



**FACTS AND FICTION IN THE INDIAN HISTORICAL NOVELS  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN' AND  
'TRAIN TO PAKISTAN'**

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**ABSTRACT**

*History has generally been accepted as the record of the past. However nobody has suspected the truth behind these records when the truth is quite different. Has anybody critically evaluated the expressions like Ashoka, the Great Alexander, the Great, Akbar, the Great, Napoleon, the Great ? It is because of rational and democratic temper of today that Hitler is not called as Hitler, the Great. If we think seriously we can find that these greats butchered thousands of hapless people simply to satisfy their ego, and to expand their territory as if the land was more important to them than the innocent people residing in it. It is quite true that their glorious advancing army might have raped, burnt and devastated everything on their way to victory. Yet history celebrates these emperors as great. In fact the real heroes of this civilization are scientists, philosophers, writers, thinkers and social reformers. Yet have we ever found, anywhere the expression like Gandhi, the Great, Martin Luther King, the Great, Abraham Lincoln, the Great, mother Teresa, The Great? We may point out another example of the distortion of history – The Taj Mahal highly praised as the greatest monument of love when Shah Jahan had scores of other wives in his harem. It may be called as an architectural marvel. However calling it as the greatest monument of love is a blatant lie perpetuated by history. Hence history as a record of facts cannot be accepted as very holy. Mostly it exaggerates and distorts facts when we talk about the so called greats.*

It may be said that history itself is a record of half-truths. So it is fully justified when we say that a historical novel applies historical facts in a modified, artistically transformed way. The use of history in a historical novel is to provide big canvas to highlight the drama of that time. In this context the novelist may select big historical figure as characters or he may simply use the historical situation to highlight the plight of the common people, caught in the upheaval of history. The writer has his own creative freedom to use the historical facts in his own way for the fulfillment of his purpose. In this sense a historical novel is not history but piece of literature. For creative work has its own needs. It is an auspicious coincidence when Indian English novel established itself in 1930s, the time for national upsurge, for mass struggle for the independence of the nation, The historical development of the time has a great impact on the development of the Indian novel.

**DR. S. T. SALI**

1 | Page



Historical events like partition of the nation, Chinese Aggression, Indo-Pak war and Independence of Bangladesh have a lot of impact on the Indian novels written, in English. R. K. Narayan in 'Waiting for the Mahatma', presents the love story of Sriram for Bharati, who is involved in Gandhian Movement. She has neglected her feelings of love to this background. In order to be near her, Sriram also becomes a Gandhian worker. He waits for the time when she is also stupefied with the feelings of love. At last she asks him to wait for the permission of the Mahatma to marry Sriram. She gets it but minutes before Gandhiji is shot dead. Thus R. K. Narayan has shown how the historical movement affects the life in its most touching aspect of love. When love opens up the possibility of life, death closes all possibilities. However both life and death have to go on. Narayan has skilfully interwoven these apparently opposite strands of life with the ongoing Indian Freedom Struggle.

Manohar Malgaonkar in his novel, 'The men who killed Gandhi' makes historical figures like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Mountbatten, Sawarkar, Godse and Apte as the characters. In such a historical work of art the freedom of the novelist in respect of the construction of plot, and characterization has many restrictions. However Malgaonkar has used his creative liberty whenever required. The partition of the country was the most traumatic event in the history of the nation. Millions had to shift from Pakistan to India and from India to Pakistan. In this process thousands were raped and killed. It happened in spite of the claim of Mountbatten of using military might to quell the communal frenzy. Indian leaders were well aware that it was not only physical but also intensely emotional and social dislocation. Gandhi told his followers that the division was possible only on his dead body. At last due to Jinnah's persistent demand, Nehru came to the conclusion that in order to stop the communal headache, one must think of parting with the head. So the head was separated from the body, still the headache remained forever. In his inclination for fairness, Gandhi made Indian government for fairness, Gandhi made Indian government to pay Pakistan fifty five crore rupees as its due share. This was used by Pakistan for buying arms and sending troops to Kashmir. This enraged Godse so much that he killed Gandhi. Thus the novel makes use of historical events dramatizing historical facts to highlight how a single person is not responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

Salman Rushdie has taken maximum liberty with historical events. He has turned history into a fine work of literature. By means of his innovative imagination he has extended the boundary of historical novel. History, for Rushdie is a reference point. He points out that a character during the time of upheaval, cannot remain an individual but a part of historical cauldron. So, Saleem Sinai claims in 'Midnight Children' he is "handcuffed to history"(3). Saleem connects his own life, as well as his family's personal life with public events. All the important events in the country – Jallianwala Massacre, Quit India Movement, the emergence of Muslim League, the Chinese attack, the separation of Bangladesh etc. are waiting for him. Not only Sinai, but the children born during this crucial period are all shaped by history. For the children of midnight – were also the children of the time, fathered ..... by history" (137). Rushdie's 'Shame' almost does the same with Pak history as a background.

Khushwant Singh's 'Train to Pakistan' presents the real events happening around the partition of India. These events take place in a remote border village, Mano Majra in Punjab. These events seem to be simple and commonplace. However when they are linked with historical happenings, they create an intensely moving fictional work – The sudden division of the country into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan affects the tenor the villagers' life. Both, the Hindus and the Muslims have been living there

as brothers since centuries, but the political turmoil tears them apart. The personal emotions are swept away in the swirling water of Sutluj due to the generated frenzy of communal violence. This violence is not the natural outcome but the handiwork of a few misguided youths who are impatient for a non-existent glory. A train from Pakistan arrives at the local station full of the dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs massacred during the communal frenzy. Hukum Chand and other local authorities of Mano Majra try their best to hush up the matter. However the smell of the burning dead bodies disturbs the village.

“The northern horizon, which has turned a bluish grey, Showed orange again. The orange turned into copper and then into a luminous russet. Red tongues of flame leaped into copper and then into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene then of wood. And then faint acrid smell of searing flesh.”

“The village was stilled in a deadly silence. No one asked anyone else what the odour was. They all knew. They had known it all the time. The answer was implicit in the fact that the train had come from Pakistan” (100).

In the above quotation, two points are noteworthy – The cool tone of the villagers accepting the horrible facts. And secondly the ironic juxtaposition of colours against the backdrop of ghostly massacre. Hukum Chand, the highest government officer, tries to play the safe role. He wants the muslims of Mano manjra to leave for Pakistan on their own before resultant revenge my harm them. However the villages, both the Hindus and the Muslims are not willing for this sudden separation. Imam Baksh, the most prominent muslim appeals his community the whole village agrees with him - “What we have to do with Pakistan and we were born here. So were out ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers” Imam Baksha broke down. Meet Singh clasped him in his arms and began to sob. Several of the people started crying quietly and blowing their noses.” (147)

The above passage reflects the clear picture of the communal harmony in during the period of partition. However the government authorities have their own way of discharging their duties. And the Muslims are forced to go the sheltered camp till they are sent to Pakistan by train. Meanwhile some hot head led by a young Sikh military officer incite the villagers. He is supported by the Malli gang and a handful of others. They tie a thick rope sufficiently high on the railway track, so that muslims travelling to Pakistan on the roof of the train would slip down and be butchered by them. Iqbal, the educated leftist sent by his party to maintain communal harmony does nothing. Besides, the educated people only talk of the high ideals. They do not act at such crucial juncture, especially when there is threat to their life. Ironically the tragedy is avoided by Jugga, the confirmed bad character. Jugga Slashes the dangerous rope at the cost of his life. For Nooran, his beloved, is also travelling by the same train to Pakistan.

“He went at it with the knife and then with his teeth. The engine was almost on him. There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan” (207)

Thus Khushwant Singh, by presenting deeply moving scenes during partition, portrays in his unique style that the participants of these events are not great persons but innocent small villagers guided by



their human emotions. After reading the historical novel one must look at the events in it with open mind. Historical novel is not a factual description of history. For literature cannot be history. It cannot be taken as authentic history. One should look at it as a literary art.

## REFERENCES

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