INTRODUCTION

Filmed or visualized history and written history have different strengths; they are experienced and understood in very different ways. The most complex problem the historian faces in the construction of the past on the screen emerges from the nature and demands of the visual medium itself: the rhetorical economy and the appropriation of the visual image. Both the advocates and the critics of historical films focus on the same aspect of the medium: the way in which film creates an illusion of immediate experience or a “virtual reality” of the past. It is deeply personal as well as personalized, reflecting the strength of films in the representation of individuals’ lives.

Moving images have played an important role in mobilizing the mass public for or, sometimes, against war. The political economy of film making is one of the topics explored in this study. Film as a text is discursively constructed; the film maker visualizes ideology by organizing and editing the text. The relationship between modern warfare and contemporary aesthetic experience or between technology and artistic perception also forms part of the study. The study evaluates the extent to which visual images, the derivative perspectives on the objective world, become the perceived sense of “reality” in contemporary culture. It also examines the extent to which the portrayal of particular image connected to war that depicts race, class or gender reflect and contribute to cultural constructs at large. The study explores how the portrayal of war, and its perception as represented by the
assembled moving images in films, becomes the central part of the collective consciousness of contemporary society. The study analyzes from a New Historicist perspective the construction of historical narratives and cultural memory in the visual media, particularly film, television and photography, and illustrates how historical narratives and cultural memory are (re)constructed, represented and circulated through film, television and photography on the basis of visual semiotics.

The first chapter “History as Narrative” deals with the elements of subjectivity in historical narratives. Postmodern historians and philosophers question the representation of history and cultural identities: history as “what really’ happened” (external to representation or mediation) against history as a “narrative of what happened,” or a “mediated representation” with cultural/ideological undercurrents. History requires representation and undergoes mediation in narrative; a story-form is encoded as historical that the readers/viewers decide to understand. The issue of representation in both fiction and history has usually been dealt with in epistemological terms: how the past is reconstructed and understood in narratives. One has access to the past only through its traces: its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials. Postmodernists believe that history is qualified with subjective elements because the historian has his own personal/ideological choices. His processes of selection and emplotment are personal and subjective. The historian takes some past events and makes a story out of
them. Though the events selected need not be his personal choice, his personal/ideological preferences influence the relative prominence given to the various elements of the events and their combinatory relationships. Hayden White’s insistence on historiography as a process of constructing a meaningful historical past challenges the idea of direct correspondence between representation and reality and questions the traditional notions of the historian’s role. According to White, a historical work is a verbal artifact; it is a narrative discourse, the content of which is as much imagined or invented as found.

Emplotment is the literary device which constructs the genre story. According to White, every history, even the most “synchronic” of narrative, is emplotted in some way. Argument is the historian’s view of what history ought to be. Ideology reflects historian’s views of life, of how the past events affect the present, and of how one ought to act in the present. The historian gathers data and assembles them toward a form. Part of “histories’” success in explaining events of the past to the readers in the present is due to the story-making ability of the historian or his skill of “emplotment.”

Visualized history can be analysed with the help of visual semiotics. Semiotics is a branch of communication theory that investigates systems of signs and the modes of representation that human beings use. There are two major traditions in modern semiotic theory: One is grounded in the European tradition led by the Swiss-French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and the
other from the American pragmatic philosophy led by Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure sought to explain how all elements of a language are taken as components of a larger system of language in use. This led to a formal discipline which he called semiology. Peirce’s interest in logical reasoning led him to investigate different categories of signs and the manner by which meanings can be extracted from them. “Semiosis”, the term borrowed from Peirce, is expanded by Eco to designate the process by which a culture produces signs and attributes meaning to signs. Although Eco regards meaning production or semiosis as a social activity, he admits that subjective factors are also involved in each individual act of semiosis. In *Mythologies*, Barthes analyses the semantic potential and ideological impact of myth embedded in popular culture. With the enormous influence of mass communication, cultural myths have been reified and taken-for-granted in their everyday presence as a mediated form of reality. Semiotics can serve as a tool to deconstruct myths embedded in popular culture like film and documentary.

Christian Metz, one of the prominent figures of French film theory, has used semiology as a method to analyze cinema. In *Film Language*, Metz argues that cinema is structured like a language. He suggests that film is a language in which each shot used in a sequence works like a unit in a linguistic statement. In his theoretical model, known as the “grandesyntagmatique,” Metz argues that individual cinematic texts construct
their own meaning systems rather than share a unified grammar. Metz’s cinesemiotics leans heavily on linguistic models. The enterprise of semiotics has evolved from the methods of structural linguistics, formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure. The semioticians have developed linguistics to one of the most rigorous and fruitful sciences of twentieth century. Metz ultimately discards a theoretical model for film based on verbal language, although he still believes that cinesemiotics can learn much from linguistics. His primary reason for rejecting rigid analogies to language is based on his claim that the image, unlike the word, is not a discrete unit that can be reduced into smaller basic units and analyzed.

The second chapter entitled “Reconstructing History” explains how history is reconstructed in postmodern historiography. Postmodernist treatments of the past and history are typically criticized by historians for such beliefs that the past has no reality, that history is nothing but a text, that the principal problem of historical representation is that of narrativization, that, there is no substantial distinction between fact and fiction in the representation of the past and that historical phenomena are better understood by storytelling rather than by model building and causal analysis of chains of events. Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson observes that “…history is inaccessible to us except in textual form … it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization” (82). Jameson underlines the discursive construction of history. The textualisation of history is an act of
narrativization that makes the representation of reality problematic. Narrativization depends on emplotment which in turn depends on the personal and ideological choices of the historian. So there are different versions or “histories” about the same set of events of the past. Paul Ricoeur also endorses Jameson’s view in *History and Truth*. He remarks: “We carry on several histories simultaneously, in times whose periods, crises, and pauses do not coincide. We enchain, abandon, and resume several histories, much as a chess player who plays several games at once, renewing now this one, now the another” (186). Ricoeur means that even when the events are restricted like the chess columns, they can form different sequences or events making different histories.

George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a fictional account of the manipulation of the historical records for nationalist agenda and manipulation of power. He observes in the novel: “He who controls the present, controls the past. He who controls the past, controls the future” (37). The creation of a “national story” by way of management of the historical records is at the heart of the debate about history as propaganda. To some degree, all nations are active in the promotion of such “national stories,” with ethnicity, nationalism, gender, power, heroic figures, class considerations and important national events and trends, all clashing and competing within the narrative. The New Historicist invocation of “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history,” made Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* a critical success
in the mid1980s. Widely celebrated as a postmodernist historical novel, this dazzling mixture of serious historical research and popular detective fiction invited its readers to view historical fiction as an academically respectable genre and a vehicle for recovering and reimagining the past in unconventional ways.

The postmodernist historical novel questions the clear-cut division between history and fiction. In this context, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher observe in *Practicing New Historicism*, that history has become more literary and literature more historicized as a result of the postmodern condition. On account of their overt metafictionality, postmodernist texts challenge the capacity of history to represent reality outside the text and the truth-value of historical knowledge. The fact that they are highly self-reflexive novels points to the process of constructing, ordering and selecting which presupposes that history is a construct as literature. Postmodernist metafiction, therefore, attempts to insert history into fiction in order to subvert historical “facts” and rewrite them from a perspective different from the accepted interpretation. In such postmodernist texts, which explore the problematized relations between history and fiction, the hitherto silenced histories of the marginalized groups are often foregrounded through the rewriting and subverting of historical materials.

Postmodernist historical novels insert historical documents, events and historical personages into the fictional worlds of their works, drawing
attention at the same time to the intricacy of fictional process. Literary critics point to the intense preoccupation with history in the works of many contemporary novelists like as Graham Swift, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, John Fowles, Jeanette Winterson and Angela Carter. The works of all these major writers can be analyzed as double-voiced discourses: in these texts the novelist refract the dominant voice of empirical or mainstream history through subversion on the one hand and gives way to the marginal voices that have been suppressed on the other. The major features of this genre include the metafictional elements of the texts, self-reflexivity, non-linear narrative, parodic intention to pinpoint the refraction and the co-existence of plural voices leading to dialogism or polyphony. As a result, historiographic metafiction has proved to be a liberating genre, especially for feminist and postcolonial writers that enable them to verbalize the histories of the marginalized.

Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, offers interesting versions of different historical events, individuals and societies. Moreover, the relationship between history and fiction in the novel is playfully interactive. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the narrative functions in such a way as to expose the implicit claims of narrative to the “truth of history.” Here the story-telling aspect of narrative is used to highlight the idea of history as a text among other texts. In the novel, history merges with fiction, and facts get blurred with fable. Rushdie plays with the idea of history
as a form of story which is always woven out of the fabric of fables. The novel shows the process of textualisation of history through the narrator. The narrator usually reminds the reader of the importance of narrativization. We can say that the novel is fashioned like a historical fantasy echoing White’s idea of emplotment in its Romance mood.

Film and television have a pervasive influence on people’s understanding of the world. An important aspect of this is the relationship of history and film. The third chapter, “History through Documentaries and Films,” deals with the cinematic representation of history. John Grierson defines documentary as the “creative treatment of reality.” A documentary filmmaker must creatively fashion the “fragments of reality” into a documentary with a social concern. The documentary must be aesthetically satisfying while having a clearly defined social purpose. Documentary is not a representation of reality, but it is the film maker’s representation of our historical world. What is conveyed in the film is the film maker’s point of views or arguments, and what makes it a documentary is its representation concerning social matters or issues. Indeed, many of the modern documentaries are structured in much the same way as fiction films. Moreover, such selections and rearrangements invariably represent the filmmaker’s point of view. So the facts represented in a documentary film need not remain “neutral;” they need not be “reality as it is.” They represent only those facts that suit or strengthen particular points of view.
Reconstructions and reenactments are particularly done in terms of a filmmaker’s vision of an event. This concept is explored in this chapter.

A three-hour BBC documentary on Gandhi (2009) is taken for the study. It does a reasonable job of covering Gandhi's life: basic biographical details, historical events, key influences, lucky breaks, setbacks and so forth. Based on mainstream scholarship, it avoids edgy controversy while conveying a sense of this immensely brave, complex and charismatic man who, despite his many flaws and idiosyncrasies, still captivates people worldwide and remains as an icon of non-violent resistance.

The documentary is visually attractive as it was shot on locations in the various places made famous by Gandhi’s presence. Period footage is judiciously interspersed between solid interviews with close associates, historians and others with personal memories of Gandhi to produce a coherent narrative with a good historical perspective. For example, the firsthand accounts of the massacre in Amritsar are both harrowing and instructive of the political shockwave that passed throughout India in the aftermath. But, there is something not quite right with this production. While there is no direct attack, the documentary indirectly blames him for alienating Muslims, especially when he attended the round table conference, and creating Pakistan. Lack of sensitivity is deliberate and is used with a hidden agenda. It is one of the most blatant display of colonial audacity where a former
colonial power uses its popular mouth-piece (BBC) to carry out posthumous revenge on one of the noblest souls of the world.

*Mahatma: Life of Gandhi, 1869–1948* is a 1968 documentary biography film, detailing the life of Mahatma Gandhi. The film, produced by The Gandhi National Memorial Fund in cooperation with the Films Division of the Government of India, tells the life-story of Gandhi and his incessant search for Truth, which largely reflects the history of India’s struggle for freedom. The story is narrated using mostly Gandhi’s own words. Gandhi is presented as a man of peace and goodwill who fought evil and injustice with soul force.

History, like the cinema, can often be a matter of perspective. Clint Eastwood narrated the Battle of Iwo Jima from both the American and the Japanese point of view in *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* respectively. It was done before in *ToraToraTora* (1970) where two different points of view are expressed in the same film that deals with the Battle of Pearl Harbour in 1941. By dividing these perspectives in different films directed for Japanese and international audiences, Eastwood treats history not merely as an issue of which side you are on but of how to look at history itself. The chapter analyses these films to unravel the “histories” of two wars.

Hayden White coins the term “historiophoty” to describe the construction and representation of history in terms of visual images and filmic discourses. He states that historiophoty is in contrast to historiography which
is the representation of history in verbal images and written discourses. The semiotics of historiography and historiophoty differ but the principles underlying the process of signification is the same. Roland Barthes’s semiotic theory focuses on the social phenomena of signs, specifically photographs. Barthes’s theory emphasizes how signs constitute culture and ideologies in particular ways. According to Barthes, the cultural and political messages are constituted in two ways: through denotation where the literal meaning refers to a sign, and connotation where the meaning is suggested or implied by the sign. For instance, “Hitler” denotes historical individual. Meanwhile, Hitler connotes evil, genocide, racism, and so on. A photographic image by itself is, therefore, pure denotation without a code. But Barthes claims that the denotative status of a photo “has every chance of being mythical” (Image, Music, Text, 15). Barthes uses mythical image as a way of describing the characteristics that are associated with common sense. In other words, the characteristics of a photograph have the opportunity to represent and convey ideological norms of a culture. Consequently, a photograph can also connote cultural meaning. In this context, Barthes states in Image, Music, Text: “The press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation” (31). Thus, in every photograph there is a photographic paradox in which denotative and connotative messages co-exist. This is the focus of the fourth chapter
“Historiophoty” that analyses war photographs. Photographs of Vietnam War are analysed in this chapter.

The concept of history as narrative, as a literary genre, interrogates the claims of truth and objectivity in historical work. Historical narratives are verbal fictions, their contents are as much invented as found and their forms have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences. While historical narratives proceed from empirically validated facts or events, they necessarily require imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story; they also represent only a selection of historical events. Thus, truth represented in “histories” is limited.