



# History Revoked And Reconstructed: A Study Of *Aavarana And River Of Fire*

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**Abstract:** This study has been undertaken to investigate the interrogation of history through the select Indian fiction. The past was interpreted in a different way during the post-colonial period, especially after 1980s, as the hitherto neglected sections in the society began to seek their place in history. Nationalism, religion, myth also was used as tools of the narrative. The paper discusses these aspects of historiography taking two novels as examples.

**Index Terms** – History, historiography, novel, religion, nationalism, interpretation, re-interpretation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The postcolonial period brought about a revolutionary and a broader extensive change in the world in general and particularly in the third world countries. The historiography has witnessed the changes taking place in the contemporary world as it showcased the many narratives with different perspectives. Fiction is one of such narratives which interrogated history during this period. The fiction including the Indian fiction during the postmodern period needs special mention as it viewed history with the prism of the contemporaneity. The Indian fiction of the nineteen eighties is characterized by a creative engagement with history which is also shared by many other disciplines like Women Studies, Tribal Studies, Post-colonial Studies and Film Studies. During this period the second generation of postcolonial writers started appearing whose concerns were first articulated by Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, who describes himself as 'handcuffed to history'. The quick appropriation and subversion of the received historiography in Rushdie's fictional discourse into a theoretical discourse about nation, history and historiography appears in the hind sight as metaphoric of a paradigm shift. The eighties also coincided with the arrival of postmodernism and its decentering agenda got erased the borders of disciplines. Another noteworthy development of this process is the further erosion in the stable distinction between fact and fiction. The second remarkable feature of the post-eighties Indian literary scene has been the sudden efflorescence in fiction, particularly from the quarters hitherto silent consumers of fiction. They included women, dalit, writers from diverse ethnic and religious background and the diasporic writers. Their background, training, concerns and point of views were markedly different from the writers of the earlier generation. Hence one notices the new writers challenging the received modes of representation, reinterpreting and subverting the received versions of history, and interrogating the canon turning the fictionscape into a contested site. These essentially interrelated features of the post-nineteen eighties- the coming of the age of a new generation of writers belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds and their creative engagement with history- merit serious consideration. The revoking of the historical events and reconstructing of the same were found in the mainstream of literature and in the literature of the regional languages. The present paper is an attempt to shed light on this mode of historiography while having the theoretic aspect at the background of this study. Two novels, i.e. one a novel written in the regional Kannada

language and another novel originally written in Urdu and later translated into English by the author herself have been selected; Aavarana, a Kannada novel by S.L.Bhyrappa and The River of Fire, a novel by Qurratulain Hyder respectively have been explained with an ensuing concluding part have been included in this paper.

#### Explanation

Aavarana, is a novel written by the popular Kannada writer S.L.Bhyrappa. The novel problematizes the historiography itself as it questions the hitherto accepted history. The two parallel stories run into the plots in the novel while relating the past with the present raise the debate over recording of historical facts with historians having their own prejudices. The narrator in the novel very firmly believes that the leftist historians have twisted facts in history. She advocates that the historians with the leftist ideas favored one community while writing the history as if it was written not to disturb the present socio-political state. The novelist argues that the truth has been hidden by the leftist progressive historians. According to him the Muslim rulers who invaded India had definite religious intentions; the fanatic rulers had been dictated by Islam to expand it to the vanquished state. The rulers were ruthless towards other faiths as they forcefully converted Hindus to Islam religion and destroyed the temple and idols belonged to Hindu community. The writer has taken it as a mission to do justice to the past. A research has been conducted through the principle character in the novel to find fault with the leftist version of history. It is strongly argued that the contemporary and future generations should have right to know the facts of the past. The only way to make the people to have known the correct history is by rewriting the history, which is not biased. The novel is a form of historiography in which the history has been rewritten leaving out all lies found in the former history books.

Aavarana, literally means veil, is an act of concealing truth. The novel actually aims at Anavarana, which means unraveling truth. The Indian philosophy also speaks about going from darkness to light and from lie to truth. For the writer of the novel, Aavarana, as he said in his preface to the novel, writing historical work is basically an act of conducting concrete research to support even the tiniest detail. According to him the writer has a responsibility towards the historical truth. If the writer is in a dilemma in choosing between truth and beauty during the composition, Bhyrappa suggests going for the truth and not for the beauty. The writer doesn't have the right to violate the truth in the guise of a creative artist. In his attempt of viewing the present through the past, the narrator tells two parallel stories, one is the present and the other one is the past. The novel opens with a scene with an artiste couple who have come for shooting a documentary on Hampi, the place known for its historical monuments. The disfigured huge Ugranarasimha statue at Hampi has had a great impact upon the future thought process of the wife, who had been converted to Islam from Hindu after her marriage. Later she conducts research on the defacement of Hindu temples with the invasion of the Muslim Kings. Meanwhile she discovers the story of a couple, a king and a queen, who would be forced converting to Islam after having been incapacitated with the defeat in a war.

The novelist while describing the events through plots, moots questions about the mode of writing history. He expresses his differences with the existing European and Leftist version of history and hints that his version of history contains the truth. According to him, "The real history is not as simple as the fundamentalists imagined of it. The real intention of history is to inculcate the progress of mankind" (A.: 67-68). The narrator, while critising the historiography, comments, "However, in modern times, especially post-independence, historians have devised innovative interpretations of Indian history, which now qualify as authentic history. This history is a ploy to whitewash the religious fanaticism of the Muslim kings' (A.: 92-93). Indian history was begun to be seen as a process of nation in the making though nationhood of the post-colonial era remained a focal point during the post independent period. Nationhood involved all cultural and social movements and the current reformations. Historians in the 1960s and 1970s were also much influenced by the Marxist ideas as colonialism was conceptualized within the system of world capitalism. With the growth of professional history after independence, the secular nationalist vision was articulated within a left liberal framework; this vision was opposed to communal and imperial conceptions of history. S.L.Bhyrappa through his novel Aavarana tries to prove this historiography as biased and advocates for rewriting of history. He interrogates the history of the historians influenced by the Marxist ideas. In the process of this interrogation, he himself rewrites the Indian history.

Qurratulain Hyder, in her novel, '*River of Fire*' argues for a culture that is inclusive. The novel insists that religion is irrelevant when it comes to the defining of Indian Identity. She uses mythology to confront the historical facts. India has a history of thousands of years. The British came over here, colonized the country and spoiled the Hindu-Muslim amity. The difference is seen only between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial India after the entry of the British. There was a perfect coordination and co-operation among the different religious groups in ancient India. She explains her point of view through the interweaving parables, legends, dreams, diaries, and letters. Hyder questions the claim of the British Empire that it was instrumental

in bringing the people together into one Nation. While interrogating the oriental version of history, she argues that the British divided nation and the goodwill existed before among different communities that began to wane with the entry of the British into the nation. She agrees that there were wars in which the Hindus and the Muslims were made to be antagonists to each other, but these wars were waged due to political reasons. The communities didn't have to do anything with the war. The people belonging to different communities lived without communal tensions. The synthesis among the different communities and their cultures established a composite culture that is unique to India. The story endorses the opinion of Mushirul Hasan, who says, "The syncretic and synthetic ethos of the Indian civilization- popularly known as India's composite culture- is a pervasive notion as well as a real historical experience shared by many Indians and non-Indians, which has continued in varied forms and meanings across time and space in the region" (Hasan 2003:269).

The Indian history is described as a tapestry of the stories in which different communities have been involved. There are generations of characters, but the characteristics of them do not differ, as they seem to be the incarnation of the same spirit with different names. The plots in the novel validate the point that the country has got the credit of having one of the oldest civilizations in the world. India was always the center of attraction for the outsiders. People came here from outside seeking wealth as well as knowledge. Some invaders looted the country and some of them settled here. They had come with their own art, traditions and culture. The country was receptive and the foreign culture was merged with the inclusive Indian culture. It again agrees with Mushirul Hasan, who further says, "India expresses itself in a unique way of accepting, assimilating and synthesizing- rather than rejecting- diverse patterns of beliefs, thoughts and actual living of an infinitive variety of people and cultures into an inclusive, variegated and complex tapestry of life and culture. This is what is traditionally epitomized as 'India's unity in diversity', and perhaps more meaningfully described as 'living together separately' (Hasan 2003:269).

The title of the novel itself is taken as symbolic. The river connects the past with the present and future. River banks are the cradle of culture. There is also fire in water though the two elements seem to be contradictory to each other in its physical nature. Fire and river have got an important place in Indian philosophy. There were two mighty communities, Hinduism and Islam, like two rivers flowed in the Indian continent and merged to give India a unique form of nationhood. There are stories narrated over the generations spanning hundreds of years. In each story, the names of the characters are different, but the characteristics and spirit are one and the same, which represent Indian civilization and ethos. The novel shows Indians lived as one nation though belonged to different religions.

Thus, the above instances from the novels, *Aavarana* and *River of Fire*, have shown how the novelists have used the belief system of religion as a medium to interrogate history. For S.L. Bhyrappa, the divisive politics is rooted in the religion. According to him the religious tenets of Islam were the cause of violence in the society as fanatic Muslim rulers destroyed the Hindu temples and harassed the defeated Hindu kings in particular and Hindus in general. Bhyrappa is not happy with the historiography because he believes that the historians twisted the facts in history as they were prejudiced. He advocates for the people's right to know the truth about their past. In his endeavor to make people know the historic truth he has recreated history.

Qurratulain Hyder also relies upon religion to interrogate the historical events in India. But for Hyder, religions in India are a strong binding force. She has shown that the religions were there in India even before any history recorded the things here. She has found that the Indian culture has been rooted in its religion. Indian culture, according to her, was inclusive of all kinds of people and their different faiths. The Muslims who settled here never behaved like outsiders. She has advocated that the post-colonial situations with the ploy of the British brought about the divisive politics in India.

## Conclusion

The post-colonial developments had ignited the anti-British sentimentality. The viewing of the Indian sub-continent through the oriental concept was rejected, which was reflected in interpreting the history through various modes, including fiction. Both the novels discussed have interrogated history from the nationalistic point of view, but their interpretation of nationalism is different. For Bhyrappa the past of India, especially for Hindus, was not secured and glorious as the historians have projected it. The happy state of the Hindus was changed after the Muslim kings from outside invaded the nation. So, he divides the past for Hindus as ancient period and the period after Moguls set their foot here. There were happiness and contentment for Hindus in the ancient India, but the situation changed for them because of the fanatic Muslim rulers. Qurratulain Hyder doesn't see any such communal tension in the past. She has surveyed thousands of years' history of India. She finds only one history of India in which Hindus and Muslims lived in one nation. There were invasions on India from the Muslim Sultans, but they later settled here and embraced the country as their



own nation. According to her Hindus and Muslims didn't fight as two religious groups until the Plassey mutiny, as the British found that they could use religion as a weapon to divide Hindus and Muslims so that they could rule India. The communal tension, according to her, started neither in the ancient history nor in the medieval history of India; it was started after the British colonized the nation. Thus, both S.L. Bhyrappa and Qurratulain Hyder have revoked the past to reconstruct history with the post-colonial context wherein nationalism ruled the roost

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