

**REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY IN
RAHI MASOOM REZA'S *A VILLAGE DIVIDED*
AND
AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GLASS PALACE***

**A
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FOR THE DEGREE OF**

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PREFACE

Post-Colonialism, New Historicism and Subaltern Studies have a great distrust for the apparatus of traditional historiography. They find it as an incompetent medium of capturing and representing the bruised memories of human beings, tried and perplexed in real life situations. They attempt to render a more authentic, consistent and interpretative version of history, which is contradictory to the mainstream discourses or official documentation of history. Theirs is a perspective determined by foregrounding the inaudible, marginalized voices in the narrative. Historians have generally been more interested in making an epistemological break with the past to create the protocol of objectivity, than in producing the “touch of the real”. Counter-histories, in the forms of autobiographies, biographies, interviews, oral history, archives, survivors’ accounts and most importantly literary narratives oppose not only the dominant narratives on history, but also the prevailing modes of historical thought, methods and research.

Subaltern Studies primarily deal with the history of the losers, with the envisioning of counterfactuals and provisional historical worlds, with delayed and alternative chronologies, with the reality of unrealized possibilities. It has made a noteworthy contribution to the discourse on the representation of history. As a form of “counter-history”, it is very often placed in contradiction to mainstream discourses on history like Nationalist narratives, Orientalist images, ethnic stereotypes, and Hindu majoritarianism. It specializes in representing individual and collective histories ‘from below’. Though basically it originated as a theory of social science in order to re-define autonomous, radical class struggles in modern times, I think that it can also be applied to the literary, cultural and historical studies. It inspires bottoming up the studies of people whose history had previously either been subdued or evaded. Though it primarily focuses on peasants’ insurgency, it also takes into consideration the process of reading history from ‘below’, which invariably incorporates the significance of individual and collective histories. Such individual and collective histories are recollected and conjoined with the present with the help of the synthesizing power of creative imagination and memory, amidst the dynamic flux of larger historical forces and events. I have applied the Subaltern Studies’ approach of interpreting

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or analyzing history from ‘below’ to Rahi Masoom Reza’s *A Village Divided* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*.

Both the selected novels function as ‘counter-histories’ or provide ‘alternate points of view’ against the officially documented versions of history. The subject positions range from an individual to a community, from being the perpetrators of violence to being the victims, from being powerful landed gentries and accomplice of colonial masters to being the subalterns in these literary narratives. Such literary narratives embody ‘distinctive, authentic, marginalized, subaltern voices’ that claim prominence, or at least equivalence against the mainstream historical narratives. Both the novels question ‘the top-down approach’ of reading the South Asian history, and replace it with the study of the culture of the people. There is a commitment to represent people’s history in these texts. These texts reject meta-narratives. They attempt to re-write history from the grounds of ambivalence and contradictions and the subaltern remains the vantage point of their critiques. They also show how individuals and collective groups in South Asia resisted the penetration of colonialism into their cultural ethos to a greater extent. They deal with major themes like dislocation, fragmented identity, void, alienation, nationality, culture, language, migration, loyalty, violence, exile, marginalization, colonialism and post-colonialism, hierarchical relations, gender, social issues like marriage, illicit and extra-marital affairs, subalternity, complex web of relationships, using aesthetically integrative metaphors, hybridity, changing power equations etc. Both the novels are overcrowded with characters, that is to say, they offer a bewildering web of family relationships extended to two or three generations. Though both the novels present a bleak and pessimistic view of life and humanity, they do not end on the same note. Both the novels end on a promising note of optimism and life. They look at history not as a period of progress and development, but as a point of crisis and stasis. Though they neither negate nor substitute the dominant mainstream historical discourses, they necessarily contradict and undermine their canonical significance. They ultimately re-visit and re-claim that part of history which was either deliberately subdued or evaded or lay buried under the burden of official versions of history.

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This M.Phil. Dissertation is an outcome of a sustained yet profoundly felt need to comprehend ‘the significant past’ in its multi-dimensional perspective and thereby to make sense of the ‘present’ on which the ‘future’ rests. While using ‘the thematic comparative approach of study’, I felt that the main core of my study is to make comparisons across cultures, across time and space, and also across various kinds of traditions, and thereby to bring out the underlying seamless relationship between the two. It provided me with a broader perspective of indigenous human responses and strategies of survival adopted by varied individuals and communities to perennial issues of life in times of colossal historical upheaval.

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CHAPTER—1

Introduction

History as legacy and as ‘significant past’ is an inescapable omnipresence in social cognition. Aesthetic cognition, as a form of social cognition is, therefore, in part historical self-discovery as well. As man cognizes himself above all as an ancestral being with all the specific manifestations of his nature, not only registering the objective phenomenon but also accumulating the cognitive corpus of past knowledge, the complexity of social life forever supplements the complexity of the process of cognition itself.

As a creative index of history as lived experience of the past, aesthetic cognition possesses significant linkage with the present. History thus depicted may, however, be less scientific, less sequential, less objective, yet more interpretative.

From the large mass of material available in historical knowledge, an artist has a big range of choice extending from studying a single colossal personality to an entire epoch. The historical value of a creative work is proportionate to the depth with which it captures the spirit of the times in terms of the underlying historical forces. At another level, through crystallization of the ‘particular’ and then its extension to the ‘general’, creative works also unfold the historical links existing between the two, often through myths, symbols, images and icons.

The ‘historical’, as any other aspect of social reality, does not get documented or factually reproduced in literature. Creative practice operates through ‘selection’ in order to be meaningful. Aesthetic cognition as an ‘ideo-

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artistic' conception of history is a response to the concerns and ideals, hopes and despair, aspirations and problems of real human beings—thinking, feeling, and suffering in concrete life situations. Aesthetic cognition, when alive to human predicament also becomes a powerful vehicle of socio-political concerns through reflecting, representing and reconstructing the given context, through creative imagination.

Ever since their emergence as academic disciplines, literary studies and history have had a close but problematic relationship. The two subjects were sometimes taught together in early degrees at dissenting colleges in the nineteenth century, and they developed as full-fledged academic subjects at around the same time. Each of these disciplines contains elements of the other: literary studies often draw on historical material, while everything, including literature, could be said to have a history. The obvious connections between the subjects, however, have not always encouraged co-operation; they have often led to greater territoriality, as each subject has sought to consolidate its own separateness and uniqueness. Where literary studies have a clearly defined and relatively narrow field of study (literary texts), history is markedly broad (it studies *everything* in the past). Where the criterion for inclusion in one is the practice of a particular kind of activity / evidence (literature, or, anyway, writing), the criterion for inclusion in the other is simply pastness in general. History seems interested mainly in facts, as literary study focuses on fiction. One could add that historians are interested in many things which are not facts in any simple sense, including beliefs, motivations, ideologies, national myths and so on, and that literature does not exclude some factual narratives, such as travel-writing, documentaries, and autobiographers. Nevertheless, the distinction between stories and actuality does seem to retain its

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force. This inclusiveness / selectivity contrast characterizes not only ‘What’ and ‘How’, but also ‘Purpose’. History aims to study more than just one activity. However, where literature claims to study culture and language, this, clearly, does approach closer to the ambitions of history’s aims.

Thus, though modern history does, indeed, study ‘the past in all its manifestations’, history has traditionally been (and still is) dominated by evidence gathered from written sources. Indeed, pre-history is usually defined as ‘the past before writing’ and the term ‘proto-history’ is used to indicate the period when writing had only just been invented, and where there are relatively few surviving records for historians to work on. Traditionally, the historian picked up where the archaeologist picked off—implying that material remains were the prime concern of one discipline, written texts the main concern of the other. And even if the historian’s field is the whole of past actuality, it could be said that their main contact with that reality is nevertheless through writing, through texts or representations read in an analogous way. This then would suggest a closer kinship between literary and historical studies.

Aristotle distinguished between history and poetry [literature in other words] in the *Poetics* as the distinction between what can possibly happen and what actually did happen, between what can be known because it happened and what can only be imagined, and what, therefore, the historian can legitimately assert as a truth of experience and what the poet might wish to entertain as a truth of thought or conceptualization. The difficulty with the notion of a truth of past experience is that it can no longer be experienced, and this throws a specifically historical knowledge open to the charge that it is a construction as much of imagination as of thought and that its authority is no greater than the power of historian to persuade

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his readers that his account is true. This puts historical discourse on the same level as any rhetorical performance and consigns it to the status of a textualization neither more nor less authoritative than literature itself can lay claim to.

Delimitation:

The researcher will confine himself to the following areas:

- 1] The researcher will attempt the subaltern reading of history in the selected two novels only.

- 2] As it is a thematic study, the researcher will look for the social, cultural, political, economic, and above all psychological implications of the holocaust-like tragedies that ravaged the sub-continent in the latter half of the nineteenth and middle part of the twentieth centuries.

Research Questions:

- 1] How far is it possible to apply subaltern studies to the chosen two novels?

- 2] How far will the application of subaltern reading of history to the selected novels prove helpful in exploring the undocumented, and therefore unrealized truth of the most important historical events of the sub-continent?

Assumption and Hypothesis:

Assumption:

The subaltern reading of colonial and post-colonial India as well as South Asia, would facilitate our comprehension of the cultural trauma suffered by the

masses, and thereby, help in filling the gaps in the documented official versions of the sub-continent history.

Hypothesis:

The term subaltern studies focuses more on what happened among the masses than among the elites, administrators and colonizers in the post-colonial and post-imperial societies of India and South Asia in particular and the developing world in general. However, it is assumed that the subaltern reading of history can be applied to the novels that deal with colonialism and its aftermaths.

Objectives of the Study:

- 1] The fundamental objective behind this study is to re-claim the history of people like my mother and her family, who have been the victims of war and violence.
- 2] This research humbly aims at contributing to the on-going interdisciplinary research and debate between history and literary studies, and more precisely, between history and novel.
- 3] It aims at emphasizing the difference of approach employed by both novel and history in terms of capturing holocaust-like tragedies and their implications.
- 4] It aims at emphasizing the need of understanding the historical past as well as contemporary times, not only in terms of collected facts or documentation, but also in terms of stories—both individual and collective, both oral and written. It is indispensable to take the help of novel in order to make complete sense of the available historical materials.

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5] This research aims to find out whether history and novel share a seamless, complementary relationship as major narratives or not.

6] This research also aims at filling the innumerable gaps in the official text of sub-continent history, particularly India and Burma, and thereby, to make history free from being unilateral, hegemonic, and conclusive. It foregrounds those voices that have either been marginalized, subdued or evaded. It calls for the subaltern reading of history which looks at history from below [victim's view] and questions or de-centers the view from above [victimizer's view].

Approach or Method of the Study:

It will be a thematic study. I wish to examine the said texts against the background of Subaltern Studies' approach of reading history from below. I will also attempt to explore similar thematic concerns in my closer readings of both the novels. At the same time, I would certainly focus my attention on the cultural trauma suffered by the masses due to larger historical events. Thus, the research humbly addresses the canonical significance and hegemony enjoyed by history over literature as a discipline.

1.1 An Overview of Narrative

1.1.1 What is Narrative?

The oldest word for 'narrative' in Sanskrit is 'akhyana' meaning 'an act of making something well-known through oral transmission'. The latter-day Sanskrit literary critics defines two classes of narrative, one called *akhyayika* which is based on a plot well-known from epics or historical records, and the other *katha* which is based on a plot imagined by the writer.

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Most of us remember having listened to stories in one form or another right from early childhood. We may have sat with rapt attention before itinerant rural minstrels who sang of the awe-inspiring exploits of our favourite folk heroes and anticipated with great excitement their rendering of the tender tales of unrequited love. Many of us have sat through the recitations of a priest, who would punctuate his verses with oft-repeated episodes from the Mahabharata or Ramayana to illustrate the moral of his verses. It is almost certain that we would remember having eagerly awaited the arrival of the evening to listen to the grandmother's tales. As we grow up our interest in the forms of narrative persists. Despite our newly won independence from the spoken word through schooling, we continue to play the "wedding guest" to an endless succession of "ancient mariners", to give a western analogy for our continual involvement in a great variety of narratives. In his introductory article in a special number of *New Literary History* devoted to narratives and narratology, Roland Barthes captures not only the ubiquitousness but also the infinite variety of the narrative as a crucial human activity:

"There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulate language, and an ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* suspense drama, comedy, pantomime, paintings in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance, stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this

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infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has been never anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups have their stories, and very often these stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.”¹

Narrative is a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee (although there may be more than one of each). Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches). A narrative will consist of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot). The category of narratives includes both the shortest accounts of events (e.g. the cat sat on the mat, or a brief news item) and the longest historical or biographical works, diaries, travelogues, etc., as well as novels, ballads, epics, short stories, and other fictional forms.

Narrative is a series of statements that deal with a casually related sequence of events that concern human [or human-like] beings. Conceived in this fashion, narrative most notably excludes all general statements of “truth” that characterize theoretical, philosophical, explanatory, speculative, or critical discourse. It also excludes purely descriptive statements and expressions of emotion.

According to Michael J. Toolan, Narrative typically is a recounting of things spatiotemporally distant: here's the present teller, there's the distant topic – hence the sense of gap. But since the present teller is the access to the distant topic, there is a sense, too, in which narrative entails making what is distant and absent uncommonly present: a merging rather than a division. He also defines narrative, “as a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events.”

Michel Butor regards “narrative” itself as a basic construct with the help of which we understand. “Narrative,” he says, “is a phenomenon which extends considerably beyond the scope of literature: it is one of the essential constituents of our understanding of reality”; we are “surrounded by narratives everywhere,” the novel being one such narrative.²

Gerard Genette gives three possible meanings of the term “Narrative”. A first meaning—the one nowadays most evident and most central in common usage—has *narrative* refer to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events.

A second meaning, less widespread but current today among analysts and theoreticians of narrative content, has *narrative* refer to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.

A third meaning, apparently the oldest, has *narrative* refer once more to an event: not, however, the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself.

Christian Metz describes narrative as follows:

“Narrative is a... doubly temporal sequence.... There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative, the time of the signified and the time of the signifier. This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives—three years of the hero’s life summed up in two sentences of a novel or in a few shots of a “frequentative” montage in film, etc. More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme.”³

Narrative, according to David Herman, in other words, is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change—a strategy that contrasts with, but it is in no way inferior to, “scientific” modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws. Science explains how in general water freezes when [all other things being equal] its temperature reaches zero degrees centigrade; but it takes a story to convey what it was like to lose one’s footing on slippery ice one late afternoon in December 2004, under a steel-grey sky.

Prince defines narrative as, “The representation...of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two or several...narrators...to one, two or several narratees.”⁴

Abbott defines narrative as, “the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*, story is an *event* or sequence of events [the *action*], and narrative discourse is those events as represented.”⁵

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R. Scholes and R. Kellogg define narrative in precise terms as follows:

“By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. A drama is a story without a story-teller; in it characters act out directly what Aristotle called an “imitation” of such actions as we find in life. A lyric, like a drama, is a direct representation, in which a single actor, the poet or his surrogate, sings, or muses, or speaks for us to hear or overhear. Add a second speaker, as Robert Frost does in “The Death of the Hired Man”, and we move toward drama. Let the speaker begin to tell of an event, as Frost does in “The Vanishing Red”, and we move toward narrative. For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required.”⁶

If defining narrative has any cognitive relevance, it is because the definition covers mental operations of a more fundamental nature than passing global judgements of narrativity: operations such as asking in what order did the represented events occur; what changes did they cause in the depicted world; what do the events [and their results] mean for the characters; what motivates actions and how does the outcome of these actions compare to the intent of the agent. If a text confronts us with such actions, and if we are able to answer them, we read the text as a story, or rather, we read the story told by the text, whether or not we are aware of what we are doing.

1.1.2 Typical Characteristics of Narrative

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1. A degree of artificial fabrication or constructedness not usually apparent in spontaneous conversation. Narrative is ‘worked upon’. Sequence, emphasis and pace are usually planned.

2. A degree of *prefabrication*, in other words, narratives often seem to have bits we have seen or heard, or think we have seen or heard, before. One Mills and Boon heroine or hero seems much like another—and some degree of typicality seems to apply to heroes and heroines in more elevated fictions too, such as nineteenth-century British novels. Major characters in the novels of Dickens, Eliot, Hardy, etc. seem to be thwarted in roughly comparable ways. And the kinds of things people do in narratives [not just being born, and dying, but falling in love, going on long quests, coming to discover more about themselves or those around them] seem to repeat themselves over and over again—with important variations, of course. Again, *prefabrication* seems common in various types of writing and visual spectacle besides narrative, although the kinds of things mentioned above seem particularly to be *prefabricated* units of narrative.

3. Narratives typically seem to have a ‘trajectory’. They usually go somewhere, and are expected to go somewhere, with some sort of development and even a resolution, or conclusion, provided. We expect them to have beginnings, middles, and ends [as Aristotle stipulated in his *Art of Poetry*]. Consider the concluding words of children’s stories:

And they all lived happily ever after;

Since then, the dragon has never been seen again...

and notice the finality and permanence conveyed by the *ever/never* pair. Or consider the common story-reader's exit-line:

And that is the end of the story

which has near-identical counterparts in the closing sequences of radio and television news bulletins. All these examples mark this attention to the expectation of closure and finality.

4. Narratives have to have a teller, and that teller, no matter how remote or 'invisible', is always important. In this respect, despite its special characteristics, narrative is language communication like any other, requiring a speaker and some sort of addressee.

5. Narratives are richly exploitative of that design feature of language called **displacement** [the ability of human language to be used to refer to things or events that are removed, in space or time, from either speaker or addressee]. In this respect they contrast sharply with such modes as commentary or description. Narratives involve the recall of happenings that may not be merely spatial, but, more crucially, *temporally* remote from the teller and his audience.

1.1.3 Time and Space in Narrative

Temporal and spatial relationships are essential to our understanding of narratives and go beyond the specification of a date and a location. Narratives unfold in time, and the past, present, and future of a given event or action affect our interpretation of that action, while the characters who populate narrative texts

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move around, inhabit and experience different spaces and locations, allowing readers to construct complex worlds in their minds.

To read a narrative is to engage with an alternative world that has its own temporal and spatial structures.⁷ The rules that govern these structures may or may not resemble those of the readers' world. And while readers do not, on the whole, try to map out hierarchical relations between world levels in the way narratologists do, they nevertheless have a sense that narratives can be divided into different temporal and spatial zones. According to the standard protocols, of realist narrative, for example, a narrator looking back on his / her past life cannot step back in time to intervene in events, any more than a protagonist can know what the author does outside the pages of the text. In each case, access from one "world" to another is blocked by their separation in time and space [in the latter case, access may also be prevented by the fictional status of the protagonist]. In non-realist texts, of course, the traversing of spatio-temporal barriers is possible, and is indeed a feature of postmodern narratives where the reader's recognition of the transgression is part of the reading experience.

Time and space are thus more than background elements in narrative; they are part of its fabric, affecting our basic understanding of a narrative text and of the protocols, of different narrative genres. They profoundly influence the way in which we build mental images of what we read.

Time has always played an important role in theories of narrative, given that we tend to think of stories as sequences of events.⁸ Space has often been set in opposition to time, associated with static description which slows up and intrudes into the narration of dynamic events. However, this opposition fails to recognize

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how far time and space are bound up with each other in narrative, as Bakhtin has shown.⁹

Theorists posit two basic temporalities of narrative which are generally referred to as “story” and “discourse”. The essential distinction here is between the “story” as the basic sequence of events that can be abstracted from any narrative telling, and the “discourse” as the presentation and reception of these events in linguistic form, in other words, the act of writing resulting in the written text and the act of reading that text. In oral narratives, the two temporalities can be described as the time of what is told [story], and that of the telling [discourse]. In written narratives, where we do not have access to the act of writing and where there is usually little in the text to tell us about the time frame of the narrator’s performance, it is the time of *reading* which is the important reference time for discourse. The time of reading clearly varies with different readers, but it can be roughly estimated in relation to the space of the text, the number of pages it takes to treat a particular length of story time. The two temporalities of narrative produce a situation in which the experience of narrative is always linked to temporal relationships. In some texts story and discourse times may roughly correspond, but in most texts they will differ in some way or the other.

Whatever the temporal patterns set out within fictional worlds—whether they are those of a nineteenth-century novel that moves toward a defined and anticipated ending, or whether they are those of a postmodern narrative, operating by disjunctions, loops, and effacements—it is inescapable that these patterns will be set against the reader’s temporal experience of the text, founded on memory and

anticipation. And the reader's attempt to relate these two kinds of temporality will be an important part of the effect of the text.

Gerard Genette suggests three main areas in which temporal relationships between story and discourse can produce interesting effects. The first relates to the order of events; the second concerns how long events or scenes last; and the third concerns how often an event occurs. They are known respectively as "order", "duration", and "frequency."¹⁰ In some narratives, events are told strictly in the order in which they occur. But they may also be told out of order, for example, using flashback to fill in an important part of a character's past. Variations in duration can be used to show which scenes are most important. A scene which is narrated briefly will usually be considered less important than a scene which it takes many pages to narrate. A scene which is narrated more than once may show a narrator's obsession or it may, in a detective story for example, reveal different views of the same events by different characters.

As Zoran suggests, spatial relationships can be constructed at a basic and relatively stable topographical level, linking objects and locations, but they can also apply to movement of things and people around a narrative world.¹¹ Objective spatial relationships between aspects of a narrative are helpful in enabling readers to visualize its contents, but equally important, here, is the way in which characters inhabit the space of their world both socially and psychologically.¹²

The idea of perspective, or point of view, in narratology includes indications in the text of both physical angles of view and the subjective attitudes and emotions of individuals; further, the former can often signal the latter. The physical

and psychological points of view of different protagonists can be an important structuring device.

Last, when considering space in narrative, we should not neglect how useful spatial information is in keeping track of what is going on. Our association of certain locations with the events that occur in them is particularly strong in our reading of narrative. As a basic mechanism of reading, in texts which develop more than one plot-line at once, location allows us to identify rapidly a return to an already-established ongoing scene. But the locations of a fictional world can also develop in prominence as they accumulate layers of past history against which we read current activities.

Different cultural concepts of both time and space and their interrelationships can influence how narrative is constructed and experienced. For example, in Western writing many nineteenth-century narratives, both fictional and historical, show a strong linear drive towards an ending, whereas modernist and postmodernist narratives tend to perturb this focus on an end point. In modernist fiction, time becomes subject to personal experience, perceptions, and memories. And, as Heise remarks, in postmodernist fiction, the past and the present become subject to the same uncertainty as the future, and without resolution. Space in nineteenth-century realist novels emerges as a concrete and stable phenomenon, while in modernist fiction it is filtered, like time, through the perceptions of protagonists. In postmodernist fiction, the idea of a “world” is itself destabilized, and different spaces multiply and merge.¹³

The point in the story at which a narrative begins and ends can have a considerable effect on the reader, as Sternberg emphasizes.¹⁴ Beginnings are where we first encounter the narrative world and establish its key characteristics. And endings are where we move towards our final interpretation of the narrative. Rabinowitz calls these “privileged positions.”¹⁵

All reading is a combination of memory and anticipation. Our focus on whatever moment in the text we have reached will invariably be coloured by our memory of what has gone before and our anticipation of what is to come. The order in which events are presented in the text is therefore crucial to our temporal experience of narrative.

Many narrative texts employ flashback [*analepsis*, in Genette’s terms] as a matter of course, in order to fill in the past history of protagonists while avoiding a lengthy introduction or in order to reveal new facts. Flashback can be more than textual housekeeping, though. More generally, the experience of reading calls for us to look back and re-evaluate events in light of current circumstances.

Textually explicit flash-forward [or *prolepsis*] is far less common than flashback. Explicit flash-forward can establish a narrator’s mastery of his or her tale or can generate suspense. Anticipation is not always produced by prolepsis. The reader’s anticipation of what will come next, and indeed what will come at the end of a narrative, is an important part of reading and can be a major motivation for engagement with the text.

The dimensions of narrative worlds can vary. They can range from a single dark space [Beckett *The Unnameable*] to a set of multi-world parallel universes

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[science-fiction fantasy]. The scope of the world can contribute strongly to the effects of a text. Proximity and distance between landmarks or humans can be expressed in neutral topographical terms. But their narrative interest lies in their role in indicating how people experience their world. In our own worlds, we are physically confined to our bodily experience of the world, but we have the ability to shift this experiencing centre to imagine ourselves in other people's places, and in other locations. This ability is constantly utilized in the immersive activity of reading narrative fiction as we shift conceptually from our own reader-centered position to locations in the story world. Spatial indicators can indicate a shift in conceptual space from the main story world to a sub-world [such as a protagonist's mind]. This is often linked to the direction of a protagonist's gaze.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can conclude that time and space affect reading at different levels. First, the process of reading is itself a temporally situated experience of the physical space of the text. Although, we may temporarily suspend our engagement with our own world while reading, the temporal dimension of reading remains significant, as does the space of the page as the means by which order, frequency, and duration are regulated. Second, time and space are components of the basic conceptual framework for the construction of the narrative world. While any worlds we construct when reading are only partial worlds, not fully defined in either spatial or temporal terms, they still require a minimal level of spatio-temporal stability. And although postmodern narrative worlds may become quite ragged at the edges and may lose their overall logic of either time or space, as readers, we nevertheless continue to require spatio-temporal hooks on which to hang our interpretations. If these are not consistently provided or their uncertainty is highlighted in a given narrative, we experience

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disorientation and a degree of unease as an essential part of our engagement with that narrative. Third, our immersive experience of narrative has temporal and spatial dimensions.¹⁶ Our emotional engagement with narrative is often linked to temporal parameters [boredom, suspense] or spatial parameters [security, claustrophobia, fear of the unknown], often through empathy with a protagonist's experience of his or her world. Last, our interpretation of narratives, their point, is influenced by temporal and spatial information, both at a local level, and in our overall construction of plot as a mapping in time and space. Our sense of climax and resolution, of complications and resolutions, the metaphors we use for the paths taken by plots are constructed on spatio-temporal patterns. Our awareness as readers of time and space at these four levels is neither equal nor constant. Genres partly determine which level or specific aspect is in focus, but each narrative will have its own internal patterns which foreground certain aspects of time-space.

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematic only in a culture in which it was absent-or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty in understanding a story coming from another

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culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us. As Barthes says, ‘narrative is *translatable* without fundamental damage’, in a way that a lyric poem or a philosophical discourse is not.

This suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted. Arising, as Barthes says, between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language, narrative ‘ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted’. And it would follow that the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence of meaning itself.

But what kind of meaning is absent or refused? The fortunes of narrative in the history of historical writing give us some insight into this question. Historians do not have to report their truths about the real world in narrative form. They may choose other, non-narrative, even anti-narrative modes of representation, such as the meditation, the anatomy or the epitome. Tocqueville, Burckhardt, Huizinga, and Braudel, to mention only the most notable masters of modern historiography, refused narrative in certain of their historiographical works, presumably on the assumption that the meaning of the events with which they wished to deal did not lend itself to representation in the narrative mode. They refused to tell a story about the past, or rather, they did not tell a story with well-marked beginning, middle, and end phases; they did not impose upon the processes that interested them the form that we normally associate with storytelling. While they certainly narrated their accounts of the reality that they perceived, or thought they perceived, to exist

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within or behind the evidence they had examined, they did not narrativize that reality, did not impose upon it the form of a story. And their example permits us to distinguish between a historical discourse that narrates and a discourse that narrativizes, between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story. Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.

What is involved, then, in that finding of the “true story”, that discovery of the “real story” within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of “historical record”? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need to not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity.

The idea that narrative should be considered less as a form of representation than as a manner of speaking about events, whether real or imaginary, has been recently elaborated within a discussion of the relationship between discourse and narrative that has arisen in the wake of Structuralism and is associated with the work of Jakobson, Benveniste, Genette, Todorov, and Barthes.

Every narrative, however seemingly ‘full’, is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is as true of imaginary narratives as it is of realistic ones.

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CHAPTER 2—History and Fiction as Narratives

2.1 History as a Narrative

2.1.1 [A] What is History?

History is a Greek word which means enquiry, research, exploration or information. The Greeks were the earliest to define history. It was Dionysius of Halicarnassus who gave us the idea that history is philosophy teaching by examples. What he meant by this was that history offers us the quintessence of human experience whose study has universal value. When lessons are drawn from real life, and when these lessons are ordered to form a coherent whole, we have history. It indicates the growth of the human mind in which the unique facts of life are collected, classified and interpreted in a scientific way. Aristotle holds the view that history contrasts research into the facts, with the logical task of explanation. The term ‘contrasts’ is very significant here, as it suggests that things in history are related to one another in a systematic and permanent manner, forming the entire story of man into one integrated whole. Aristotle further suggests that history is an account of the unchanging past in the sense that human nature does not change, and that all activities that originate with the same intentions and motives differ only in the degree of details and not in their basic nature. Thus wars, conquests, expansion and exploitation are constant factors in history although every age and every country has its own technique to achieve the objective. Polybius and Thucydides think that history is a story of things worthy of being remembered, reminding us that all and sundry events do not constitute history, and that only unique, significant and remarkable happenings would figure in it.

Rousseau regards history as ‘the art of choosing from among many lies that one which most resembles the truth’. Truth is a mirage, while beauty—however subjective is a possession and a reality. Since truth is relative, and very often becomes controversial, history is an attempt to come as near as possible to reality. The definition of Henry Johnson that ‘History in the broadest sense is everything that ever happened. It is the past itself, whatever that may be’, is at once too vague and obscure. It becomes impossible for us to comprehend everything that ever happened, and we have to limit them to those that are very significant and have left behind a deep impression on man.

Professor Findlay’s view that, ‘History is any sequence of events traced in their relations’ introduces the new element that past events must be judged in their correct perspective. Professor Maitland has further improved our knowledge by saying, ‘what men have done and said, above all what they have thought—that is history’. In the ultimate analysis it is the thought process, the reflective activity and the image formation of all that happened in the past that becomes the main business of history. Renier has a new dimension to add when he says that history is the story of men living in societies, a new concept in which group activity, collective response to creative thoughts and sociability to serve the interests of all, gains greater prominence. When Lecky touched on the point that history is the record and explanation of moral values, he desired to bring history closer to philosophy. The emphasis of Lecky is on ideological and moral values and not on factual or contingent factors. Leibnitz thought in the same way except that he limited the scope of history to the true demonstration of religion, or the way of life based on moral principles. Edmund Burke thinks that history is a preceptor of prudence and not of principles. History is related to something changing as

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opposed to something constant, and whatever is so changing cannot be reduced to any principles.

Carlyle holds the view that history is nothing but the biography of great men, and that it is a record of human accomplishment, particularly of great souls. What history requires, according to Carlyle, is geniuses and not masses. Ordinary folk who carry out on routine rigour of life do not figure so much in history as those who are strong, powerful and intelligent with a clear perception of their destiny. Only such people have a chance to live in history, as those who live dangerously, who send out their ships to unexplored seas, and who live constantly in a state of war. Seeley says that history is past politics, and present politics is future history. He seems to think that the primary function of history is to impart instruction in the art of politics through a body of maxims which would help statesmen to be great. The scope of history in recent times has been so much expanded that politics forms only one of the many branches of historical study. As all ages of history are important in the cosmic process, so are all activities of man which would form the province of the historian. He must look beyond government to people, and must study every intellectual, moral, material and emotional aspect of human life and society.

Lord Acton gave a different twist to history when he said, 'History is the unfolding story of human freedom.' Great moments of history are not those when empires were built, but those when good things of the mind were obtained and freedom of will was gained. A.L. Rowse said that history is essentially the record of the life of men in societies in their geographical and their physical environment. Seignbos says that history is essentially a science of reasoning, since all historical knowledge is indirect. It is the job of a historian to select and analyze facts

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according to some rational and scientific principle. The doctrine of historical relativity must be applied to the historian's own judgment. Reasoning is quite helpful in history, because the motto of history is 'the same things, but in different ways'.

Turgot and Condorcet developed the idea of progress, a conception which heralded the dawn of true history, bringing unity and synthesis to history. The idea of progress certainly helped to link up the past with the present. History never repeats itself, and hence every historical phase is a new venture taking us out of the narrowness and commonplace of everyday life into a strange and wonderful panorama of man in his journey from savagery to modern civilization. History is a yardstick to measure human progress; how he has gained mastery over beast and bird, earth and wind, and all other creative activities which have enabled him to conquer space and put man on the moon. Bury says that history is 'science no less and no more'.

But the most significant definition among all the western scholars is that of Ernest Bernheim, who says, 'History is a science that investigates and presents in their context of psycho-physical causality the facts determined by space and time of the evolution of men in their individual as well as typical and collective activity as social beings.' This definition has touched on all fundamental activities of historical pursuit. It is a science because it embodies systematized knowledge based on realities of life and about occurrences and happenings that have actually taken place, and not based on myth or imagination.

Secondly, its main job is to search, investigate and explore these facts of life with the intention of presenting them in their proper context. But the more important task is to explain their causality, find out the root of the problem, examine the issue in its depth and interpret the phenomenon from the origin to its final end. The origin lies in the combination of mental and material factors determined at a particular point of time and in a particular place. The facts that are thus investigated relate to the progress or change in the position of man so far as his individual activity is concerned.

History is the record of those events which indicate the growth of man's mind, man's intelligence, and how he used them to discover better ways of living, and to build up orderly societies which we call civilization or culture. History is not merely a body of maxims supplying examples from which 'ordinary men could learn to be good and statesmen to be great', but it is a study of the forces, social, political, economic and psychological that shape the course of human progress. History is a noble subject that deals with the story of the past. This story is to be properly examined, analyzed and explained in the most intelligible and fascinating way. What we do in history is 'to tell man what man is, by telling him what man has done.' In other words, the proper understanding of man by man is the business of history, which it does by narrating man's unique ideas, thoughts and deeds, so that we could know everything worth knowing about what man has ever done, or thought or hoped or felt. Subjectively expressed, history may be regarded as a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness. Objectively treated, history takes into account the progress and decline of the communities and states with special reference to politics, morality, religion, intelligence, social organization, economic conditions, refinement and taste.

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History may be seen, somewhat naively, as a collection of facts. Crude representations of history suggest that it is objective and therefore opposed to literature, which is ultimately subjective. It can also be seen as a legitimizing discipline by which other subjects or disciplines can function. In other words, 'history' is a bedrock of objective facts and data which give credence to any empirical discipline. A 'discipline' here is conceived of as a set of principles and concepts related to a particular field of enquiry. A 'subject' is that field of enquiry. The facts and data of history must also have an internal consistency and coherence which reflects *external* coherence. In other words, the coherence of the *representation* of history reflects the coherence of historical events themselves.

To write a history in the traditional sense is to construct a coherent narrative by weaving together parts of a culture with the thread of values which must necessarily inform the whole. The historical interpretative process is therefore cyclical: parts inform the whole which in turn must inform those parts.

History is a different 'mode of experience', and the historian must in consequence approach it with methods entirely distinct. Historical knowledge is the knowledge of what mind has done in the past, and at the same time it is the redoing of this, the perpetuation of past acts in the present. Its object is therefore not a mere object, something outside the mind which knows it; it is an activity of thought, which can be known only in so far as the knowing mind re-enacts it and knows itself as so doing. To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind.¹

The four propositions often put forward in support of the theory that history is an autonomous branch of study, irreducible in principle to any other, are the following:

A] Historical events are past events and hence cannot be known in the manner in which present events are known.

B] Historical events are unique and unclassifiable.

C] History describes the actions, statements, and thoughts of human beings, not the behaviour of 'dead matter' with which science is concerned.

D] Historical events have an irreducible richness and complexity.

History is essentially the study of the past; and, furthermore, as Professor Field has rightly emphasized, it is a presupposition of all historical thought 'that what happened in the past is absolutely independent of our present thinking about it'.²

History is about what happened on particular occasions. It is not about what usually happens or what always happens under certain circumstances; for this we go to science. It is about what did actually happen at a clearly specified period of time, in all its detail and in the context of what preceded it and of what succeeded it. The historian concentrates upon the event in its *unique individuality*, regarding it, not as an instance of a type, not as a member of a class, but as something which is to be viewed for and in itself. And this interest in events for and in themselves is

regarded as a distinguishing feature of historical writing. To quote Croce again: 'The vision of the thing done is necessary and is the sole *source* of history.'

The fact that memory cannot be contained within individual experience but has the capacity to shape a contemporaneous community of individuals who share common ancestral memories means that an individual's memories are essentially never individual property; the individual, then, has recourse to a community to lighten the burdens assigned by the past because of the collective and dialogic nature of memory and the language we use to represent it. Remembering becomes a way of reinstituting the individual as a member of a synchronic community. Therefore, if memory and the language used to represent it irrevocably reflect our present personality, then remembering the past can become a regenerative, creative process.

However objective a historian might be in the reporting of events, however judicious he has been in his assessment of evidence, however punctilious he has been in his dating of *res gestae*, his account remains something less than a proper history if he has failed to give to reality the form of a story. Where there is no narrative, Croce said, there is no history. And Peter Gay in *Style in History*, writing from a perspective directly opposed to the relativism of Croce, puts it just as starkly: "Historical narration without analysis is trivial, historical analysis without narration is incomplete."

Thus, we can say that History is not a collection of disconnected or separated incidents or events but a continuous narrative of some sort of development. The various parts or units of this continuum must be organically connected. History is the story of the experiences of men living in civilized

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societies. Every story contains an admixture of theory and preconceived notions. Narrative is like gold: it can be used only in the form of an alloy. To say this does not imply that the additional element which turns the narrative into a story contributes to the performance of its major or social function, or that it is actually the more important part of the story. The historian is not entrusted with the task of explaining the past. But to tell the story as it should be told he must understand the events he narrates; he must be able to explain them to his own satisfaction. A bare knowledge of the events of Napoleon's life is insufficient for the purpose of the historian. He must also know the place of these events in Napoleon's life, and their effect upon other events.

2.1.1 [B] An Overview of New Historicism

It is important to address the question, 'what is historicism?' before I continue to explain New Historicism. Historicism is a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds. It has enjoyed a long tradition of influence upon many disciplines of thought, recently experiencing a lively renewal in contemporary literary criticism. The most prominent late 20th century critical fashions, post-structuralism and postmodernism, have ended up being understood through the images of history they imply. Yet this historical turn rejoins a well-worn tradition of historicism. At present, historicism is tempted to present itself as 'new', the latest way forward for literary theory.

New Historicism is an approach that advocates the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same period; in other words, the non-literary text becomes a co-text of the literary text. The literary text is not privileged

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against the background of historical and non-literary texts. The textuality of history and the historicity of texts are given equal weight in New Historicism. In the traditional approach, history—social as well as literary—provided the *context* for understanding literary texts but in New Historicism, historical documents of the same period are taken as co-texts or expressions of the same historical ‘moment’ that is found in literary texts.

New Historicism is influenced by Post-modern ideas, particularly by those of Foucault and Derrida. Foucault’s analysis of cultural history, his visualization of the state as ‘panoptic’ [all-seeing] and all-pervasive force, and his discussion of social structures in terms of power and the discursive practices that circulate its ideology through all layers of the body politic are implied in the critical readings of New Historicism. Secondly, Derrida’s view that everything about the past is available to us only in the form of texts/language [i.e. ‘There is nothing outside the text’] is accepted in New Criticism. Whatever that is presented to us is represented and remade; it is ‘processed’ or ‘filtered’ *thrice*, first through ideology and other ‘discursive’ practices of the period in which it was written; then through the practices of the period in which it is read, and finally through the deconstructive practices of the language itself in which it is written. So, in New Historicism, historical documents are read differently in a deconstructive way and literary texts which/what are called ‘the archival continuum’ meaning within *historicity* and not just historical movements. Historicity or history-as-text brings to focus the concept that the world of the past is available only in the world of the past. These practices of reading combined with a political edge, but at the same time not attached to a particular political ideology, give New Historicism a freshness in its approach.

New Historicism is not a ‘theory’ or an ‘approach’, in the sense that applies to psychoanalysis or deconstruction. New historicism is more eclectic in its approach and attempts a reinterpretation of history as well as literary texts and, thereby, tries to ‘defamiliarize’ the canonical texts by detaching them from the weight of the past. It attempts a mind-shift by destabilizing the mind-set; at the same time the emphasis on the ‘power’ of social and ideological ‘structures’ makes New Historicism politically pessimistic.

The term ‘New historicism’ was first used by the American critic, Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* [1980]. In his highly lyrical account of the significant features of the New Historicist method of interpretation of the text, encapsulated in his essay “Resonance and Wonder,” he sums up brilliantly what he considers the singularly most important task of the New Historicist enterprise, i.e. to reclaim the text’s resonance:

“The new historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance; that is, its concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own. New Historicist critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as a stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed, but as dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces. The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work

in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both in history and our own”.³

New Historicism emerged as an inevitable reaction against the failure of both new critical and deconstructive approaches to grapple with the complex constitution of the literary text. New Criticism suspected history and considered it inimical to literature. Therefore it put a strong emphasis on the autonomy of the work to shield it from the encroachment of the outside world. Deconstruction on the contrary, looked down upon literature as a bourgeois phenomenon. The New Historicists tried to negotiate between these extreme positions in order to see if a common ground could be created for their mutual transaction. As Fredric Jameson states candidly, “History is inaccessible to us except in textual form...It can be approached only by way of prior [re] textualization”. By discarding the conventional distinction between text and context, made much of by other historians of ideas under the impact of the rational logic of the Enlightenment, the New Historicists have tried to redefine the context-text relationship through the dynamics of their “negotiation and exchange”, to use Stephen Greenblatt’s phrase. History as a repository of knowledge providing base for literature was the product of the binarism of the West which resulted in the hegemonic discourse of history drawing its power and ideology from the belief that there is an unbridgeable gap between the self and the Other, the ‘emergent’ and “the residual”, to use Raymond Williams’ famous distinction. Michel de Certeau’s concept of history as it was being practiced in the West through centuries was in fact a critique of the dogmatic notion of old historiography engendered by the wishful thinking of the powerful West trying to subjugate the rest of the world with the help of its entrenched determinism. Michel de Certeau’s impact on the New Historicists is substantial, as

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is Foucault's, Bakhtin's and Clifford Geertz's. In their subtle critique of what Greenblatt calls "forms of power" and "power of forms" immanent to old historiography the New Historicists have conflated the rhetorical strategies of literature with the material base of history. In the New Historicist conception, a text is both mnemonic and prophetic.

The New Historicism undermines apparently established concept of what literature and history are. It is informed by recent critical theories including psychoanalytical criticism, reader-response criticism, feminist criticism and specifically deconstruction. New Historicism sees history not as a mere chronicle of facts and events but, as Clifford Geertz puts it, as a "thick description" of human reality, and concerns itself with politics, anthropology, art, economics, film, television, popular literature, non-discursive events and the symbolic elements of the everyday life. Historiography was already looked at with suspicion long before new historicism came in to being. E.H. Carr said in *What is history?*:

"...historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical fact existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy."⁴

Distinctions have been drawn between new historicist and the leftist positions. The practitioners, who have been considered under this nomenclature, are divided into the English Group called Cultural Materialists of Raymond William's School, and the American Group of Stephen Greenblatt. The cultural materialists operate with a strong Marxist commitment. Their criticism is inclined towards political interference in their own era; they function more like political activists for the transformation of social order which has been oppressive on

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grounds of class, race and gender. Terry Eagleton and Catherine Belsey have developed the views of Althusser, Macherey and Foucault. They have shown the exact relationship between ideology [i.e. Marxism] and literature, and coupled the study of literature to power struggle. Among the American cultural materialists, Fredric Jameson has also given priority to Marxist commitment towards rebuilding of the present social system. He brings together in one method a number of divergent approaches and sees contemporary deconstruction as a method which breaks down texts into motivating *aporias*, as a first step towards an eventual reconstruction of the social totality.

2.1.1 [C] An Overview of Subaltern Studies

In India, as in Britain, ‘History from Below’ had a tremendous impact in the 1970s. In particular, the visit of E. P. Thompson to the sub-continent in 1976-77 left a widespread desire amongst radical historians to emulate his work in an Indian context.

This response reflected a number of factors. Just as elsewhere in the world the late sixties saw a tremendous radicalization, against a backdrop of economic and political crisis. This had its echoes in the new and expanding universities of India. But the specific attraction of ‘History from Below’ was its challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy. An admixture of Stalinism and Nationalism dominated historical study, particularly of the colonial period. Nationalists viewed the anti-colonial struggle in terms of a ‘unitary movement’ under the leadership of the Gandhian Congress. Communist historians, such as Bipan Chandra, widened the parameters of ‘acceptable nationalism’ to include the ‘revolutionary terrorists’ and the left. Nevertheless both nationalists and communists shared the assumption that

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the mass of Indians were woken to political life by Gandhi and the rest of the Congress High Command.

However the impact of ‘History from Below’ collided in the Indian academy with another import from the west - post-structuralism and post-modernism. This collision produced a new and specifically Indian synthesis - the Subaltern Studies group. A journal of that name first appeared in 1982, edited by Ranajit Guha. The term *Subaltern* was taken from Gramsci’s euphemism for the proletariat in his *Prison Notebooks*. However the Subaltern Studies collective used it as a catch-all term for all groups they viewed as oppressed - the proletariat, the peasantry, women, and tribal people.

As with Thompson *et al* they saw their aim as being to recover the struggles of the poor and the outcast from the ‘condescension of posterity’ and the grip of ‘official’ left intellectuals. The collective focused on peasant and tribal struggles, little work being done on urban movements with the exception of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s ‘Rethinking Working Class History’ on the jute mill workers of Calcutta. But what was distinctive about their approach was the argument that these struggles, far from being creations of what they termed ‘elite nationalism’, were independent of it and much more radical. Gyan Pandey, for example, in the first issue of the journal demonstrated convincingly, in a study of the 1921-22 peasant struggle in Awadh, how Congress, far from initiating the struggle, had attempted to undermine it because the peasants were targeting Indian landlords who Congress wished to incorporate in their pan-Indian alliance against the British.

However, the Subalterns weren't simply interested in illustrating the 'bourgeois' nature of India nationalism. They argued that movements from below had been hijacked by elite nationalism and subordinated to the nationalist project. When they wrote of combating 'grand narratives', it was the 'grand narrative' of anti-colonial nationalism they were targeting. Undoubtedly there was a very important core to their argument - essentially the 'nationalist leadership' had attempted to use 'highly controlled' struggles of the Indian masses in order to confront and then replace the colonial masters. But the collective's project had an even more ambitious aim: they wished to reconstruct peasant consciousness itself, and to demonstrate its autonomy from elite nationalist thought. In order to do so, they sought out both new sources and attempted to reread the traditional archives 'against the grain', all with the aim of recreating the mental world of the peasant insurgent.

Over time however, the Subalterns began to shift their ground. The influence of post-modernism and its offspring 'post-colonial studies' began to take its toll. Now, the central theme of the group's work became not the hijacking of popular struggles in the interests of an aspiring Indian bourgeoisie, nor the reconstruction of subaltern consciousness, but the argument that the whole 'nationalist' project was fundamentally flawed. In the name of 'progress' and 'modernity', the nationalists, after 1947, had imposed an oppressive centralizing state on the 'fragments' that comprises Indian society. So Partha Chatterjee, a key figure in the group, argues in 'The Nation and its Fragments' that secularism, enlightenment and rationalism are simply weapons in the armoury of the post-colonial state. Similarly Dipesh Chakrabaty insists that the very notion of a good society or of universal progress are 'monomanias' that need to be junked in the name of the

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‘episodic’ and the ‘fragment’. It is in this context that ‘community’ began to replace ‘subaltern’ as the focus of the collective’s work. ‘Community’ was now privileged as the key source of resistance to the new hegemonic power. This has led to a celebration of local traditions for their own sake. But of course, in reality, communities are not simply centres of resistance to an intrusive and oppressive state, but also sources of oppression themselves - of class, gender and caste.

In his compelling essay, “Chandra’s Death,” Ranajit Guha poses the question integral to Subaltern Studies, the influential school of Indian historiography he helped to found in the early 1980s. The question encapsulates the collective’s contestatory framework: *how* is Indian history to be written outside the historically dominant frameworks, first of colonialism and, later, of elite nationalism? *Who* is the “one” who interprets historical events and how does the mediation of that “investigative consciousness” influence the writing of history? What *documents* and *archives* have been overlooked? When documents and archives have been consulted, how have they been *read*? What does it mean to *reclaim*? Last but not least, what is *history* and to what ends is it *written*? Ranajit Guha states the Subalternist position as follows:

“The ordinary apparatus of historiography has little to offer us. Designed for big events and institutions, it is most at ease when made to operate on those larger phenomena which visibly stick out of the debris of the past. As a result, historical scholarship has developed... a tradition that tends to ignore the small drama and fine detail of social experience, especially at its lower depths.”⁵

Bending closer to the ground, Subaltern scholars have cobbled together gripping stories out of the “untamed fragments” that constitute the “residuum of a dismembered past”. This attention to the “exceptional-normal” has brought forth a memorable cast of characters, local legends, and village scandals: unruly peasants attacking landlords and police-stations much to the chagrin of national leaders like Gandhi and Nehru; a “tribal” leader who calls himself Gandhi and declares the end of the British Raj.

Using the tools of narratology which had been developed in linguistics and literary studies, the new historiography has given critical attention to plot, character, authority, language, voice, and time. In reconstructing on the basis of the fragment available to him a family “tragedy” and “death” out of what had been archived as “crime” and “murder”, Guha appeals to concepts which would later come to be interrogated by other Subalternists: the “actual sequence of what happened,” and the “real historical experience” which had been narrowed by the vocabulary of crime and abstract legalism. If historical events are only available to us through narrative, Guha states the case for the historian’s responsibility to write contextualized and full narratives. By articulating the many-sided and complex predicament of the humble peasants the historian rejects the hegemonic authority of the state. Guha’s discourse is simultaneously sharply anti-colonial and profoundly humanist, attentive to the human suffering that is the consequence of domination and oppression at various interesting levels, including class, caste, gender, and enforced criminality.

Drawing attention to “the small voice of history,” Subaltern Studies emerged as a corrective to both colonialist and “bourgeois-nationalist” historiography, under whose auspices nationalism had been “written up as a sort of spiritual biography of

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the nationalist elite”. Missing from that biography had been “the contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite, to the making and development of nationalism.” This “un-historical historiography” had paid no attention to “the politics of the people” who had acted “in the course of nationalist campaigns in defiance or absence of elite control”. The category of the “subaltern” was intended to shed light on the practices of dominance and resistance outside the framework of class struggle, but without ignoring class itself. While in recent years the Subaltern Studies school has expanded to include work on other regions and has inspired Subaltern Studies initiatives in other historical and geographical contexts, its purview has largely been “South Asian” [or strictly speaking, *Indian*] history. Bourgeois-nationalist historiography of the sort that Subaltern Studies challenges is, Guha argues, “primarily an Indian practice”.

Who or what is a subaltern? Although the term subaltern conventionally denotes a junior ranking officer in the British army [OED], the most significant intellectual sources for Spivak’s definition of the subaltern are the early twentieth-century Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci [1891-1937]. And the work of the mainly Indian-based Subaltern Studies collective. In the early work of the Subaltern Studies collective, the term was often interchangeable with the category of “peasant”, marking the project’s debt to the Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci. The Italian term “subalterno”, as used by Gramsci, translates roughly as “subordinate” or “dependent”. In theory, “subalternity” as a category was to be extended to “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way”.

2.1.2 Novel as a Narrative

According to the Oxford English dictionary a novel is ‘a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length [now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes] in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity.

The novel is fictitious—*fiction*, as we often refer to it. It depicts imaginary characters and situations. A novel may include reference to real places, people and events, but it cannot contain only such references and remain a novel. However, even though its characters and actions are imaginary they are in some sense ‘representative of real life’ as the dictionary definition has it; although fictional they bear an important resemblance to the real. What exactly this resemblance is has been a matter of much discussion and dispute amongst literary critics, and it is arguable that it varies in kind from novel to novel. But this resemblance to *real* life is one of the features that distinguish the novel from other forms such as the epic and the romance; however much we recognize that the term ‘real life’ is a problematic concept that requires careful definition and use.

The novel is in prose rather than verse, although novels can well include very ‘poetic’ elements so far as their language is concerned. And although it would be serious mistake to assume that the language of a novel was identical to ordinary speech or most non-literary writing, nevertheless the fact that the novel is in prose helps to establish that sense of ‘real life’—of recognizable everyday existence—that is the preserve of the genre.

The novel is a *narrative*: in other words it is in some sense a ‘telling’ rather than an ‘enacting’, and this distinguishes it in an important sense from the drama. Of course novels can contain very dramatic scenes, and often the reader may forget that what we learn of character and event is not direct [as in the theatre or the cinema] but mediated through a particular telling, a narrative source. The telling is such that we can visualize what is described—that is often the mark of an accomplished narrative.

Moreover, the novel has *characters, action[s], and a plot*: it involves people who do things in a total context ruled over by some sort of connective logic: chronology, cause-and-effect, or whatever. There is, moreover, in most events a connection between these three elements such that they form some sort of unity. The novel is of a certain length. Of course it is not just a question of length: we feel that a novel should involve an investigation of an issue of human significance in such a manner as allows for complexity of treatment, and by common consent a certain length is necessary to allow for such complexity.

The biographer or historian is concerned to discover the pattern implied by the facts; the fiction writer may choose or create “facts” in accordance with the pattern of human conduct which he wishes to present. Fiction is primarily concerned with “truth”. The truth of fiction involves such matters as the following:

- [1] the consistency and comprehensibility of character,
- [2] the motivation and credibility of action, and
- [3] the acceptability of the total meaning.

History and biography give us what may be called truth of correspondence. What a true history says “corresponds” to the facts. A true biography matches the

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life of its subject. But fiction is not fact, and its “truth” does not involve a correspondence to something outside itself. Fiction is concerned with people, and one of the interests we take in it arises from the presentation of human character and human experience as merely human. Both the common and the uncommon human characters or experience interest us, the common because we share in it, and the uncommon because it wakes us to marvel at new possibilities.

Fiction involves a theme, an idea, an interpretation; an attitude towards life developed and embodied in the piece of fiction. Directly or indirectly, through the experience of the characters in the piece of fiction, an evaluation is made. Fiction is not illustration because with illustration we are always aware that the idea being illustrated comes first, that the content of the illustration is being dictated by the nature of the thing being illustrated. The illustration is an explanation, not a discovery. The illustration has no independent life. Fiction is a created image of our very life process by which significance emerges from experience. Fiction is basically an attempt to make sense of our experience.

From the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel. The novel is the form of literature which fully reflects the individualist and innovating re-orientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author’s treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and

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most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience—individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literal vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named.

Fiction establishes continuity and enables us to re-examine, reconstruct and deconstruct the past and put things in their proper spaces. Fiction may refer to any historical event, may deal with major concerns [like religion, education etc.], but basically in fiction one is reviewing, questioning, replaying and analyzing past events and incidents with a view to arriving at answers which may give new meanings and insights. No doubt the most pervasive and prominently problematic application of the word *fiction* in recent decades has been to narrative discourse in general—historical, journalistic, and autobiographical—as well as to imaginative discourse.

2.1.3 Comparison and Contrast

“It is impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regards himself as an historian and his novel as history. It is only as an historian that he has the smallest *locus standi*. As a narrator of fictitious events he is nowhere; to insert into his attempts a back-bone of logic, he must relate events that are assumed to be real”.

Henry James, “Anthony Trollope”

However, history and literature, though regarded as having kinship, are equally often seen as distinct, and, in some respects, opposed spheres in modern

Western cultures. In the sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney famously suggests some of the distinctions and resemblances between the two in his essay *Defense of Poesie* which argues for the supreme value of literature (=poesie) above all other verbal arts.

Sidney's basic opposition here is between History as being based on 'fact' ('veryty', 'things doone') and Poesie as springing from *imagination and invention* ('newe formes such as never were'). He does, however, suggest a similarity between History and Poesie, when he argues that History is not entirely factual, but uses a range of poetic (or literary devices) in order to enhance its narratives of 'what men have done'. Sidney is specifically referring to early history writing here—arguing his view that history was only accepted as a relatively popular form because it borrowed interesting devices from literature (the description of emotion, the specific details given in narratives, the use of dramatic speeches).

The distinction between fact and fiction is still though the most obvious way of distinguishing the two areas. Yet there remains a close association between literary study and historical study—usually in the opposite direction to that suggested by Sir Philip Sidney.

The term *history* is ambiguous in its modern usage, as Hegel reminds us: "history combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both the *historian rerum gestarum* and the *res gestas* themselves, both the events and the narration of the events."⁶ Yet for most practicing historians the ambiguity is logically resolved by distinguishing between events and the narration of events on the basis of the intervening evidence. History writing, or the rhetoric

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of history, as J.H. Hexter calls it, is based on an “over-riding commitment of historians to fidelity to the surviving records of the past.” The written history has no immediate access to the *res gestas*, but must reconstruct them from the available documentation of the past. The historian interprets the written record [though it may be supplemented with other types of artifactual evidence] and attempts to translate from this primary documentation to actions and events. The actions and events—political, military, artistic, economic—are themselves subject to further interpretation. They are not the final meaning of the written account but are themselves construed as signs of underlying intentions or forces or even laws. The historian constructs a narrative in such a way that his own text refers through intermediary documents to the events that they record, and through the events to the forces, ideational and material, of which these events are the most probable expression.

The novel resembles the historical narrative in many respects, not the least of which is its traditional commitment to narrative explanation. As Louis O. Mink has argued, both history and literary story-telling appeal to a “configurational” mode of understanding, where phenomena are accounted for, neither by the application of theoretical laws nor by the arrangement into systems of classification but by the construction of persuasive sequences, stories of happenings with beginnings, middles and ends. Some historians and literary critics have gone further and argued that works of formal history can be best understood as operating according to literary and rhetorical models. One of the most forceful of these scholars, Hayden White, goes as far as to claim that “historical discourse shares more than it divides with novelistic discourse.”⁷

One might paraphrase Sidney [who was paraphrasing Aristotle] and say that, while the novel is more historical than literature, it is also more literary than history. The novel locates itself *between* literature and history as cultural institutions. Thus the novel evades the classifications and undermines the norms of poetics, but it also evades and undermines the referential imperatives of history. Novels play “literature” and “history” off against one another as codified forms of written discourse. They reopen poetic closures by appealing to the more random plots of supposed historical phenomena. But they also foreclose historical reference. They betray the surviving records of the past to the logics of literary coherence—the logics of plot, of character, of point of view, and of their more particular protocols of narration.

The opposition between the novel and history writing may be described more precisely in terms of the referential or representational function of the text. Novels are pseudo-historical, in the sense that they raise the question of documentation. They do this openly and ironically, as in the case of *Don Quixote* and the manuscript of the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli which unexpectedly becomes the basis of the text. But where history infers from the record to extratextual phenomena, agents, and events, novel-writing turns this referentiality back upon itself. In the novel, the world offers itself up as a series of textual records—fragmentary or complete, reliable or duplicitous, literal or figurative. The reader is referred to an extratextual “reality” or “truth” only to be referred back to the compendious textuality of human experience, which the book he is holding seeks to elucidate and control.

History is a narrative discourse with different rules than those that govern fiction. The producer of a historical text affirms that the events entextualized did

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indeed occur before entextualization. Thus it is quite proper to bring extratextual information to bear on those events when interpreting and evaluating a historical narrative.... It is certainly otherwise with fiction, for in fiction the events may be said to be created by and with the text. They have no prior temporal existence. Another way of expressing this opposition is to say that referential narratives are verifiable and incomplete, whereas non-referential narratives are unverifiable and complete.

History is more often concerned with humanity in the plural than in the singular, with events and changes affecting entire societies, than those affecting the lives of individual beings. For this reason biography is often regarded as a minor historical genre, and by some even as “a simple form of historiography.” Indeed one of the distinctions of fictional as compared to historical narrative is that the former is able to make an entire life come to life as a unified whole in a short span of story time, as short as a single day in novels like *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. However, historical and novelistic narratives that center on a life plot is the generic region where factual and fictional narratives come into closest proximity, the territory that presents the greatest potential for overlap. Michel Zeraffa writes, “with the novel, society enters history and history enters into society”.⁸

When Hayden White calls history “a true novel” he is not only signaling the two genre’s shared conventions like selection, organization, dieresis and employment but also challenging the implied assumptions of historical representation.⁹ Even E.L. Doctrow’s notion that “history is a kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive and fiction is a kind of speculative history” points towards the same direction. The metafictionality of novels acknowledging

their own construction, selection and order, but shown to be historically determined acts is what is called “historiographic metafiction”. Historiographic metafiction refutes the commonsense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from their identity. In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make the past events into present historical “facts”.

Historiographic metafiction may be defined as an inverted yet improved model of the conventional historical novel. It problematizes history, by portraying historical events and personalities only to subvert them. They attempt to re-write/re-present the past in fiction so that the past can be opened up to the present; by this they prevent the past from being conclusive and teleological; such metafictional works posit no single “truth”, but *truths* in the plural, never one Truth. It is just your version of truth against someone else’s truth, so there is no falseness *per se*. Also, such truths are relative to the specific place and culture.

Historiographic metafiction differs from the historical novel in many ways. According to George Lukacs, the historical novel deals with history by presenting a microcosm which generalizes and concentrates through a protagonist, a type who synthesizes the general and the particular. It usually relegates historical personalities to secondary roles, for the historical novel is primarily concerned with *fiction*, rather than history. The postmodern historiographic metafiction differs from its predecessor in all these respects. The protagonists of postmodern works

are “anything but proper types; they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, and the peripheral figures of fictional history”.

Further, postmodern metafiction problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: the events in these novels are narrated either from multiple points of view or by an overtly controlling narrator. There is a desire in these novels to close the gap between the past and the present and also a wish to rewrite the past in a new context.

A very significant aspect of postmodernist metafiction is its constant act of parodying, which is done not to destroy the past, but both to enshrine the past and to question it. In it lies the clue to understand the postmodern paradox. Along with paradox, self-reflexivity or self-consciousness is another vital characteristic of postmodernist metafiction. One may add to these elements other postmodernist features such as intertextuality, open-endedness, subjectivity, provisionality, indeterminacy, discontinuity and irony.

The post-structuralists in their very attitude towards history dislodged it from the high pedestal of superiority to literature. Michel Foucault, Hayden White and Louis Mink expostulated that history is fictitious. To them history is “a verbal structure in the form of narrative prose discourse”. A historian like a novelist includes and excludes, suppresses and stresses historical materials depending upon his prejudices, predilections and even prescriptions. S/He in this manner shares ‘emplotting strategies’ with the novelist. History, thus, is a construct ‘made up’ by a historian. And like every other construct, it is necessarily a political act.

As a consequence, it was realized that history which was considered a mirror reflecting factually and exactly what an individual, country and continent was, reflects exactly and everything depends on the mirror. A thing—as it is—appears differently in different mirrors in the mirror house. Similarly, history does not reflect reality. It is possible to influence or distort history as in the case of a mirror. However, of all forms of literature, the novel is the most nurtured by history. Conversely, it can be said that history is also equally nurtured by the novel.

The fictional engagement with history by its nature contests history. This may lead to two attitudes. The subscribers to the traditional notion of history may be saddened and nostalgic at this disruption of history, while others with joyous affirmation may celebrate this disruption caused by contextual versions of history. There may still be a third attitude—of the anxiety over this unprecedented engagement with history, as Shashi Deshpande finds many works of our contemporary Indian English novelists overburdened with history—so full of details from history that they end up sagging under its weight. These novelists have historical not histrionic sense with which they analyze those historical events and personages that have affected the lives of individuals, communities, the country and even the subcontinent. They do not use history as a lump but with their “sixth sense” they appropriate, revise and re-interpret history—what happened to them as they saw and experienced and what they were told about it. Like excavators these novelists employed their historical sense or consciousness as their chisel, spade, scoop and brush to uncover what lay buried underneath the authorized/official version of History. They have tried to recover the repressed events and interpreted their versions in as diverse ways as they or their works themselves. In the process they have attempted the Re-Discovery of India.

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The narratives of emancipation and enlightenment are narratives of integration, inclusion of stories of people who have been away from the main stream. Writers in the postcolonial age reflect retrospectively on colonialism and the present neocolonial times. The present is interdependent on its past and the neocolonial times are an after-effect of the pre-colonial times. The present colonized culture, including minds is a result of past imperialism, both politically and culturally.

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CHAPTER—3

Subaltern Reading of History in Rahi Masoom Reza's *A Village Divided*

The best of the literature that emerged in the wake of the Partition bears the imprint of the struggle to comprehend pain and suffering on a scale that was unprecedented in South Asia. The Partition Literature became a repository of localized truths, sought to be evaded and minimized by the dominant discourse on the Partition. These narratives offer insights into the nature of individual experience, and break the silence in the collective sphere.

Trends in recent Partition research represent a shift away from the parleys and betrayals in the domain of High Politics, towards an emphasis on the subalterns as both victims and perpetrators of violence, the instigation behind the widespread rioting, the resulting psychological trauma, and most importantly, the feminist concern with recovering lost stories of sexually violated and abducted women during the Partition. New Archives of survivors' memories are being created to supplement the available sources such as autobiographies and biographies, poetry and fictional accounts.

Novelists who have written about the Partition, especially those who lived through its days of terror, take their stand beside those who suffered, in order either to bear witness or to offer solace, to call down damnation on those who were responsible for it, to commemorate nostalgically communities in the past or speak with bitter irony about the possibilities of life in post-colonial days. The best of them, however do not repeat what the historians already know—that there was violence of such fiendishness that each reminder of it still comes as a shock to our

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decencies and still violates our sense of a common humanity. Indeed, they seek to make connections with the social and cultural life of a community in its entirety within a historically specific period. That is why, these fictional accounts, unlike narratives of the historians, which move with certitude towards a definite end, contain all that is locally contingent and truthfully remembered, capricious and anecdotal, contradictory and mythically given. Their endings too are various. While some manage to find their way out of the realm of madness and crime, others either mark out the emotional and ethical map of our times with indelible lines of screams, ash, smoke and mockery, or crumble into shocked silence.

These narratives either assume the existence of a communally shared history in pre-partition India, or imaginatively set up, with the help of small remembered things, images of the sub-continent as a place of tolerant communities as structural counterpoints to the dispirited sense of exile and pain after the division. Their fictionalized life-worlds of villages and small towns invariably suggest that there was an essential feeling of relatedness between the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, not merely a passive acceptance of different customs and beliefs. That is why, perhaps, hardly any of these texts seriously concern themselves with defining the religious identities of different groups, but assert that such identities only be forged in the social relationships established between human beings in the process of living together; that is in the daily interaction between people which gives to theological beliefs a significance and a value.

The second element that nearly informs all these narratives is the note of utter bewilderment. Each of these narratives finds the Partition and the massacres so completely without historical or social reason, that all they can sometimes do is to record the place they called 'home' or 'basti', and the memories of a society

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with collective rites and traditions, songs and legends, names of birds and trees, that were tinged forever with acrid smell of smoke and blood.¹

Partition fiction is concerned with the fate of those ordinary characters—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs—who do not feel, at any time prior to the country's division, that they are aliens living in unreal places which have neither the sanction nor God and amongst people who are intolerant, bigoted, and contemptuous of each other. For a majority of them their customary homes, where they try to realize their common hopes and mundane desires, are utopian enough. Only a fool, they think, can be tempted by distant political horizons, and only a pilgrim is addicted to a travelling life, forever in search of a destination other than the one he has arrived at.² Sometimes, in their minds, the pilgrim and the fool are the same. For as long as they can remember, they have lived side-by-side in settled communities. The beginnings of each of their private biographies are connate with the origins of their 'bastis'. It rarely occurs to most of them that, as members of different religions or sects, their cultural differences are so radical that their lives have followed historically different and antagonistic paths since the beginning of their encounter with each other. And so, despite the enormity of violence around them unleashed by the demand for two separate nations, Partition fiction is replete with characters who resist the pressures of theological hardliners and ideological fundamentalists, and refuse to migrate; refuse to leave their homes or their lands just because some politicians claim that different forms of worship demand different cultural, moral, and political citizenships.

There are other fictional works which speak about the pathos of the people, who refused to leave after the Partition; who refused to be coerced into believing that India could be divided into two religiously defined nations. Whether Hindu or Muslim, they remained deeply attached to their homes, their village landscapes, their ancestral graveyards, and their rights of conversation with people of all sects.³ These novels portray characters who chose to stay in places they have inherited and consider any change in their habitat to be a violation of their selfhood. Besides, their experiences had taught them how to live with pluralities and develop, in the process, ‘a sense of responsibility in many kinds of living’⁴ so as to evade tragedy. Their villages and towns were non-communalized, agnostic spaces where people hardly felt the need to draw attention to their religious identity because it neither posed a threat to the other nor saw the other in genocidal opposition to itself. Since their sense of belongingness within a shared community is co-extensive with their sense of identity,⁵ they reject, as a myth, the essential idea of the partition—the idea that the reason for their presence anywhere is somehow dependent on abstractions called ‘Islamic brotherhood’ or ‘Hindu *Sangathan*’, both of which derive their legitimization from sacred sanctuaries located beyond the horizons of their immediate and intimate boundaries, and are discontinuous with their daily and lived experiences.

There are countless characters in Partition fiction who are bewildered by the new borders India and Pakistan because for them their home was their ‘basti’ and, hence, their country. Attached to their ‘home’ were all the ideals of well-being and ‘well-doing’. It was their sanctuary; their affective and moral space; and it was sufficient. Unfortunately, however, the politics of religious identity which surrounds these ordinary characters is hasty, restless, and crass. In Partition fiction,

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characters never aspire to be part of some exceptional religious group. Their understanding of their selfhood is that they are ordinary people with limited means and abilities, and that they are vulnerable. They are self-conscious about the fact that they live within a network of people with different religious convictions whose right to a share in their living spaces has to be acknowledged.

Most novelists who have written about the Partition either draw upon their personal memories of those harrowing days or use stories told to them by others about their experiences. Novels about the partition, therefore, tend to be autobiographical. Fiction about the Partition in India and Pakistan has made an attempt, despite the enormity of the horror it describes, to preserve essential human values. This attempt is remarkable because in 1947 a lot of property was destroyed, thousands had to migrate, and countless people were killed. Yet, writers were convinced that it was essential to preserve a sense of humanity.

One such Partition fiction that incorporates all the afore-mentioned characteristic features of Partition literature is indisputably Rahi Masoom Reza's novel *A Village Divided*. Dr Rahi Masoom Reza was born in 1927 in Ghazipur district in Uttar Pradesh. He was educated in Ghazipur and later at the Aligarh Muslim University where he took a Ph.D. A brilliant student of Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit, Dr. Reza subsequently taught at the AMU and was a proponent of Urdu in the Devanagari script. He later moved to Mumbai and became a successful screenplay writer and wrote the screenplays and dialogues for over 300 films including B.R. Chopra's television series, *Mahabharata*. Dr. Reza died on 15 March 1992 in Bombay.

A masterpiece of Hindi literature in an acclaimed translation, Rahi Masoom Reza's honest and controversial novel unfolds during the latter years of the Raj and the first decade of Independence and portrays the rival halves of a Zamindar family, their loves, fights, and litigations. It attacks the creation of Pakistan and explores the abolition of the zamindari system and its impact at the village level.

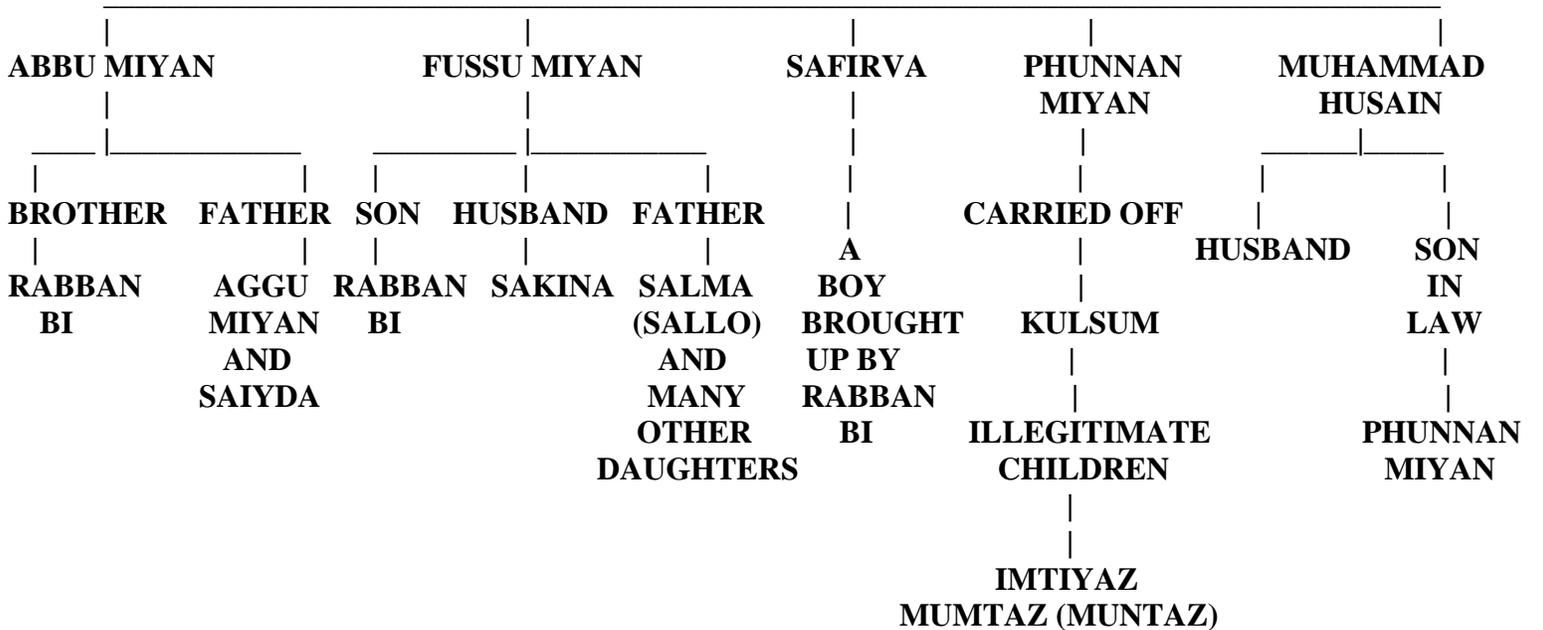
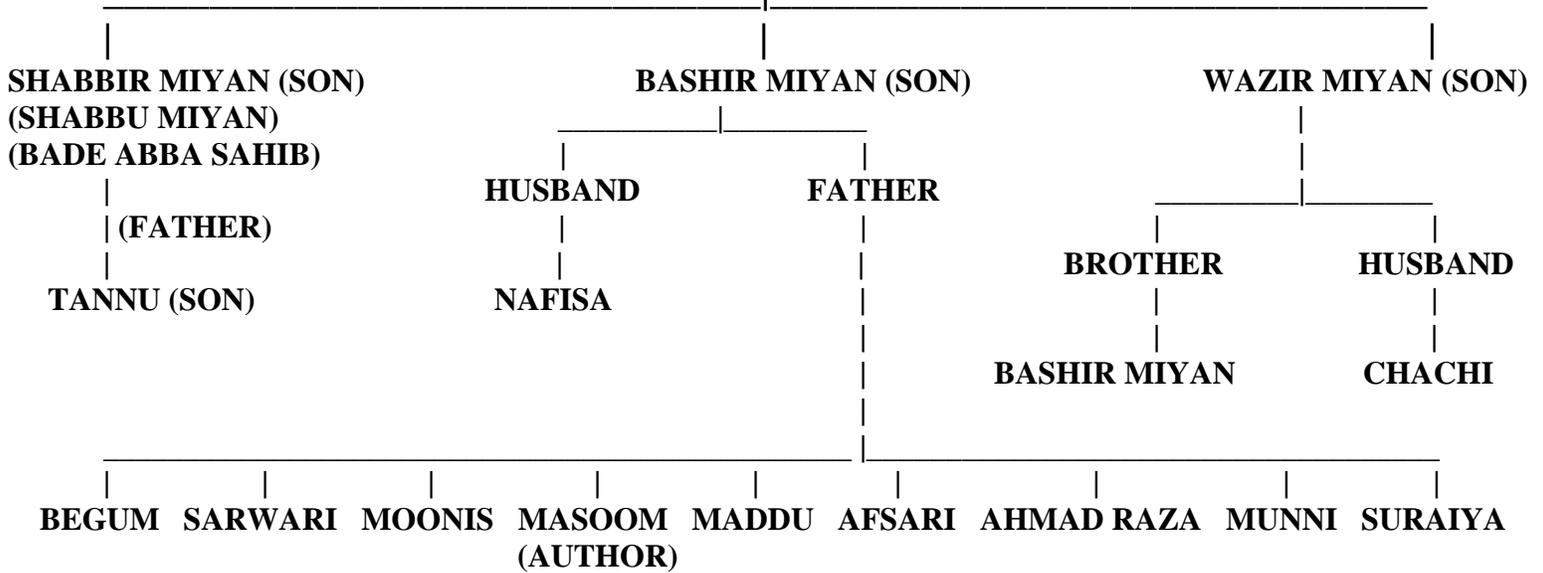
A semi-autobiographical work set in the author's village of Gangauli, in Ghazipur district on the fringes of Avadh, *A Village Divided*, previously published as *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli*, is full of passion and vibrancy; a powerful record of the meeting of Muslim and Hindu cultural traditions that bound Indian society together.

This novel may frustrate readers as far as its complex web of relationships among characters is concerned. Therefore, it is essential to have a closer look at these relationships in the form of tree structures:

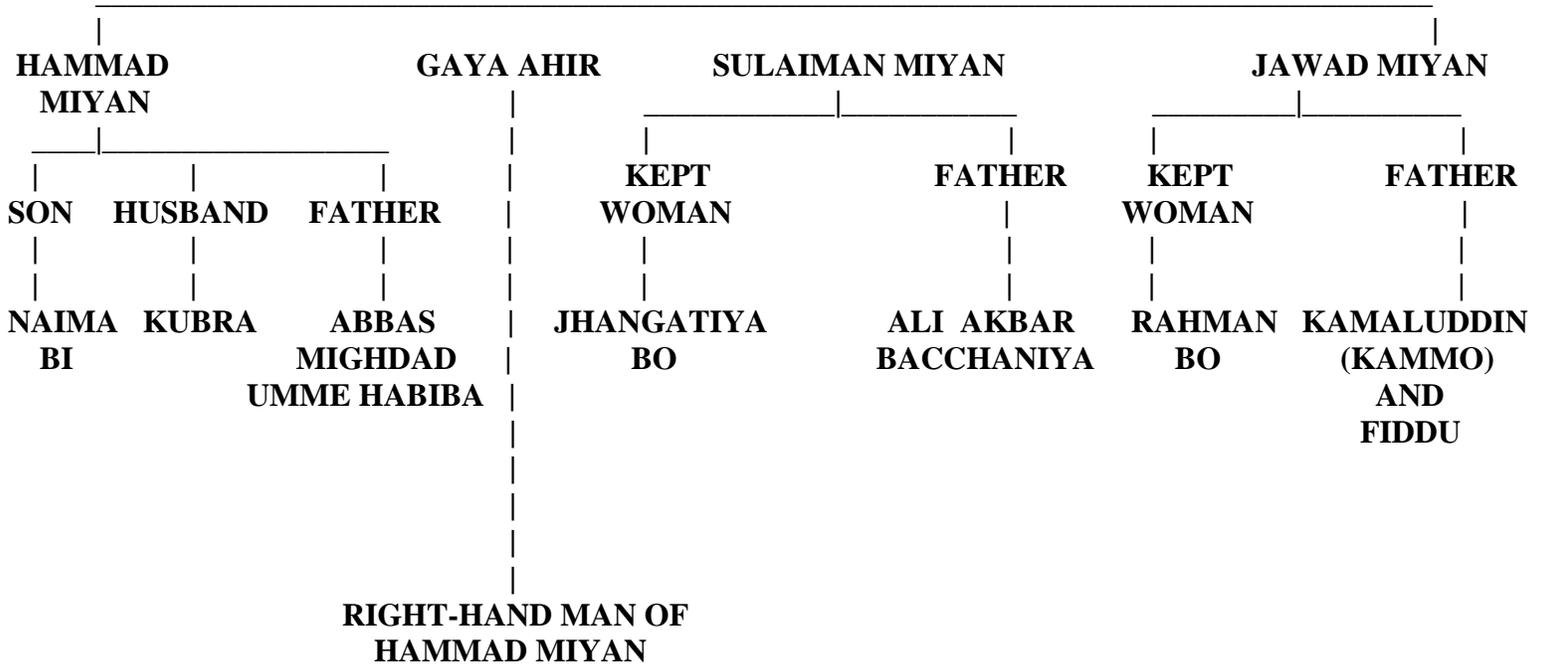
A VILLAGE DIVIDED
GENEALOGY

DAKKHIN PATTI

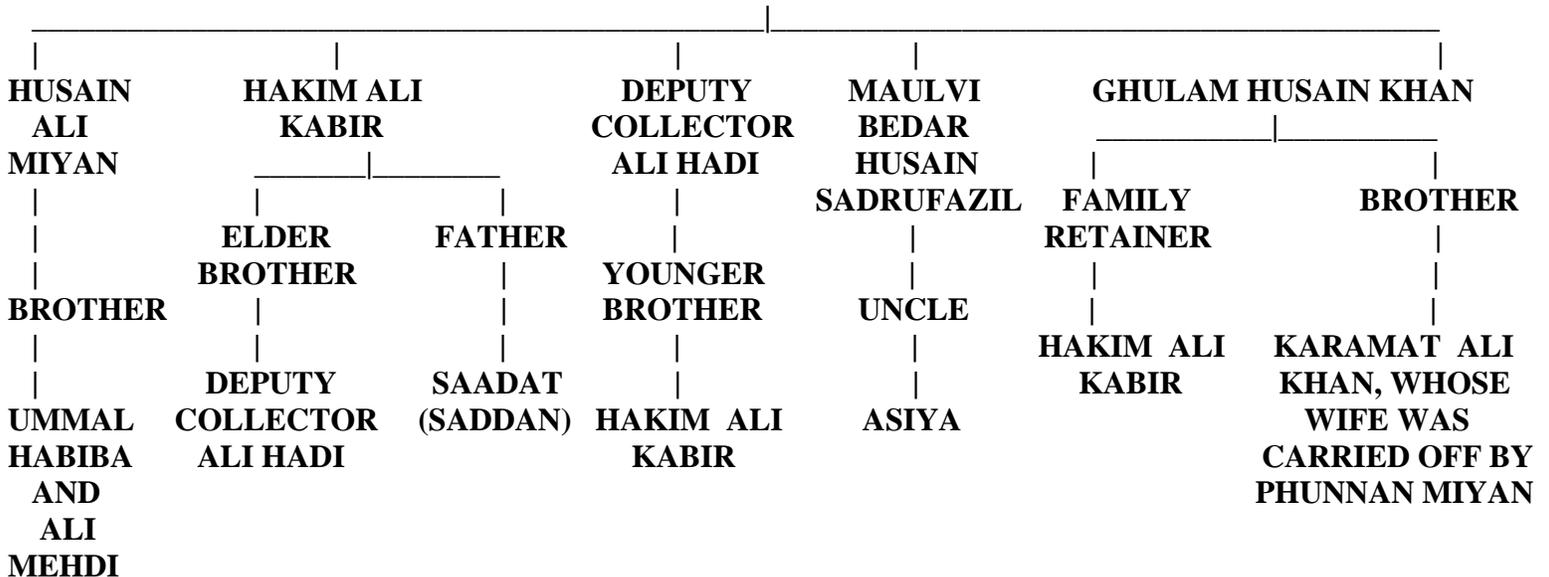
DADDA OR AKBARI-BIBI (MOTHER)



**RAZIA
RUQAYYA
MAGHFIYA**



UTTAR PATTI

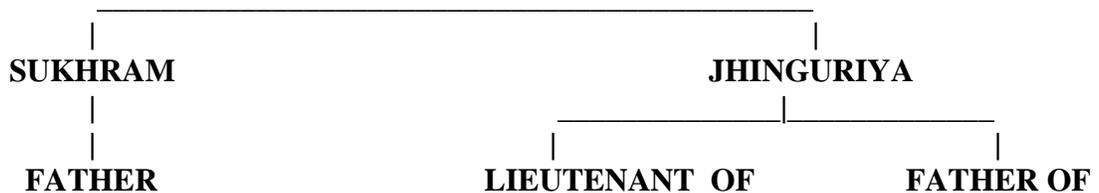
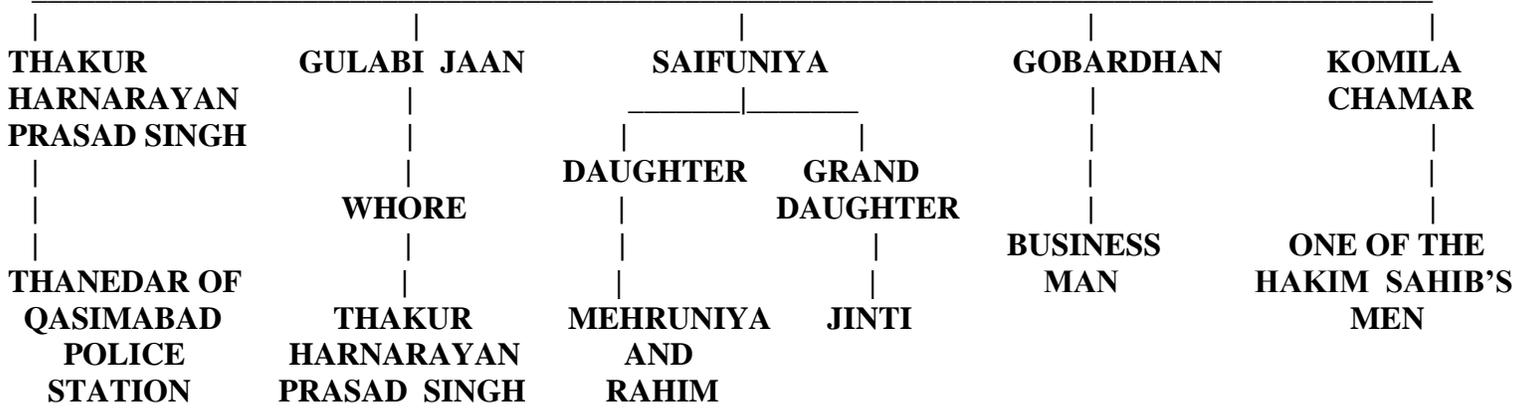
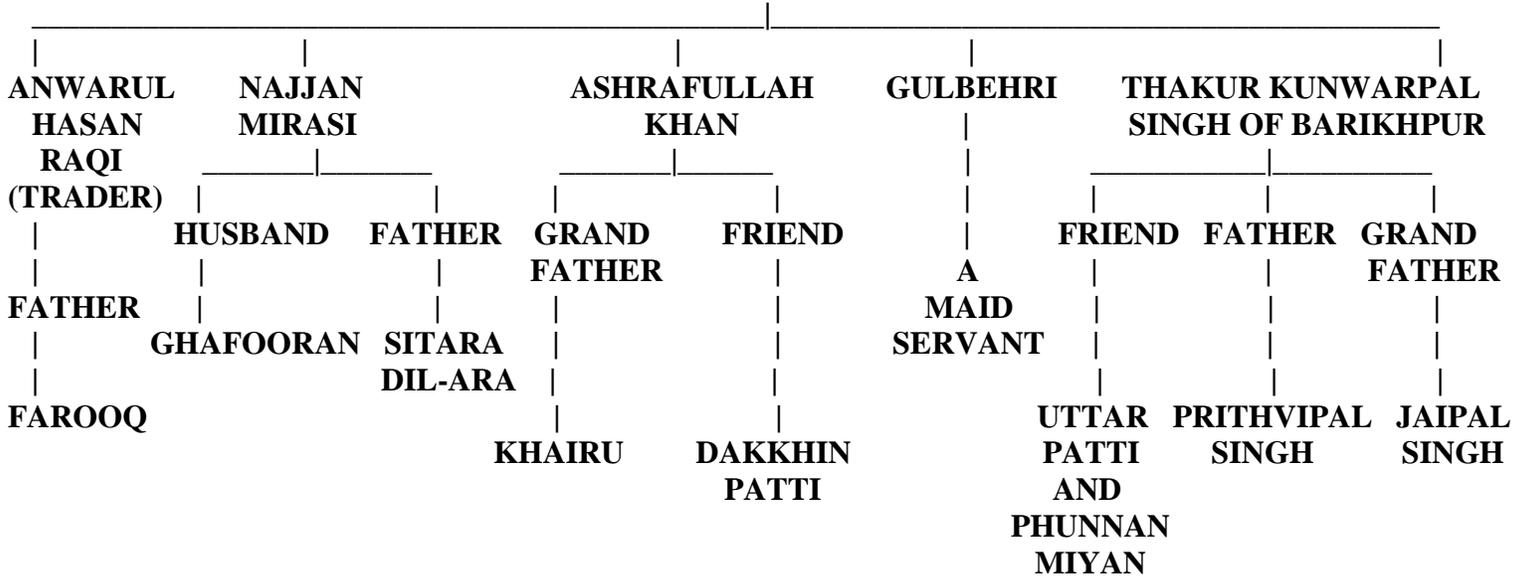


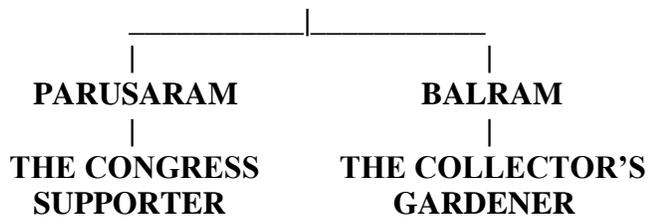
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OTHERS





PHUNNAN MIYAN

CHIKURIYA

A Village Divided deals with history in two forms, that is to say, the national history unfolding itself as a backdrop to the author's personal history. There exists an organic relationship between the two. The novel begins in an elegiac mood. It laments over history as 'the significant past', which has brought in its wake dislocation, desolation, degradation and dilapidation. For instance, the school of the town is not only deserted by people but also by history. Only stories, both mythical and real, are left behind on the sands of time. Setting of the sun symbolizes the end of an era, an epoch in the eventful history of Ghazipur. The novel takes a critical look at largely two significant issues, namely, the eradication of Zamindari system and its destabilizing consequences at the village level, and the creation of Pakistan. However, it looks at such enormously important national issues from below, that is to say, from a subordinated perspective, from the point of view of an individual.

The town of Ghazipur and its inhabitants have been created, destroyed and re-created by the formative influence of the holy river Ganga from the times immemorial. The river bears testimony to the eventful history of the town. However, the beginning of the novel shows Ghazipur incapable of either being nostalgic or being anxious about future. It can only survive transiently. It is as rightly put by the novelist:

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“This town lives in moments, dies in moments, and then is reborn in moments.”⁶

The social fabric of Ghazipur is flexible enough to include all the multi-ethnic communities like Thakurs, Brahmins, Kayasths, Ahirs, Bhars, Chamars, Saiyids, Sheikhs and Pathans with their respective religious and cultural affiliations. It suggests that the soil of Gangauli has never lost its essential accommodating and enriching nature. The novelist refers to the history of Nuruddin the Martyr (the son of Masood Ghazni) and his tomb. Though desolate and forlorn, it has stood the test of time. Its roots are firmly grounded in the soil of Gangauli. Perhaps, time as history has changed everything—Gangauli and its inhabitants, their lives, their destinies, their relationships, except this tomb. This tomb symbolizes the victory of life, culture and humanity over history in the race of time. The Saiyids of Gangauli have also created an artificial Karbala in Gangauli in order to commemorate the supreme sacrifice of Imam Husain and his family, the rightful descendants of the Prophet.

Rahi Masoom Reza describes the precise location of Gangauli in the following words:

“In between a decrepit tomb and a ruined factory lives this village”.⁷

Gangauli is neither a fictitious place, nor its inhabitants, unreal. Of course, characterization of this novel is a unique combination of some real characters and some fictional ones. However, the novelist clarifies that the real characters are his own family members, whereas, the fictional ones are developed on the basis of familiarity.

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This novel closely depicts the hierarchical domestic world of Gangaulians, wherein each one is designated some fixed space and power. This well-defined power structure is also extended to the village level. The novel shows the ancestral rivalry between the Saiyid Zamindars of Uttar Patti and Dakkhin Patti, especially in putting up a great show of grief and mourning during the celebration of Moharram. For the Saiyid families of Gangauli, Moharram is ‘a spiritual celebration’.

One can perceive a considerable amount of sarcasm in the following remarks of the novelist:

“When I opened my eyes the bus was crossing Bauri bridge Just near the bridge were two or three heaps of lime mortar left over from building the bridge. The mothers of the neighbourhood used to give it to their babies to lick when they were teething and that’s why these mounds were slowly disappearing. This mortar had been handed out by mothers since the time of the Mughals, and some people say that the Mughals did nothing for Hindustan! It’s possible that P.N. Oak* is right to think that they cannot be congratulated for building Fatehpur Sikri or the Taj Mahal. I can also accept that someone else might have built the Red Fort of Delhi, but for generations the mothers of Ghazipur have known that the Mughals definitely left several piles of material by the Bauri bridge and that it helps children with teething problems.”⁸

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- Purushottam Nagesh Oak (March 2 1917 - December 4 2007), commonly referred to as P. N. Oak, was an Indian writer and self-styled Professor, notable for his historical revisionism based on the ideology of Hindutva. His claims, for example, Christianity and Islam are both derivatives

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of Hinduism, or that the Kaaba and the Taj Mahal were once Hindu temples to Shiva, have largely been dismissed in mainstream academic circles, in India as well as the West, as examples of pseudo-history; he has been referred to as a "mythhistorian".

Rahi Masoom Reza poignantly questions this very negation of localized truths by the official versions of history. History, thus biased and distorted, is no better than a corpus of unfounded truths, which could be potentially dangerous. In the above instance, Rahi Masoom Reza hints at minimizing or subduing or evading the localized truths in the form of oral stories and archives by the dominant discourse on history.

Rahi Masoom Reza further hints at the Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli voting neither for Iqbal Suhail (a sworn enemy of the Saiyids) and the Muslim League in the conversation between Fussy-cha and Gore-da. The novel consciously attempts at filling up the gaps in the documented version of history of colonial and post-colonial India. It attempts at giving a counterpoint version to the so far dominant discourse on history regarding the perception and perspective of individuals and communities on the national issues like the Partition and eradication of Zamindari system. One may compare this unofficial version of history to the tales of a character named Kallu Kakka in the novel. The novelist says:

“Kakka began to tell us tales of Amir Hamza. When I grew up I read these stories and found there were many things missing from them which Kakka used to tell us with such immense conviction that it seemed he’d seen them happen with his own eyes. I preferred Kakka’s version; perhaps because he didn’t tell it in the chaste Urdu of Lucknow but in Bhojpuri Urdu. And besides, he didn’t just tell the story—he acted it out as well.”⁹

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Some historians suggest that the Pakistan movement was instigated primarily by the Zamindars and the educated middle class aspiring for jobs in the bureaucracy. The Zamindars wanted to hold on to their lands. They were afraid that if the Congress came to power, it would appropriate their property. The demand for Pakistan was, therefore, primarily articulated by the rich and educated. The ordinary man or woman didn't really play a major role in the movement. In the present novel, Rahi Masoom Reza insists that the Pakistan movement was launched by those who were educated at Aligarh—by people who spoke chaste Urdu. The novel is replete with instances wherein the characters out-rightly reject both the creation of Pakistan and eradication of Zamindari system. One such noteworthy instance is the following discussion among the Gangaulians:

“There was a furious discussion in progress. Ali Kabir-cha was saying, ‘Our forefathers lived here...our tazia platforms and imambaras are here...our honour and self-respect is here! Gangauli means something to us! If we don't care about it, then are some traders going to? Those who've earned their pile in Calcutta...I'm not stopping them, but...’

‘Arre, bhai sahib, it's the fate of Muslims to be separated from their homeland. After all didn't the Prophet of God himself have to leave Mecca for Medina?’ threw in uncle Wazir.’

‘That he did!’ said Kabir-cha, ‘He certainly did, but then, we are not the Prophet of God.’

‘Arre, Mir Sahib! This Congress is the Party of the Hindus. Since the majority of Zamindars are Muslims, they are bound to abolish Zamindari.

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And where are the homes of Muslims in the countryside? They're like salt in dal', said Anwarul Hasan Raqi, one of the traders.

'It's salt that gives dal its taste', said Ali Kabir-cha, 'How many days have you tasted dal without salt?'

'It's the fate of Indian Muslims to suffer', said Anwarul Hasan emphatically.

'In the first place, I'm not accepting that the British are about to leave us. And in the second place it's the fate of us Shias to weep. You Sunnis can stay wrapped up in your songs and qavvalis', announced Ali Kabir-cha decisively. Everyone was speechless".¹⁰

On the one hand, the Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli as a community are contemptuous of the Congress Party regarding their decision to eradicate Zamindari system—a system that defines their very existence and identity. On the other hand, they criticize the Muslim League for demanding a separate nation, which means undertaking the Herculean task of transporting the movable assets to an alien land, and leaving behind the immovable ones, which comprise their Imambaras, fields, houses, lands etc.

The high-sounding political discourse of the Muslim League is beyond the comprehension power of the ordinary Gangaulians. These people had nothing to do either with the creation of Pakistan or Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who claimed to be the sole representative and saviour of Indian Muslims. They defy the very logic of the creation of Pakistan with their simple yet baffling questions. The only thing that is intelligible to them is that Gangauli is their home and Imam Husain is their saviour. They are the natives of this soil and have been the equal

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shareholders of the cultural heritage of India. Pakistan, for them, is a mere abstraction, a distorted idea of nation, and certainly not a Promised Land as was the ‘myth’ projected by the Muslim League. They are basically choiceless. They are taken unawares by the course of the events. For them, Gangauli is what matters the most as it promises or assures safety, intimacy, relationships, spirituality, culture, ancestral dignity etc. The world outside Gangauli is just an alien world, a world full of strangers. We can vividly perceive a sense of contempt for the colonial rule and whatever it entails in the following words of Hakim Sahib. He says:

“May God destroy the English and the study of their language! The faithless wretches have ruined everything!”¹¹

For the denizens of Gangauli, all alien ideas and people are equivalent to trespassing and trespassers. The underlying problem is that how to accommodate such ‘homogeneous social and cultural distortions’ into multi-ethnic and heterogeneous society of Gangauli.

The Saiyid Zamindars do not even spare the Congress Party and Mahatma Gandhi. Hakim Sahib says:

“These here Congresswallahs have turned the brains of the tenants downright bad, bhai. God knows what this Gandhi...’ here the Hakim spent some time wishing ill on Gandhi and Nehru, ‘...now this saala Balram-va is the Collector Sahib’s gardener and that Parusaram-va is a Congress supporter...So how on earth do you get the land revenue out of the

bastards...and then you turn round and say, “You’re getting worried for no reason” ... ¹²

Abolishing the Zamindari system not only crippled the Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli economically, but also rob them off their ancestral right and honour. It is a matter of great disgrace and embarrassment for them to share the age-old hegemonic power structure with a low-caste infidel like Parusaram-va, who was designated a subordinated position before yesterday. It is a severe blow to their ancestral pride. It created destabilizing effects at the village level. The Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli could no longer find the power equations of the old world relevant in the changing social, political and economic contexts. Their proud Zamindari has already succumbed to larger historical and political forces. It has crumbled to the extent that Maulvi Bedar, a proud Saiyid has proposed marriage to Bachhaniya, the daughter of Jhangatiya-bo, who is not only an untouchable but also a kept woman of Sulaiman. Bachhaniya is an illegitimate child of Jhangatiya-bo.

As a keen observer of life, Rahi Masoom Reza has successfully captured the sense of absurdity that the Partition embodied through the character of Phunnan Miyan in his inimitable style. Phunnan Miyan is not only a proud Saiyid, but also an important member of the village Gangauli. For Phunnan Miyan, hurling abuses in his typical Bhojpuri Urdu is just natural and commonplace. He enters into a heated debate with Farooq, a student of the Aligarh Muslim University on the matter of the creation of Pakistan. It is as follows:

“‘Adaab, Chacha!’ Anwarul Hasan’s son Farooq greeted Phunnan Miyan.’

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‘Eh, bhaiyaa, how is your Pakistan doing?’

‘... There’ll be an Islamic government.’

‘Is there true Islam anywhere that you can have an Islamic government? Eh, bhai, our forefathers’ graves are here, our tazia platforms are here, our fields and homes are here. I’m not an idiot to be taken in by your “Long live Pakistan!”’

‘When the British go, the Hindus will rule here!’

‘Yes, yes, so you say. You’re talking as if all the Hindus were murderers waiting to slaughter us. Arre, Thakur Kunwarpal Singh was a Hindu. Jhinguriya is a Hindu. Eh, bhai, and isn’t that Parusaram-va a Hindu? When the Sunnis in the town started doing haramzadgi, saying that we won’t let the bier of Hazarat Ali be carried in procession because the Shias curse our Caliphs, didn’t Parusaram-va come and raise such hell that the bier was carried. Your Jinnah Sahib didn’t come to help us lift our bier!’

Farooq laughed.

‘In reality the “sincerity” of the Hindus is a deception,’ he said using an English word.

‘Their what is a deception?’

‘“Sincerity” ...I mean that...Arre, sahib, that is to say...’

‘What is it, bhai? Have you forgotten the language of your forefathers?’¹³

The Muslims of Gangauli neither understand the logic of the Partition nor of Muslim nationalism. They out rightly reject the two-nation theory. They are simply baffled by the idea of the division of their nation. They are completely unaware of how Lord Mountbatten's plan or the Radcliffe Award would alternate their existing reality forever, and India's 'tryst with destiny' would horribly change the destinies of millions. For a man like Phunnan Miyan and others, Gangauli is not only an ancestral village, but a place that has nurtured and nourished them from within. For them, the creation of Pakistan is as illusive as is the Partition. Phunnan Miyan is not to be taken in by promises of a Promised Land for Indian Muslims. He is simply worried about the fate of Gangauli rather than Aligarh Muslim University or Mohammad Ali Jinnah or Pakistan. For him, Gangauli implies the notion of 'state' or 'nation' with which a sense of familiarity could be established, a sense of identification is possible. For Phunnan Miyan, Jhinguriya and his son Chikuriya as Hindus are far more noble and loyal than the Sunni Muslims because Shias have always shared a troubled and usually antagonistic relationship with Sunnis in the matter of faith. However, Phunnan Miyan's nationalistic feelings are put to test when both of his sons die as martyrs for the cause of India's freedom. He observes their death as a re-enactment of the days at Karbala, an occasion of mourning during Moharram. Phunnan Miyan is at pain when Balmukund Verma did not take the name of his martyred son Mumtaz for the 1942 Movement. It reflects that the elites are more concerned with making eloquent speeches rather than genuinely acknowledging the martyrdom of each and every soldier. The character of Phunnan Miyan embodies Reza's notion of belongingness or citizenship, which neither comes through one's physical transportation to a new land nor by sharing the common faith or religion. It is something as natural and essential as air, water and

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food for survival. This sense of belongingness primarily comes through participation in a community, by sharing a common cultural history over a longer period of time.

The novel also provides an exclusive reference to the peasants' insurgency against the colonial rule in the form of the Bhars, the men of Prithvipal Singh and Ashrafullah Khan attacking the police thana of Qasimabad. They turned the police thana into smoke and ashes and tied Thakur Harnarayan Prasad and his constables to the tree and burnt them alive. These are the people who have been exploited for generations under the name of war fund or land revenue. Their tolerance paved way to violence, which finally resulted in a massacre.

Rahi Masoom Reza gives another example of his intrinsic faith in the Ganga-Jamuni culture of Gangauli. This harmony is a consequence of mutual respect shown by both the Hindus and the Muslims for the beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, gods, goddesses and saints of either religion. Chikuriya, the son of Gaya Ahir, is not ready to believe that Imam Sahib was a Muslim. The illiterate Chikuriya argues with the Master Sahib and asserts his unflinching faith in the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his age-old loyalty to Phunnan Miyan. The sanctity of Imam Sahib is beyond Hindu or Muslim faith for the illiterate Chikuriya. He, like many others, is not ready to give it up for some rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim animosity. According to him, no other person is eligible enough to be called a martyr except Imam Husain. Larger historical events along with their broader sweep of generalizations are of no significance to people like Jhinguriya and Chikuriya who have lived amicably with the Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli for ages. It is a strong rejection of a discourse that attempts to represent Hindus and Muslims as antagonistic communities having altogether opposite cultural

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interests—the communities that have shared a thousand year of courtship and cooperation. Invasion and conflicts of their initial encounters gradually subsided and got transformed into support, cooperation, mutual respect and loyalty.

Tannu is another character who is extremely vocal in voicing his disgust towards the recent political developments. Though he returns to Gangauli after being on the war-front for six years, Tannu is profoundly attached to the soil of Gangauli. He constantly longed for Gangauli, its lanes, its fields, its houses, its inhabitants and most importantly, its Moharram. In fact, this is the case with almost all who had left Gangauli for one reason or the other. Most of them are ignorant about the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim League and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. However, it is noteworthy that at the time when the Muslim League and its supporters were busy accelerating their agitation against the Congress Party at a national level with respect to their demand of a separate nation with an Islamic government, the inhabitants of Gangauli are busy in their inter-patti rivalries, celebration of Moharram and daily chores. Larger historical and political issues simply went either unnoticed or were not thought worthy of discussion. Gangauli, like Mano Majra of Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan*, appears unperturbed by the frenzy of communal riots that engulfed thousands of lives during the Partition.

This novel unequivocally suggests that the Pakistan movement or creating a separate nation for the Muslims on the notion of 'Islamic Brotherhood' was inaugurated and accomplished by the Aligarh-educated breed, by those elites who spoke chaste Urdu. They neither had the willingness to perceive the ground reality among the mass, nor had an interest in the common good, and that's why their

discourse on the creation of Pakistan and its projection as the ‘Promised Land’ for Muslims sound strange to the common people of Gangauli.

The Gangauli-bred Kammo enters into a heated debate with two Aligarh-educated students on the issue of creating Pakistan. The two Aligarh students deliver a long speech to Kammo concerning the hazards that are involved in the stay of Muslims after Hindustan gets free. Kammo is simply bemused at the logicity of the speech which predicts that the erstwhile low-born infidels of Gangauli would vanquish their former masters (Saiyid Zamindars) after the Partition.

Even the same distinction in perspective is evident in the discussion between the Aligarh-educated students and the weaver Haji Ghafoor Ansari. He argues:

‘No, Miyan,’ said the Haji Sahib, ‘I’m an illiterate peasant. But I think that there’s not the slightest need to make Pakistan-Akistan for the sake of our prayers. Lord God Almighty said quite clearly, “Eh, my Prophet, tell these people that I am with people of the Faith.” And someone was saying that this Jinnah of yours doesn’t say his prayers.’

‘False allegations were made even against the prophets, sir!’ one young man replied heatedly.

‘But the prophets used to do some miracle-aracle to show who was right!’

‘Jinnah Sahib’s miracle is Pakistan.’

‘Well, bless me! I didn’t know that Jinnah Sahib had become a prophet.’

...The Haji Sahib stormed out of the mosque. The speech had been quite beyond his comprehension. He didn't even understand why all of a sudden Muslims needed a place of refuge. And where was the protective shadow of the British that those boys had made such a song and dance about? No Englishman had ever been seen in Gangauli. And why then hadn't the Hindus killed the Muslims before the British came to India? And what about the fundamental question—was life and death in the hands of God or the British and Jinnah Sahib?¹⁴

The arguments of Haji Ghafoor Ansari are far more incisive, offensive, and scathing than those of Aligarh students. According to him, Jinnah is not even a Muslim as he does not say his prayers, keeps fasts and is fond of drinking. Therefore, he is not the rightful representative of Indian Muslims. Jinnah can't be claimed as a proper Muslim in faith. In fact, he was a typical Englishman in the guise of a Muslim. His mannerisms and speech resembled an Englishman more than the common Muslim of India. The commonplace logic of Gangaulians questions the historical claims of fundamental organizations like the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, who were bent upon establishing a state on the exclusivist ideology.

Rahi Masoom Reza and the Gangaulians of this novel have a clear understanding of what it is to live in a heterogeneous society, a space with plurality as a daily living reality. It's a space where multiculturalism breeds smoothly, and which not only defines their sense of belongingness, but also their sense of identity. To them, the whole idea of Partition, or to say, dividing a nation into two

on the basis of religious identity is a myth and a mere abstraction. They can hardly believe the notion of dividing India into two on the line of clearly demarcated religious ideologies.

Even Tannu, the soldier could not make out anything from the Aligarh Muslim University students' discourse about Mecca, Iqbal, Jinnah, Urdu, and Pakistan. Tannu derides the policies of the Muslim League, which he believes to be impractical and far-fetched. He argues:

‘I am a Muslim. But I love this village because I myself am this village. I love the indigo godown, this tank and these mud lanes because they are different forms of myself. On the battlefield, when death came very near, I certainly remembered Allah, but instead of Mecca or Karbala, I remembered Gangauli...Allah is omnipresent. Then what is the difference between Gangauli and Mecca, and the indigo godown and the Ka’ba and our pond and the spring of paradise?’

‘People like you selling out the Indian Muslims to the Hindus!’ said the black shervani angrily. ‘Have you no shame? Are you comparing the Noble Ka’ba with this miserable village?’

‘Yes, that’s just what I am doing!’ replied Tannu. ‘And neither am I ashamed to do so. Why should I be? Gangauli is my village. Mecca is not my city. This is my home and the Ka’ba is Allah Miyan’s. If God loves His home then won’t He be able to understand that we too can love our home as much as He loves His?’¹⁵

Tannu Sounds most prophetic, philosophical and at the same time realistic when he utters the following statement:

“Anything constructed on a foundation of hate and fear cannot be auspicious.”¹⁶

It is extremely surprising to note that the storm of communal frenzy did not disturb the serene atmosphere of Gangauli, particularly at the time when the raging fire of communal violence spread rapidly. Though the haughty Saiyids of Gangauli debate the issue of communal riots with profound seriousness, curses Hindus of Calcutta and Delhi and hurl abuses at Congresswallahs, they aren't ready to harm the Bhars, the Ahirs and the Chamars of Gangauli, who have been an integral part of their lives. It appears absurd to them to avenge the barbaric killings of Muslims in Calcutta and Delhi by killing the Hindus of Gangauli. The elitist version of history overlooks such personal emotions in favour of empirical truth.

The novel also refers to the Hindu fundamentalism in the persuasive speech of Pandit Matadin, instigating the Bhars, the Ahirs and the Chamars of Ghazipur to take revenge on the Muslims of Barikhpur, Ghazipur and Gangauli. A little later, Rahi Masoom Reza provides another instance of the overwhelming sense of communal harmony when Bafati-chacha, the vegetable seller and other Muslims are saved by Thakur Prithvipal Singh from getting assaulted and murdered by the Hindu fundamentalists.

Thus, Rahi Masoom Reza breaks the conventional mode of narration and places the introduction almost towards the end of the novel in order to express his everlasting attachment and belongingness with the soil of Gangauli. It serves a dual

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purpose. First of all, it asserts Reza's belief in the formative influences of language, culture and region rather than religion as far as subjectivity and identity are concerned. Secondly, it gives a fitting reply to both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists. He became extremely furious when they taunted him about his village, home, nationality and heritage. He re-asserts his claim on India, and especially his village Gangauli, as his homeland, not as a novelist or as a citizen, but as a human being:

“The Jan Sangh says that Muslims are outsiders. How can I presume to say they're lying? But I must say that I belong to Ghazipur. My bonds with Gangauli are unbreakable. It's not just a village, it's my home. Home. This word exists in every language and dialect in this world, and is the most beautiful word in every language and dialect. And that is why I repeat my statement—because Gangauli's not just a village, it's my home as well. 'Because'—what a strong word this is. And there are thousands of 'because's' like it, and no sword is sharp enough to cut this 'because'. And as long as this 'because' is alive, I will remain Saiyid Masoom Reza Abidi of Ghazipur, wherever my grandfather hailed from. And I give no one the right to say to me, 'Rahi! You don't belong to Gangauli, and so get out and go, say, to Rae Bareli.' Why should I go, sahib? I will not go.

This introduction was necessary to carry the story forward.”¹⁷

The novelist believes that the above 'Introduction' was essential as all new epochs, new eras are harbingers of new value system, new world order, new power equations, new hierarchies, new cultural dimensions, new sectarian loyalties, new political and religious affiliations and new social outlook. However, Gangauli and

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his outlook towards it remains the same. He clarifies that he is not going to be coerced by anyone to opt for Pakistan either by force or by fraud.

Eradication of Zamindari system and the Partition brought in its wake new set of complications. Parusaram, a low-born untouchable suddenly became Parusaram, the MLA. He meets the Chief Minister, holds meetings, gives speeches, sits in the Parliament, and is probably corrupted as he is making more money. The erstwhile powerless untouchables have started to wield power in the same exploitative and destructive manner as was the case with Zamindars, after getting politically strengthened. Parusaram has even forgotten his native language and speaks chaste Hindi—a language of officialdom or the Parliamentary language. Standardization of language skillfully excludes the native elements. Parusaram now commands equal respect and power from the erstwhile landed gentry. The Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli finds it extremely difficult to come to terms with the changing social, political and economic scenario. It is to be noted that the sudden eradication of Zamindari system resulted in a situation of utter chaos and created a division in otherwise tolerant communities. The pertinent question is, ‘Had the Indian National Congress been foresighted enough to realize the resulting instability, they would have ensured the gradual eradication of Zamindari system, and thereby handing over the reins of agricultural economy to its rightful owners would have far been smooth, fruitful and satisfactory. At social level, eradication of Zamindari system appears to be a great blessing to the poor peasants and untouchables as it was expected to break the vicious circle of exploitation and humiliation. But at an economic level, it gave rise to a new kind of power structure which posed a greater danger in the form of dismantling the old order of communal harmony and cultural heritage. Corruption and exploitation of

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different kinds became the rule of the day. Time shook the firm foundations of Zamindari and made it extremely porous and hollow.

Another major concern that the novelist has raised in this novel is its being feminist in nature. Specifically, within the sphere of domesticity, daughters-in-law are treated as per the hierarchy, that is to say, if the bride is wealthy, she is addressed either as 'aziz dulhan' (dear bride) or 'nafis dulhan' (delicate bride). In noble Saiyid families, women are either addressed simply as 'bahu' or 'dulhan'; whereas, in socially lower families, they are referred to as 'bo' (wife). This hierarchy itself decides the proportion of respect, honour and privilege to be conferred on an individual woman within the family circle. For the women belonging to the third category, namelessness or anonymity is their hallmark. *A Village Divided* manifests the actual situation of women in the families of Saiyid Zamindars in pre-independence India. In this novel, women are represented as subalterns, who are subjected to live a subordinated life. They have no voice in the debates concerning either Moharram or the changing political scenario. Their choicelessness is an outcome of their marginalized existence. At the most, they can indulge in gossiping, taunting, humiliating and scandal-mongering. Both patriarchy and history have victimized the women of Gangauli.

After the Partition, the proud Saiyids of Gangauli encounter a major problem, that is to say, the difficulty in getting their daughters married to boys of noble lineage and equal status. This is because most of the young Saiyid boys have left the village in search of employment. So, the whole village is deserted by the younger generation of boys in the hope of a better, promising future. There is a dearth of young eligible bachelors for marriage in Gangauli. The womenfolk of Gangauli have doubly been marginalized and silenced due to the disastrous

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consequences of the Partition. They are now looked upon as an inevitable burden. The Partition has thus affected the Gangaulians at a very personal and emotional level. The Vampire-like Partition has completely sucked the life-blood out of them. They have no more remained their usual haughty selves. The Partition has forced them to live on the crumbling pieces of bread. For an instance, the Mir Sahib opens a shoe-store for sustaining himself in the changing circumstances.

This novel also discusses the issue of the construction of ‘minority identity’ as a category perceived in India of 1930s or 1940s. It penetrates into the very process which constructs ‘Muslim’ identity in a peculiar way. It seems that several or multiple historical narratives tend to create a unilateral, conclusive view of Muslims as ‘invaders’, ‘monstrous savages’, ‘victimizers’, ‘polluters’, ‘aggressors’, ‘outsiders’, ‘aliens’, ‘untouchables’, so and so forth. Such a derogatory view of the ancient and medieval periods, have largely defined the ‘Muslim’ identity during the colonial era. Further, the Machiavellian policies of the British worsen the matter. Even before the Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah pronounced his demand of Pakistan publicly in the year 1939 at the famous Lahore session, Mr. J. Coatman, the C.I.E. dropped a hint about the future, as early as in 1932:

“The creation of a strong, united India..... is day by day, being made impossible, and in its place it seems there might be brought into being a powerful Mohamedan state in the North and North-West, with its eye definitely turned away from India....”¹⁸

The discourse of the fundamentalists strongly denies the legacy of the syncretic culture (Ganga-Jamuni)—a culture which celebrates thousand years of

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history of Hindu-Muslim solidarity and cultural participation. The fundamentalists and the British government were bent not only upon dividing the common people on the basis of their religious ideologies and affiliations but also their language. One of the most crucial issues debated in this novel is the significance of language, and in this case, Bhojpuri Urdu, in creating a sense of belongingness and identity, apart from communication. Standardization of language skillfully excludes all native elements, and with them is lost the familiar way of comprehending the realities of the outside world. For an instance, almost all the Gangaulians find it simply difficult to comprehend the long discourses of Aligarh students on Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Iqbal etc. delivered in chaste Urdu. At the same time, they are baffled by the chaste Hindi, the language of Parliament or officialdom spoken by MLA Parusaram. The conflict between Hindi-Urdu as languages of communication and expression proved hazardous and aggravated the communal tension. Reza's novel *A Village Divided* also celebrates this momentous shared history, but at the same time, laments the loss of it in Independent India.

The title of this novel embodies this very sense of a fractured, fragmented, disjointed, disintegrated, splintered identity. Gangauli, like India, journeys from being a space of tolerant communities, organic unity, and assimilation to a space which is divided, exclusivist, alienating, and in turmoil. Earlier, the village was divided in terms of geographical boundaries into Uttar Patti and Dakkhin Patti. But after the Partition, one can also see the division of hearts, language and cultural traditions. The semi-autobiographical form of this novel allows Rahi Masoom Reza to reconstitute and recollect the cultural trauma of experiencing the division of a harmonized lived existence, and thereby lend it some sort of harmony in the world of aesthetics.

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Reza has developed Moharram as a religious, cultural, social, mythical and artistically integrative metaphor. The Shias of Gangauli believe that Imam Husain comes back to Hindustan during Moharram, and after it goes back to Karbala. After Moharram, Gangauli seems desolate because with Imam Husain's departure the young people of Gangauli also go back to Calcutta, their Karbala. Thus, life in Gangauli witnesses the dramatic moments of separation-reconciliation-separation of a number of families after the Partition. The Partition symbolizes another Karbala for the people of Gangauli. For the people of Gangauli, after the turmoil of the Partition, Moharram acquires an entirely new historical meaning or significance. The usual weeping during the singing of nauhas is now not only limited to the sacrifice of Imam Husain, but achieves a symbolic meaning. Now, it also becomes an occasion of mourning over the brutal genocide of thousands of people during the Partition violence. In this sense, the ritualistic ceremony of mourning during Moharram attains a universal significance. For Gangaulians, it's all about mourning over an endless series of loss—the complete loss of their power and landlordism, the disintegration of their families, the heterogeneousness of Gangauli, their sense of belongingness and identity, loss of self-respect, loss of 'that' time which has now become a distant past, and above all the loss of Bhojpuri Urdu as the language of their expression. Gangauli is less of a physical space for its inhabitants, as it is a mental one. It's an integral part of their existence, their mental make-up, and as they are torn apart, completely ravaged by the cyclonic winds of the Partition, they try to devise new strategies of bare survival in the changing socio-political scenario. Thus, Gangauli emerges and functions as the microcosm reflecting all that was happening at the macro-level, that is to say, at the level of nation. The human predicament is to remember. However,

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remembering or recollecting becomes important only when it is invested with meaning. Memory functions as a synthesizer for Rahi Masoom Reza in recollecting the cultural trauma that common people went through for the crime which they didn't commit.

Though we witness the deaths of three characters—Phunnan Miyan, Chikuriya and Hakim Sahib, the novel ends on a note of optimism. Rahi Masoom Reza does not end his novel with the dark clouds of the Partition hovering around and haunting the inhabitants of Gangauli. He chooses to end his novel with a fresh morning on the distant horizon of the sky, which vividly reflects his optimism. The ending of the novel affirms Rahi Masoom Reza's faith in the regenerating power of culture, village, language, home and above all life itself. Thus he ends:

“Outside the morning was most beautiful. In the courtyard a cock was chasing a chicken and a crow was sitting on the ridge of the roof, calling out to heaven knows who. A flock of sparrows flew past Fussy Miyan's shoulder. At the edge of the pond two or three naked children were throwing water over each other, and to one side a young woman was sitting scouring pans with her sari lifted up to her knees. Stirring up the dust, a jeep was heading over the winding road paved with river pebbles. Opposite, near the tank, thick smoke was pouring out of the chimney of a brick kiln. A young child, a schoolbag over his shoulder, ran past at great speed. Fussy Miyan watched him until he turned to the left and disappeared from sight.”¹⁹

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- 4 See T.R. Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy. London: Methuen, 1956. XIV.
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CHAPTER—4

Subaltern Reading of History in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

Another such distinctive voice that makes the silenced voices of history audible is that of Amitav Ghosh. He was born in Calcutta (Kolkata) and spent his childhood in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Northern India. He studied in Delhi, Oxford and Egypt and has taught in various Indian and American universities. Amitav Ghosh is widely recognized as one of India's leading novelists of the present generation. Amitav Ghosh, a novelist with an extraordinary sense of history and place, is indisputably one of the most important novelists and essayists of our time. Ghosh locates an individual's drama in the general, often uncontrollable, sweep of humanity's destiny and actions. From the Partition to colonial science to colonialism, Ghosh is interested in the ways in which the violence of history, geography and politics alters lives. Some of the major themes that infuse almost all his novels are history, science, discovery, travel, nationalism, and subalternity.

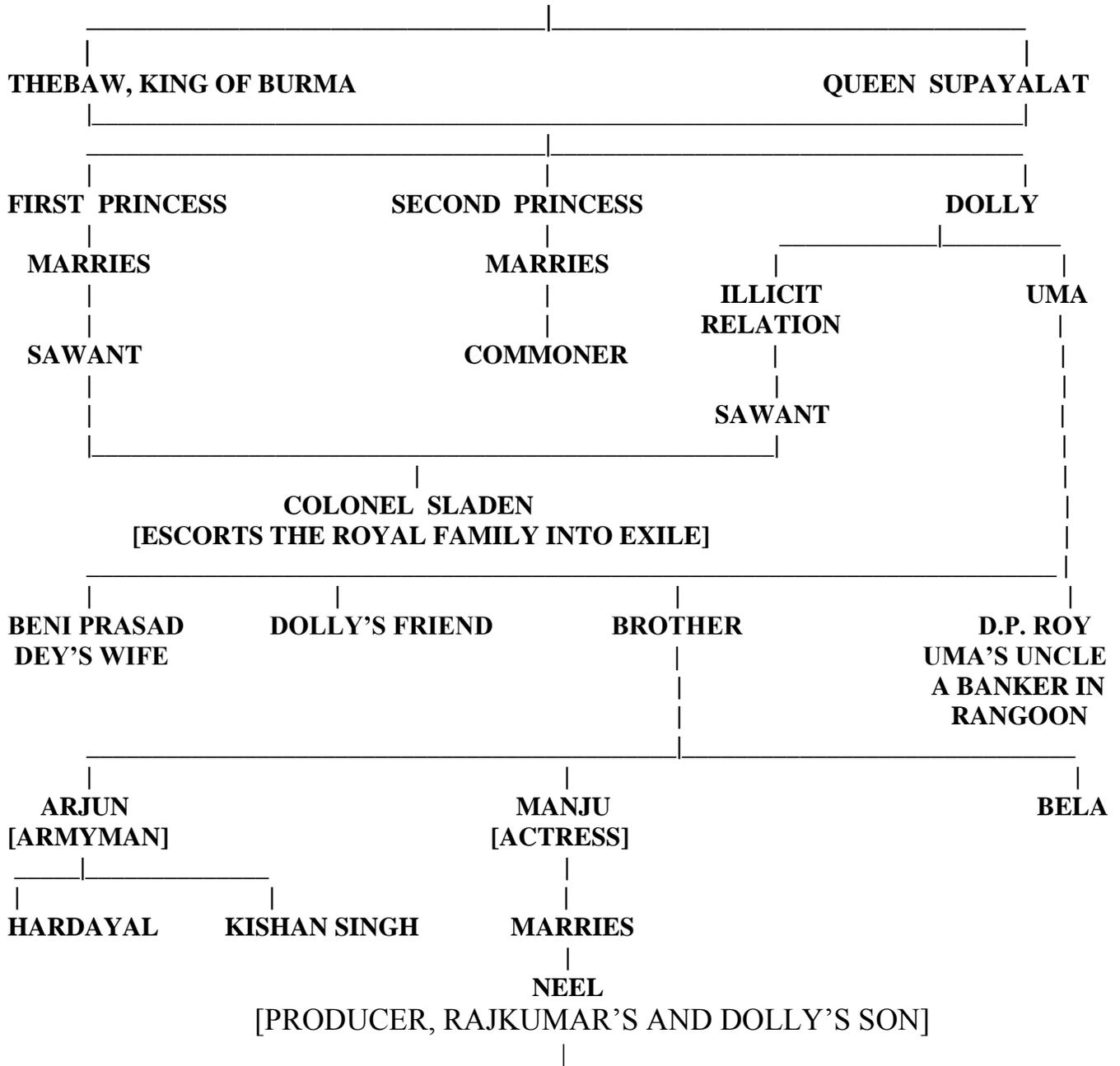
Amitav Ghosh's writing has received numerous awards. These include a Prix Medicis Etranger for *The Circle of Reason*, the Sahitya Akademi Award for *The Shadow Lines*, the Arthur C. Clarke Prize for science fiction for *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the Pushcart Prize (an award given for stories, poems and essays published in a literary magazine in the U.S.) for his essay, "The March of the Novel Through History: My Father's Bookcase" and the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards for *The Glass Palace*. Controversially, he declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for *The Glass Palace*, on the grounds that he was unaware that his

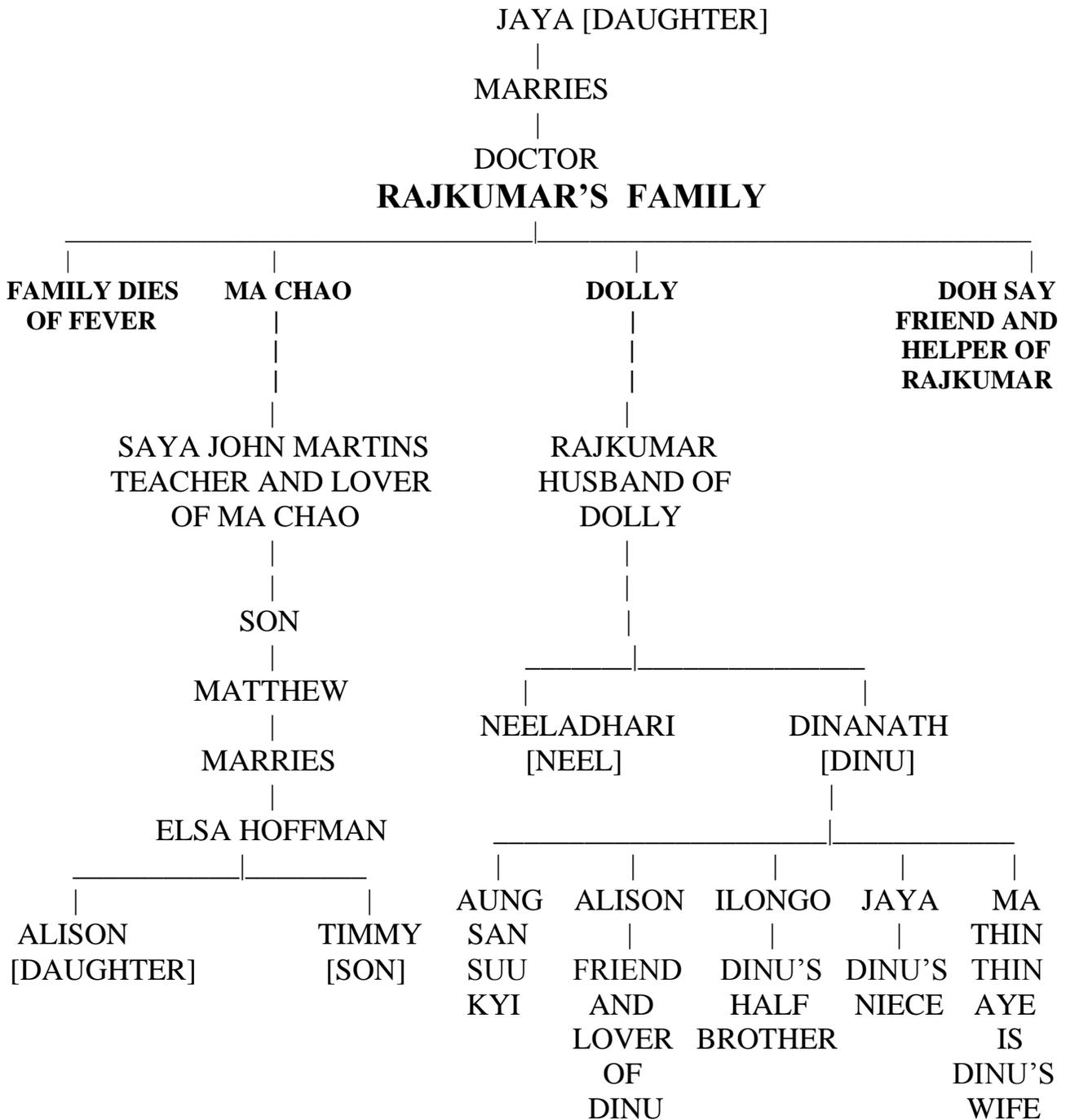
publishers had entered the book for this prize and objected to the classification of “Commonwealth Literature”.

The novel that I wish to examine in the context of Subaltern Studies, and particularly its approach of looking at history from ‘below’, is Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*. It is a novel that covers almost hundred years of Burmese history of exodus and dislocation, right from the last part of nineteenth century to 1990s. It is a novel that is spread over three generations and across three countries, namely, Burma, India and Malaya. However, it is essential to understand the complex web of human relationships that inhabit this novel in the form of a tree structure:

THE GLASS PALACE **GENEALOGY**

ROYAL FAMILY





In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh specifically attempts to claim the history of certain individuals, and thereby of a group, that was dislocated in the wake of Burmese exodus in the last part of 19th century as a result of British imperialism. It presents a perplexing yet heartrending accounts of a family uprooted due to the complex sociological, political and historical factors beyond their comprehension and control, resulting in a distressing sense of loss, exile and the quest for identity and homeland. The novelist has tried to re-map the history of three nations in turmoil—Burma, India and Malaya—serving under the colonial regime, by interweaving various strands of narration into a unifying whole. In a way, the novel foregrounds the silenced and marginalized postcolonial subjects (the subalterns, in terms of victims of both time and history).

John Thieme has rightly described *The Glass Palace* as a ‘family saga’. It is quite protracted and demanding in terms of involvement. The novel commences in the year 1885 in Mandalay with the introduction of a skilled eleven-year old orphan Rajkumar, one of the major characters of the novel. He has reached Mandalay accidentally as the sampan on which he works as a serving-boy has to be repaired in the port. His whole family has died of fever on their way to Burma. The last words of his dying mother were, ‘Stay alive,’ she whispered. ‘*Beche Thako*, Rajkumar. Live, my Prince; hold on to your life’¹. And this is what he precisely tries to do throughout the novel by devising out various strategies of survival.

Rajkumar’s first acquaintance in Mandalay is Ma Chao, who is half-Indian and half-Chinese, in her mid-thirties, and runs a small food-stall. Rajkumar works as an errand boy in her stall. Rajkumar’s second most important acquaintance in an alien land is Saya John Martins, the teacher and lover of Ma Chao, who is also a

Christian and a Chinese contractor. He is a thoroughly experienced man in terms of travelling. Though he has mastered a good number of languages in the process, he lacks the sense of ‘belongingness’. Rajkumar is further introduced to Matthew, the seven-year old son of Saya John, who is attending a reputed missionary school in Singapore. Saya John decides to take Rajkumar as an employee and both of them start trading in teak.

However, the arrival of Rajkumar in Mandalay is followed by the arrival of the British in no time. The British has overpowered the royal army of Burma and are in possession of most of the Burmese territories. In the thirty-year old ‘Glass Palace’, lives the twenty-seven year old Thebaw (1885-1916), King of Burma and Queen Supayalat. She is his supercilious and hardnosed chief companion. She has assassinated altogether seventy-nine contenders including the family members, who might protest against her husband’s right to the throne, thereby ensuring her husband’s Kingship. She is attended upon by maids who are orphans, and Dolly is the youngest and the most beautiful of them.

So, it is Supayalat who wields the real power and not the King, who is ignorant about the state affairs. In fact, he has not even stepped out of the palace in seven years and has never left Mandalay. Thebaw, the King of Burma and his royal army has to surrender to the British just in fourteen days. As the troops enter the city, Ma Chao and other ordinary subjects take this as an opportunity to enter the former non-trespassable palace compound, to loot the valuables and to rummage through it. In the chaos, Rajkumar encounters Dolly, the maid for the first time, and is so much enthralled by her dazzling beauty that he hands over the jewelled ivory box to her, which he intended to steal for himself. Colonel Sladen shoulders the duty of escorting the royal family into exile. They arrive first to Madras (now

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Chennai), and then eventually to Ratnagiri, as their permanent abode, which is hundred and twenty miles south of Bombay (now Mumbai). The allotted house is named “Outram House”, which is situated on a hill overlooking the town. A local man named Sawant is at their service. With the passage of time, Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant.

In 1905, an Indian named Beni Prasad-Dey arrives in Ratnagiri as its new District Collector. By that time, the Burmese Royal family and a few of their attendants have somehow completed their twenty years of stay at the “Outram House”. Beni Prasad-Dey holds a higher position in the British Civil Service, one of the rarest Indians to have been conferred with such a distinction. His wife Uma is fifteen years younger than him. They live in a house named the Residency. From here onwards, Uma becomes a life-long friend of Dolly, who by now has become a beautiful and a gracious young woman. Uma is profoundly worried about the future prospects of Dolly and the royal family, particularly the princess, who are in the charge of Dolly. However, the first princess is discovered to bear the child of Sawant, and is to be married to him, and the second princess elopes with a commoner, and never to return.

In the meantime, Rajkumar makes friends with Doh Say in the inland Burmese town of Huay Zedi, situated on the Sittang River. Doh Say works as an elephant herder in the teak forests. Rajkumar is ambitious and determined enough to become wealthy. He devises a strategic plan to buy a teak forest from the assistance offered by Doh Say and money procured by importing workers from India for the British oil fields. After long years of dedication, resourcefulness and perseverance, Rajkumar establishes a profitable plantation. He masters the art of negotiation and is successful in signing a contract with the company that is

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building a new railroad into the various teak forests. He has also received financial assistance from Uma's uncle, D.P. Roy, who is a banker in Rangoon. This unanticipated association leads Rajkumar, a man at the age of thirty and rich, to decide to visit Ratnagiri in search of Dolly, his childhood love. He has never been able to forget Dolly and his brief childhood titillating encounter with her throughout these many years. The impressions of her beauty are etched in his mind forever. Now, we know that he is a curious combination of romantic feelings and hard-headed business skills. After a prolonged hesitation, Dolly is convinced of Rajkumar's genuine feelings of love for her. Their wedding ceremony is presided over by Uma's husband. This development, however, exasperate Queen Supayalat tremendously, as she expected Dolly to serve her forever, and she is now determined not to see Dolly's face ever again.

Amitav Ghosh has probably found it difficult to develop the character of Beni Prasad-Dey, perhaps due to the sheer number of characters in the novel. He is portrayed as somewhat unimpressive, incompetent and a weak officer of the British, as he is placed in an awkward situation by the pregnancy of the princess and the prospect of her marriage to the Indian Sawant. His tragic downfall is accelerated both by his demotion and departure of Uma from his life. Beni Prasad-Dey seems incapable to face this double reversal of fortunes, and consequently drowns himself in the sea. The sad demise of her husband is followed by the receipt of a compensatory substantial pension. Uma has now both freedom and money. She moves to Europe, and becomes a leader of the movement to free India. She visits the United States and collects funds for the cause and settles in New York, where Saya John's son, Matthew, is living. Matthew, meanwhile, has

married an American girl named Elsa Hoffman. Uma later tries to persuade Matthew to visit his needy estranged father.

Dolly and Rajkumar lands at Saya Johns' house initially, and this is Dolly's first encounter with Burma after twenty-five long years of exile. Saya John and Rajkumar have also ventured into rubber plantation on Penang Island. Soon, they are visited by Matthew and Elsa, who christens / baptizes the rubber plantation as 'Morningside Rubber Estate'. Soon Dolly gives birth to her first son Neeladhari (nicknamed Neel), who has inherited some of the typical characteristics of Rajkumar, his father. Four years later, Dolly gives birth to her second son Dinanath (nicknamed Dinu), who resembles Dolly more in terms of mood and temperament. Dinu, unfortunately becomes a victim of polio, but is saved from its hazardous effects due to proper medical treatment. Dolly attends to Dinu more as compared to Neel due to his frailty. However, in an unusual happening, dolly dreamt of the old King Thebaw, warning her to take the illness of Dinu seriously, resulting in his on-time medical treatment. Soon after Dinu's episode, Dolly learns about the death of the old King that very night when he appeared in her dream.

By 1929, Dinu is fourteen, Neel is eighteen, and Uma is fifty, who informs Dolly through a letter that she is leaving America and returning to Calcutta. Matthew and Elsa have become parents of a daughter named Alison and a son named Timmy. Dolly decides to take her two sons to Malaya and invites Uma to meet them at the rubber plantation at Morningside House. They departed from each other before twenty-three years in Rangoon. In the meantime, Uma has transformed herself into a significant political activist. Though Uma feels happy to visit her long-lost friend, she rather angrily deprecates Rajkumar as an accomplice in perpetrating Britain-engineered cruelty. She soon leaves for Calcutta (now

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Kolkata) after this tussle. She is received at the airport by her brother and his children named Arjun, Manju and Bela. To our greatest surprise, Uma's radical and non-conformist political thinking changes drastically in the new milieu. As the Burmese rebellion fails, Uma's thoughts turn to Gandhi's non-violent methods, and she voluntarily renders her services to the cause.

However, Uma's new mode of passive resistance is definitely contrasted by her nephew Arjun, who joins the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun and holds a significant identity there. Arjun's sister Manju desires to be an actress. As a matter of coincidence, she has to give her first audition in front of a producer, who is none other than Neel, Dolly and Rajkumar's son. They immediately fall in love and are happily married soon. Meanwhile, Arjun is delighted to perceive the democratic spirit in the army. He is one of the very few Indians at the Academy. He is also tremendously influenced by another Indian named Hardayal, whose family can boast of a long tradition of military career in the British army. Despite this ancient connection with the British army, Hardayal has increasingly developed a sense of futility and restlessness in playing this role, and condemns the British for treating Indian soldiers as a mere plaything in their hands.

Meanwhile, the eruption of Second World War and the developing pneumonia of Rajkumar, forces him to make a fresh assessment of the situation, to take a renewed stock of situation regarding his business in Burma. He decides to sell his properties before the situation gets worsened. As a shrewd businessman, he decides to sell all his assets to finance the purchase of great quantities of timber: he is anticipating that the British and the Dutch will need to reinforce their defenses throughout the East. Dolly accuses him of war-profiteering. Alison receives the news of the sad demise of her parents, Matthew and Elsa, in a car accident in the

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Cameron Highlands. Meanwhile, Arjun's battalion is sent to Afghanistan, and it is there they learn about the mutinied Sikh unit of Bombay. Rebellion and doubt start to plague the minds of both Arjun and Hardayal, who are now full lieutenants.

Dinu, at the age of twenty-seven, is now interested in photography and arrives at Morningside House, where he makes friends with Alison. She is extremely grieved by the untimely death of her parents. However, love blossoms between Alison and Dinu. Simultaneously, Dinu comes to know that the servant Ilongo is his half-brother.

Arjun's battalion marches forward, and reaches Malay Peninsula via Singapore. Arjun is wounded, and is also deserted by most of his units. He is only aided by his batman Kishan Singh. However, in the atmosphere of Japanese attack and storm-drain, both of them have to hide themselves for a while. The next morning, they are safely out of the storm-drain and are happy to find Hardayal. But he has now joined hands or collaborated with Indian National Movement, whose members are now assisting Japanese for the time being against the mighty British. Even Arjun finally decides to join hands with Hardayal unit.

With the impending doom in the form Japanese attack, Alison, Dinu, Saya John, and Ilongo plan to escape Burma. On reaching the railway station, they are jolted to learn that only Europeans will be allowed to board the trains. This intense experience is enough to arouse the national political consciousness of Dinu, and he fights with the Indian officials on the meted injustice. In desperation, they return to the plantation. Dinu is successful in convincing Alison to leave by car with the elderly Saya John and promises to join them later in Singapore. After travelling some distance, they decide to sleep for a while. After waking up in morning, Alison doesn't find Saya John. She is surprised to see Saya John being questioned

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up ahead by Japanese soldiers. She fires in their direction. Consequently, they shoot Saya John immediately, and head towards her. But she commits suicide before they could catch her.

Meanwhile, Manju gives birth to a baby girl named Jaya in the time of extreme turmoil. They are soon informed by an Indian representative regarding the approaching trouble, and they are asked to leave Burma that very evening. Neel has proved to be successful in handling the business transaction of his father, that is to say, he successfully sells his father's properties. This moment of celebration during the times of war is marked by the tragic death of Neel, when the elephants in the plantation get panicky due to the bombing nearby by the Japanese soldiers. The trees also get destroyed in the process. Thus, the pace with which Rajkumar has established his business and earned money, he loses it in no time. At the same time, he loses Neel. Manju, Dolly and Rajkumar join some thirty thousand refugees trying to cross the river in order to escape Burma. In the utter state of despair due to the loss of Neel, Manju drowns herself while crossing the river, leaving Dolly and Rajkumar all alone in this exodus. She had probably realized that Dolly and Rajkumar are individuals belonging to a distant era, and probably her little baby would learn better lessons of life from their ageing hands.

Dolly and Rajkumar settle down at Uma's flat for six years to come, whereas, Uma decides to locate Dinu in Rangoon. She, however, succeeds in locating Dinu, lives with him for a while, and decides to spend her remaining life in a nunnery. With the passage of time, Jaya, at the age of seventeen, marries a doctor ten years older to her. In 1996, she as a college professor is sent by her college to an art history conference at the University of Goa. Here she happens to meet a "pioneering photographer from the early years of the century", who is none

other than her uncle Dinu. At the age of eighty-two, Dinu owns a photo studio named “The Glass Palace”. Dinu conducts his classes much like those of Aung San Suu Kyi. Like her, he suffered confinement for three years by the Burmese dictatorial military authorities. His classes focus on aesthetics, but they also imply a philosophy with political ramifications.

Jaya learns that Dinu had left Malay soon after Alison’s death and had escaped to Rangoon in June of 1942. He has gone in search of Arjun, but found him wounded and lying on his death-bed. Dinu married a girl named Ma Thin Thin Aye, who provided him with a shelter in 1942. Both of them were greatly inspired by listening to the lectures of Aung San Suu Kyi and developed a political consciousness. Jaya informs Dinu that both Dolly and Rajkumar had died within a few days of each other at the age of almost ninety.

The Glass Palace contemplates about the effects of history on the lives of individuals from a subordinated perspective. It also foregrounds the lives of socially, politically, economically and historically insignificant characters. Like Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, it does challenge the notion of boundaries, euro-centrism and the ill-effects of Western expansionism. This novel is partially based on the personal experiences of Amitav Ghosh’s uncle, Jagat Chandra Dutta, who had been a timber merchant in Burma. In his 17 July 2000 interview with *Outlook*, Ghosh mentioned that his father’s family had lived in Burma for several generations. Therefore, writing this novel is a way of re-claiming the personal history of his family for Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh has profoundly been interested in the history of Burma not only due to a personal urge to re-locate the history of his family but thereby to record a portion of history that might otherwise simply pass out of public record or won’t remain accessible and audible to the

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world. Regarding the Long March (it was a massive military retreat undertaken by the Red Army of the Chinese Communist Party, the forerunner of the People's Liberation Army, to evade the pursuit of the Kuomintang KMT or Chinese Nationalist Party) army, when Indians fled Burma fearing Japanese occupation, Ghosh told a reporter that:

“...it’s not been written about at all....It’s strange – there were over half a million people on the Long March, over 400,000 of them Indian, and there is such a silence about it....There was no need for the Indian in Burma to flee when the Japanese approached – many Indians did stay back. It makes you realize the degree to which Indian felt themselves to be the sheep of the British; the delusions that governed their lives.”²

In the beginning of the novel, we come across a universal statement by the narrator-author as a post-colonial critic:

“This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism, between the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next; in an instant when the world springs free of its mooring of dreams and reveal itself to be girdled in the pathways of survival and self-preservation.”³

In the constant flux of larger historical events, it is the individual histories of the postcolonial subjects that endure massive shifts in their fate. Ultimately, some of them survive, while most of them succumb to anonymity. *The Glass Palace* is a ‘virtuoso demonstration’ of Amitav Ghosh’s method of remembering the past, that is to say, not as an imperial chess game, but as biographies of otherwise unknown people. The application of Subaltern Studies, and particularly, its approach of

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reading ‘history from below’ to this novel is significant in the sense that it reveals the survival strategies adopted by ordinary individuals, families and collective groups at times of violent historical movements. The question that lies at the heart of this novel is, ‘Whose life should be counted as significant and whose not?’ In this context, Subaltern Studies may be of great help in the sense that its primary focus has always been on the masses rather than on the elites.

As a victim of larger historical forces, the exiled King broods over his own fate and of his empire as a postcolonial critic. He ruminates:

“The King raised his glasses and spotted several Indian faces, along the waterfront. What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another—emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement—people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?”

And where would his own people go, now that they were a part of this empire? It wouldn’t suit them, all this moving about. They were not a portable people, the Burmese; he knew this, very well, for himself. He had ever wanted to go anywhere. Yet here he was, on his way to India.”⁴

Amitav Ghosh ponders over the issue of exile, not as a commonplace experience triggered in the wake of some larger historical event, but as an ultimate fate of powerless people, as an enigmatic and unfathomable problem in history. Though treacherous and wicked herself, Queen Supayalat hurls severe indictment

as a colonial subject, when the British officials visit Outram House to investigate the princess' marriage to a commoner. She grumbles:

“Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are now reduced to this. This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all Burma. They took our kingdom, promising roads and railways and ports, but take my words, this is how it will end. In a few decades, the wealth will be gone—all the gems, the timber and the oil—and then they too will leave. In our golden Burma where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end—as prisoners, in shanty towns born of the plague. A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the Kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm.”⁵

Though Beni Prasad-Dey, the collector and husband of Uma, works for the British, he has a complete realization of the disparaging British policies based on the deprecating racial framework of exploitation, being implemented in the colonies. If Beni Prasad-Dey is reticent in his protest, Uma is under no onus to subdue her protest. After her husband's death, Uma registers her protest outspokenly. Though her mind is more or less conditioned by her husband's thoughts, Uma ultimately proves to be an independent, assertive thinker and leader. She not only questions the role of British, but also her husband's role in the British

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Empire. As a post-colonial critic, she concludes that her husband was more or less a mimic man, a messenger of the colonizer. She remembers:

“There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues. And yet it seemed to be universally agreed that he was one of the most successful Indians of his generation; a model for his countrymen. Did this mean that one day all of India would become a shadow of what he had been? Millions of people trying to live their lives in conformity with incomprehensible rules? Better to be what Dolly had been: a woman who had no illusions about the nature of her condition; a prisoner who knew the exact dimensions of her cage and could look for contentment within those confines.”⁶

Amitav Ghosh is not only challenging the disgusting policies of Britain through the character of Uma, but also the special affiliation of certain Indians to their colonial masters through the character of Beni Prasad-Dey. Uma, as a colonial subject and as a subaltern, envisions for herself a new and a meaningful role of a revolutionary. She would not like to see her descendants entering the new epoch as crippled and aping colonial subjects. Uma even goes to the extent of accusing and condemning Rajkumar of being neo-colonialist, an accomplice in the exploitative policies of the British. She shouts at him:

“It’s people like you who’re responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans.”⁷

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Amitav Ghosh questions the arbitrariness of borders as well as debates the issue of loyalty to one's "true" identity mainly through the characters of Hardayal and most prominently Arjun. Hardayal asks Arjun:

“Well, didn't you ever think: this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time—what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country—so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when we took our oath it wasn't to a country but to the King Emperor—to defend the Empire?”⁸

In the pre-colonial Burma, the military joins hands with the British, overpower King Thebaw, resulting in the loss of his political power. The military power of Burma withdraws its support and loyalty from the local master, and attaches it to the foreign one. Thus, the British Indian Army assists the British colonial rule in Burma to exercise their coercive power over Burma. In other words, the people of one colonized country functioning as accomplice in perpetrating gruesome violence over the other colonized country, and thereby favouring the colonial masters. It is ironical that soldiers like Arjun as subalterns (subordinate officer) in the British Indian Army were fighting neither to defend nor to extend the territory of India. They were simply facilitating the British policy of colonial expansion. It is through the character of Arjun that Amitav Ghosh raises the issue of identity, subalternity, colonialism and belongingness, most vocally. Arjun introspects about his position as an officer. Though he feels great pride in being accepted as an officer in the British army, he thinks for a moment about his own subordinated military assistant, his “batman” named Kishan Singh, and

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concludes that he has more in common with his lowly assistant than his colonial masters. For the first time, he feels that his comradeship with the British officers is superficial and hollow. There is a sudden realization in Arjun of his subordination and rupture from his colonial masters. He now listens more attentively to Hardayal when he complains to him:

“It was strange to be sitting on one side of a battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn’t really your fight—knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours. Knowing that you’re risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It’s almost as if you’re fighting against yourself. It’s strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself: Who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself?... But when I was sitting in that trench, it was as if my heart and my hand had no connection—each seemed to belong to a different person. It was as if I wasn’t really a human being—just a tool, an instrument. This is what I ask myself, Arjun: In what way do I become human again? How do I connect what I do with what I want, in my heart?”⁹

Arjun is simply overwhelmed by the clear-headedness of Hardayal and his military subordinate Kishan Singh. They appear to have perceived a thorough understanding of their own insignificance, subordination, and marginalization in the face of larger historical forces. When Arjun decides to join Hardayal’s “mutiny”, he wonders:

“Was this how a mutiny was sparked? In a moment of heedlessness, so that one became a stranger to the person one had been a moment before? Or was

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it the other way round? That this was when one recognized the stranger that one had always been to oneself; that all one's loyalties and beliefs had been misplaced?"¹⁰

However, Arjun has a clear understanding of the imminent presence of Colonialism as being its conscious victim, though a former accomplice. He fully comprehends the implications of the indelible marks etched on the psyche of the colonized due to the ruthless process of colonization. He says:

“We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain, which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves. And that, I suppose, is where I am...”¹¹

Colonialism, as a strategic exploitative policy, brought in its wake a systematic oppression of everything that was “native”, and conform it to its expansionist movement. The major economic network of the British in the novel includes two significant resources—timber export in Burma and rubber plantation in Malay as well as human labourers. Colonization made both the resources an integral part of the trading culture in Burma and Malay. Thus, the process of commodification, transformation and haulage started in both the countries, which subsequently strengthened the economic basis or power of the imperial rulers. This was done with the false ideology that consumption of nature and the inhuman exploitation of labourers to any extent will lead to the amelioration of the economic standards of people, to a progressive life. However, this turned out to be

a grossly fallacious ideology. The operation of economic power ultimately destroys the place where it operates, and also its social fabric, cultural and historical legacy, traditions and language. Burma is a supreme example of this outcome, as it has suffered the exploitative policies of ruthless dictators twice.

Simultaneously, it led to cultural crisis like uprootedness, fragmentation of identity, dislocation, large-scale migration, drastic changes in administration, and reconfigurations of political boundaries. In the process, the native becomes the 'lost soul', and faces the existential dilemma of being a partitioned subject. *The Glass Palace*, as a historical novel records this existential dilemma of the 'lost souls', who suffered an imposed exile, and whose voice got lost underneath the burden of larger historical forces with the passage of time. Amitav Ghosh has attempted to excavate either this deliberately subdued or lost or forgotten history, and thereby to foreground the voice of the bewildered immigrants, the subalterns to present their version of history.

Despite of the disintegration of families, women of this novel, unlike, the women of Rahi Masoom Reza's *A Village Divided* asserts themselves. Though they are forced to live a life of subordination due to the ruthless colonial rule, they gradually emerge as women of some substance. Though uprooted, dislocated, and marginalized, the women characters of this novel, especially Uma and Queen Supayalat, criticizes their colonial masters with a Caliban-like spirit. They are extremely critical of the monstrous expansionist policies of their colonial masters. However, all the characters of this novel suffer a common fate, that is to say, all of them are the victims of the inevitable discourse of colonial displacement. They are forced by the whirlpool of history to be driven from Burma to India, Malaya, Singapore, and back again. Almost all of them makes several transitions across

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national frontiers during their life-time, yet are their won destiny-makers; the creators of their own history. Though the novel is structured around the personal history of Rajkumar and the histories of three nations in turmoil, it also chronicles the histories of all the characters associated with either of the two.

The novel begins and ends with the two most important historical events that took place in the eventful history of Burma, namely, the smooth invasion of the British army on 14 November, 1885 and the sixth year of the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi (the opposition politician and general secretary of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar) under the generals in 1996. Within the framework of these two great historical events, Amitav Ghosh situates the imaginative histories of individuals based on the memories of an embittered history of disgrace. *The Glass Palace* is a profoundly researched presentation of the ill-effects and ruthlessness of colonialism, but from an anti-colonial perspective. Amitav Ghosh confesses in his 'Author's Notes':

"I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks, published and unpublished; I travelled thousands of miles, visiting and revisiting, so far as possible, all the settings and locations that figure in this novel; [and] I sought out scores of people in India, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand."¹²

What is so fascinating about *The Glass Palace* as a novel with its sweeping historical canvas is that, the 'Orient' or the 'colonized' or the 'subaltern' is given a voice of its 'own'. Its polyphonic narrative makes it a space of contesting historical realities, claiming equivalent legitimacy and authenticity as 'counter-narratives'. Such a novel becomes a mode of emancipation or redemption from the alluring

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realm of colonial language and history. Postcolonial narratives usually consist of the ‘others’—those lives that are eradicated by wars or missed out in the ‘grand narratives’ of history. *The Glass Palace*, as a novel stands out as a distinct achievement not in terms of representing new stylistic or thematic avenues, but because it superbly represents ‘a historically genuine idyllic Burma’ as it was once—the Burma of elephants, teak, pagodas; its metamorphosis coupled with the possibility of attaining the same ideal once again, despite of the present chaotic state of affairs in Myanmar.

As a masterpiece, this novel represents the recurrent themes that are found in almost all postcolonial novels—absurdity of wars, boundaries as ‘shadow lines’, colonization and its ill-effects, quest, dislocation, fragmentation or disintegration of identity, amalgamation, divided loyalties, the process of growing, exile, temporary settlements, etc. Looked at from the Subaltern perspective, this novel deals with the specific history of individuals, and thereby the collective histories of communities and nations in turmoil, rather than historiographic generalizations. Amitav Ghosh nevertheless succeeds in telling this forgotten history from below or from an alternative point of view. Such a novel as *The Glass Palace* can be categorized on the borderline territory between history and fiction. This novel deals with the history of losers and survivors, yet with the champions of humanity. It is a provisional world of constant meeting or gathering and separation. It is as Homi Bhabha puts:

“Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; “gathering” on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life; half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language, gathering the signs of

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approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.”¹³

Like ‘Moharram’ in *A Village Divided*, the ‘glass palace’ of the title is used as an aesthetically integrative metaphor. On the one hand, it stands for the magnificent hall of mirrors centering the Mandalay palace of the Burmese royalty, and on the other hand, it also stands for Dinu’s ‘small photo studio’:

“‘But you have an address for him then?’ Jaya said.

‘Yes’. Ilongo reached into his pocket and took out a sheet of paper. ‘He has a small studio. Does portraits, wedding pictures, group photographs. That sort of thing. The address is for his studio: he lives right above it.’

He held the paper out to her and she took it. The sheet was smudged and crumpled. She peered at it closely, deciphering the letters. The first words that met her eyes were: ‘*The Glass Palace: Photo Studio*’.”¹⁴

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CHAPTER—5 **CONCLUSION**

While pursuing the present subject as a researcher, I have increasingly realized that writing fiction about the ‘significant past’ and with a poly-vocal narrative is in many ways a quest—quest for identity, meaning, comprehending multi-layered truth, and most importantly for personal significance in a living world. There are lessons to be learnt from the past, if only human beings are willing enough to learn them. History has proved itself to be a strong, formative influence in the life of individuals and collective groups living in South Asia. Describing history as an unending dialogue between the present and the past, the historian E.H. Carr observes that its dual function is to enable man to understand the society of the past and to increase his mastery over the society of the present. However, this could never be achieved with an emphasis on history alone. In order to understand two of the most complex historical events in the history of South Asia, namely, the Partition of India and the Burmese exodus, it is necessary to understand them in the light of a supplementary corpus of available material comprising of archives, biographies, autobiographies, interviews, survivors’ stories, and most importantly literary narratives.

Post-Colonialism, New Historicism and Subaltern Studies have questioned the premises of traditional historiography. They find it an inadequate medium of capturing and representing the bruised memories of human beings, tried and perplexed in real life situations. They attempt to render a more authentic, consistent and interpretative version of history, that questions the mainstream discourses on history. Theirs is a perspective determined by foregrounding the inaudible, marginalized voices in a narrative. Historians have generally been more

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interested in making an epistemological break with the past to create the protocol of objectivity, than in producing “the touch of the real.” Counter-histories, in the forms of biographies, autobiographies, interviews, survivors’ stories, archives, literary narratives etc. oppose not only the dominant narratives on history, but also the prevailing modes of historical thought, methods and research. I have particularly focused on the Subaltern Studies’ approach of looking at ‘history from below’, which primarily deals with the history of the losers, with the envisioning of counterfactuals and provisional historical worlds, with delayed and alternative chronologies, with the reality of unrealized possibilities, and lending voice to the silenced. It has made a noteworthy contribution to the discourse on the representation of history. As a form of “counter-history”, it is very often placed in contradiction to mainstream discourses on history like Nationalist narratives, Orientalist images, ethnic stereotypes, and Hindu majoritarianism. It specializes in representing individual and collective histories ‘from below’. Though basically it originated as a theory of social science in order to re-define autonomous, radical class struggles in modern times, I think that it can also be successfully applied to literary, cultural and historical studies. It helps incorporating the studies of people whose history had previously either been subdued or evaded. Though it primarily focuses on peasants’ insurgency, it also takes into consideration the process of reading history from ‘below’, which invariably takes into account the significance of individual and collective histories. Such individual and collective histories are recollected and conjoined to the present by making use of the synthesizing power of creative imagination and memory. Such a wholesome way of understanding the ‘significant past’ would lead to a comprehensive understanding of the possibilities of establishing and sustaining a harmonious, civilized society in the present as well as in future.

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In the first place, both the selected novels deal with traversing borders, whether voluntary or coerced. It becomes almost an obsession with Amitav Ghosh, though not with Rahi Masoom Reza. The fictional worlds of both Reza and Ghosh change journey into a metaphor, that is to say, travel is metamorphosed from being a mere dislocation into a living quest. For most of the characters, travelling to Gangauli during the time of Moharram in the novel *A Village Divided*, is a matter of rejuvenation, celebration, annual purgation, an occasion to strengthen the bond of community, and home-coming. Likewise, departing from Gangauli is a matter of great pain and sadness, and almost equivalent to becoming a non-entity. Whereas, all the major characters in the novel *The Glass Palace* are either forced to leave their ‘homes’, whether natives or non-natives, and gradually pass through the process of traversing, assimilation and change, in order to evolve new stabilities and identities, or they migrate due to a desire for upward mobility, an increased awareness of better prospects and a sense of ambition. However, in both the novels, travelling or journey does not result in acquisition of greater power, but becomes an essential strategy for survival. Traversing, thus means transporting their old *bastis* (community abode) to the new ones and their past into their present. Both the novels trace genealogies that traverse either national frontiers or city frontiers. This also points to an important observation that an immigrant has to start afresh, and establish himself in the new socio-politico-cultural context. Along with this change in the socio-cultural, political and economic references, and the value systems and principles, his or her ‘positionality’ changes accordingly.

Secondly, implicit in the experience of journey is the act of remembering or recollecting the past in the present. An attempt has been made in the dissertation to

present the close readings of the chosen novels and to make the seamless or the organic relationship between the ‘significant past’ and present palpable. Zakir the protagonist of Intizar Husain’s Urdu novel *Basti*, constantly mediates with and modifies his past in accordance with the significance and nature of his present. Zakir teaches history and is professionally dealing and actually grappling with the linearity of time flowing uninterruptedly. On the other hand, he psychologically confronts the discontinuities and ruptures juxtaposed with the images and the experiences of the past flashing on the screen of his mind. His sense of personal history calls for a fundamental rethinking of historiography. Problematizing his experience of history, he thinks:

“How boring it is teaching history to boys. Other people’s history can be read comfortably, the way a novel can be read. But my own history? I’m on the run from my own history—and catching my breath in the present. Escapist. But the merciless present pushes us back again toward our history.”¹

Likewise, all the major characters in both the selected novels are made or undone by the unprecedented historical events. The Saiyid Zamindars of Gangauli are unable to carry their haughty selves across the transition period, that is to say, from pre-independence to post-independence period, and from a united India into a divided one. Their present is tinged with a sense of loss and is tormenting. History, in the sense of the ‘significant past’, is now beyond their reach. It is simply an impenetrable and non-transgressable reality belonging to the lost familiar world. The same sense of loss, torment, and exile pervades the fictional world of *The Glass Palace*. The characters of this novel, be it Dolly or Queen Supayalat or Uma,

yearn for the familiarity of the lost world because it was where they could invest their life with meaning and identity. It was a world that nurtured and nourished them from within and with which a sense of identification was possible.

Thirdly, it is also my observation that both the selected novels function as ‘counter-histories’ or provide ‘alternative points of view’ against the officially documented versions of history. The subject positions range from an individual to a community, from being the perpetrators of violence to being the victims, from being powerful landed gentries and accomplice of colonial masters to being the subalterns in these literary narratives. These literary narratives embody ‘distinctive, authentic, marginalized, subaltern voices’ that claim prominence, or at least equivalence against the mainstream historical narratives. Both the novels question ‘the top-down approach’ of reading the South Asian history, and replace it with the study of the culture of the people. There is a commitment to represent people’s history in these texts. They attempt to re-write history from the grounds of ambivalence and contradictions and the subaltern remains the vantage point of their critique. They also show how individuals and collective groups in South Asia resisted the penetration of colonialism into their cultural ethos to a greater extent.

Fourthly, they deal with major themes like dislocation, fragmented identity, void, alienation, nationality, culture, language, migration, loyalty, violence, exile, marginalization, colonialism and post-colonialism, hierarchical relations, gender, social issues like marriage, illicit and extra-marital affairs, subalternity, complex web of relationships, hybridity, changing power equations etc. Both the novels are overcrowded with characters, that is to say, they offer a bewildering web of family relationships extended to two or three generations. Though both the novels present a bleak and pessimistic view of life and humanity, they do not end on the same

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note. Both the novels end on a promising note of optimism and life. They look at history not as a period of progress and development, but as a point of crisis and stasis. Though they neither negate nor substitute the dominant mainstream historical discourses, they necessarily contradict and undermine their canonical significance. They ultimately re-visit and re-claim that part of history which was either deliberately subdued or evaded or lay buried under the burden of official versions of history.

At the thematic level, I would particularly emphasize the difference in response put forward against the process of colonial penetration by Gangaulians and the denizens of Burma. As far as *A Village Divided* is concerned, the Gangaulians are successful to a greater extent in resisting the colonial penetration into their cultural ethos. However, one witnesses the actual process of aggression, capture and colonization in *The Glass Palace*. The colonial masters ruthlessly robbed the Burmese people off their cultural heritage, royalty and resourcefulness with guns and artillery. Simultaneously, characters like Beni-Prasad Dey, Rajkumar, and Arjun have also assisted their colonial masters in continuing their regressive and exploitative policies.

Further, both Rahi Masoom Reza and Amitav Ghosh have used the two most significant integrative metaphors in their respective novels—Moharram as an annual religious occasion of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husain, particularly for the Shia Muslims is used in *A Village Divided*, and the ‘glass palace’ as a historical monument as well as ‘a photo studio’ signifying creativity in *The Glass Palace*. Reza has developed Moharram as a religious, cultural, social, mythical and artistically integrative metaphor. The Shias of Gangauli believe that Imam Husain visits them and shower his blessings on them during Moharram, and after it is over,

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goes back to Karbala. Most of the young people desert Gangauli and their family members with the completion of the ten days of Moharram and are prepared to face the onslaughts of life. Thus, life in Gangauli witnesses the dramatic moments of separation-reconciliation-separation of a number of families after the Partition. The Partition metaphorically represents Karbala for the people of Gangauli. Even Moharram acquires an entirely new meaning or significance, which has both historical and personal relevance and significance. The usual weeping during the singing of nauhas is now not only limited to the sacrifice of Imam Husain, but achieves a symbolic meaning. Now, it also becomes an occasion of mourning over the massacre and violence that succeeded the Partition. In this sense, the ritualistic ceremony of mourning during Moharram attains a universal significance. For Gangaulians, it is all about mourning over an endless series of loss—the complete loss of their power, their landlordism, the disintegration of their families, the heterogeneousness of Gangauli, their sense of belongingness and identity, loss of self-respect, loss of ‘that’ time which has now become a distant past, and above all the loss of Bhojpuri Urdu as the language of their expression.

Likewise, the ‘glass palace’ functions not only as a thematic and a structural device, but also as a symbolic or a metaphorical device. The ‘chronos’ and ‘kairos’ of this novel are structured by the metaphor of ‘the glass palace’. As a historical monument, it stands for the grandeur and magnificence of the Burmese royalty, for authority, kingship, golden Burma that once it was, and also for pride and nationality, though fallen into disgrace. Historical magnificence of the palace excludes humanitarian concerns and is simply concerned with exercising absolute power. But in the context of Dinu’s ‘small photo studio’, it is a ‘life-enhancing’, ‘life-preserving’, ‘life-promising’ metaphor and of all those attributes and ideals

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that one may associate like freedom of thought and expression, multiculturalism, creativity, innovativeness, optimism, sense of identity and attachment, sense of not only 'being' but also 'becoming', a place for generating absolutely constructive and productive ideas, a place for preparing the blueprint of 'bright' future and so on. The former glass palace functions on exclusivist theory, whereas the latter believes in inclusive progress and development; the former believes in hierarchical power structure, whereas the latter symbolizes the 'essential life', away from the breath-taking power struggles. By ending his novel with an artistically creative metaphor, Amitav Ghosh probably is trying to emphasize the point that peace, progress, harmony, order, innovativeness, in other words, life itself is possible only through such integrative and secular, though 'historically insignificant metaphors', and not through 'historically significant' palaces. Though both of them mark the beginning of great historical upheavals in the eventful history of Burma, the first marks the beginning of colonialist expansion, whereas the latter signifies a creative reflection of the past. The metaphor of photography suggests a point of view that reclaims the past in frozen frames.

Both the novels deal with essential humanistic concerns that counter dogmatism, ruthlessness, authoritarianism, parochialism, identity-crisis, alienation, dehumanization, degradation and fanaticism of all kinds. Both the novels largely uphold the ideals of human freedom and dignity. Fundamentally, humanism stresses the formative influence of human values in a person's life, which ultimately celebrates universalism and transcends boundaries.

It is also an interesting similarity that both the selected novels have interwoven the life-stories of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities into their respective fictional world. Simultaneously, both the novels are crowded with

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a bewildering number of characters and intricate relationships. However, *A Village Divided* covers not more than twenty years, whereas *The Glass Palace* encompasses almost a century. This strongly emphasizes the fact that history of erstwhile colonies in South Asia in the last century has largely been dominated by a series of unprecedented events like dictatorial regime, colonialism, communal violence, colossal migration and exploitation of the native resources.

Both the novels derive their title from ‘space’ in time, that is to say, one uses the hyphenated or truncated reality of village Gangauli and the other uses a historical monument. The sense of place becomes one of the most significant elements the writer can manipulate to condition the representation of individuals and community; he or she delineates its process of growth and subsequent fall. Place, thus, attains a discrete identity of its own, very often acquiring the status of character, in two ways: first as having distinctive features which seem to bear down on characters, producing responses that would not have occurred elsewhere; and second, resembling a human with specific features, identity and set of values. The history of a community has to be located in a place so that not only does place becomes central to any description of the growth / decline of a people, but also with migration, the location of that community keeps changing and new identities keep evolving. In literature, place is the geography of imaginative space, and it has the potential to represent and preserve the identity of a community that binds its members in a shared sense of purpose and a common sense of belonging, but in addition to this, place also defines the identity of the individual along with situating him in his community. The exploration of the past is as much the exploration of a physically real geographical location as it is of the landscape of

the mind; the psychological nuances are as much part of the remembering as the geographical location.

Further, both the novelists have heavily relied either on their personal memory or on memory of the actual victims in order to re-create the past. Memory is assigned the task of structuring the events in both these novels, that is to say, to create a sense of how people felt—how, if at all, these feelings found expression, what emotions were paramount. Memory plays a pivotal role in synthesizing the loose strands of the past with present. As far as Rahi Masoom Reza is concerned, it is episodic memory that is pre-dominant, that is to say, recollection of time, place, and associated emotions at the time of the event. Whereas, in the case of Amitav Ghosh, it is borrowed memory, that is to say, memory acquired through various sources like archives, newspapers, survivors’ stories, interviews, and most importantly from the personal experiences of his uncle, Jagat Chandra Dutta. It is as Francesco Loriggo explains:

“The authors often act as the memory of the group: they are scribes who give voice to those who have lived or live in silence. By their mediation, because they managed to master a language, an experience otherwise lost, left unsaid, is communicated.”²

Thus, the re-enactment of history in fiction is a way of preserving the remnants or relics of the ‘significant past’. It is an aesthetic response rescuing the past from getting buried into the realm of amnesia. Finally, I would like to conclude with the following significant statements made by two eminent novelists. The first is by Intizar Husain, probably the most accomplished writer in Urdu after Manto, and the second by Amitav Ghosh. Intizar Husain wrote:

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“The agony of India’s partition could be lessened—perhaps—by exploiting the event’s potential creativity: ‘to salvage whatever of that [pre-partition] culture, if only by enacting it in literature’. To preserve a memory, however fugitive, of that culture before time and history have placed it beyond reach.”³

In an interview, Amitav Ghosh defended his choice of fiction over history by giving the following explanation:

“I think the difference between the history historians write and the history fiction writers write is that fiction writers write about the human history. It’s about finding the human predicament; it’s about finding what happens to individuals, characters. I mean that’s what fiction is... exploring both dimensions, whereas history, the kind of history exploring causes, causality, is of no interest to me.”⁴

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