

Introduction

Introduction

I

With the development of social thought and man's consciousness, new complex texts and literary output continued to add up his giant intellectual production. Beginning with traditional historiography, his intellectual journey has reached this postmodern phenomenon of literary output; all this goes parallel to man's social, cultural, political and physical environment. As his condition changed, his views of genres and the contents of his literary output, and even the narrative modes, techniques and strategies also changed. New concepts and ideas were put forth; new theories and philosophies came to be applied upon arts and social sciences.

History and literature had been thought to be different and distinct genres which could never come close to each other. In *Poetics*, his classic treatise on genres, particularly tragedy and epic, Aristotle draws a distinction between history and poetry. According to him, literature is higher than history for it is more philosophical and more serious; and literature deals with the universal and history with the particular. He says:

From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between the historian and the poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse – you might put the work of Herodotus into

verse and it would still be a species of history. The true difference consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophical and of higher significance than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are of the nature of particulars. (ch. IX)

Thus the scope of history got limited to a particular space and time, and literature concerned all ages and all spaces, or mankind in general. So, there was uniformity and equality in ages and men, periods and classes. Aristotle further says:

It is evident from the above that the poet must be more the poet (maker) of his plots than of his verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of the imitative element in his work, and it is actions that he imitates. And if he should come to take a subject from actual history, he is nonetheless a poet for that; since some historic occurrences may very well be in the probable and possible order of things; and it is in that aspect of them that he is their poet or maker. (ch. IX)

So, historical events can be used in literature as its subject matter, and they function as metaphor not as factual history. They lose particularity of space and time, merge in the general framework of the work of fiction, and yield multiple interpretations. Or historical narrative diminishes to give dominance to fictional narrative where history evolves to narrative components, like metaphor, metonymy, irony and allegory. History thus used gives direction to the discourse in the work of fiction. Being at the background, it does shape the discourse level.

Henry Fielding, in his novel *Joseph Andrews*, draws a difference between history of a place and that of a person: “. . . [*Joseph Andrews*] is not such a book as that which records the achievements of the renowned Don Quixote more worthy the name of a history than even Mariana’s; for whereas the latter is confined to a particular period of time, and to a particular nation; the former is the history of the world in general . . .” (147).

Fielding calls fiction, particularly that which is written in biographical mode, as history to bring it closer to life, experience and human nature. To him biography of a person is an example of life shared by all in general. In other words, he equates history with example which, according to him, acts more forcibly on the human mind than precepts. Or, in technical terms, he intends to use historical events and incidents as metaphors; history is nature, and the novelist takes assistance from history to convey his point of view.

However, the historical novel came into being in its proper form in the 19th century with Sir Walter Scott. And, history and literature came closer and historical content got its place in the novel, though for purposes beyond history. Since then, history has come to be used in the novel through different methods and techniques, and a time came when the general opinion was that there was no history but narrative.

Certain theorists and philosophers put forth the views recognising literature in history. Thinkers like E. H. Carr, Elton, F. Ankersmit and Hayden White emphasise the fictional aspect of history. The famous ‘what is history’ debate has given rise to many characteristics of human history which were unusual in earlier times. Imagination, generalisation, subjective dimension and one’s own ‘idea of history’ came to be recognised in contemporary historiography. Hayden White, especially,

established the narrative dimension of history, emphasising emplotment and some other stylistic devices, like metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche in historiography. Thus not only the content but the form also got significance in the writing of history.

E. H. Carr admits subjective elements in the writing of history. According to him, writing of history is a selective process; it is at the same time a social process. This means that the complexities of social web do influence the writing of history; i. e. social interactions, one's social position and whatever one has received from society do make one's point of view and shape one's perception. It is also true that perception is always subjective. Carr says in *What is History?*: "The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate" (12). The historian's subjective approach lies in his selection and interpretation of historical facts. He gives importance to certain facts and ignores others, and presents them as his self likes, or, as is in harmony with his self. In other words, we can say, he presents his own point of view. Or, we can say, through the writing of historical facts and events he builds up his own point of view, his own position vis-a-vis the developments that have been happening around him. Carr also does not rule out creative elements in history.

As the historian uses his language, generalisation of historical events is possible. Carr says:

The very use of language commits the historian, like the scientist, to generalisation. The Peloponnesian War and the Second World War were very different, and both were unique, but the historian calls them both wars, and only the pedant will protest. When Gibbon wrote of

both the establishment of Christianity by Constantine and the rise of Islam as revolutions, he was generalising two unique events The historian is not really interested in the unique, but in what is general in the unique. (63)

At another place Carr says: “It is nonsense to say that generalisation is foreign to history; history thrives on generalisation. As Mr. Elton neatly puts it in a volume of the New Cambridge Modern History, “what distinguishes the historian from the collector of historical facts is generalisation” (64).

Two dimensions of history are recognised here, universalisation which takes history to metaphoric character and the importance of language in historiography. It becomes possible through language and style that history can be used to derive knowledge and lesson from it. As Carr himself pays some heed to the lessons learnt from history, historical events lead to more knowledge about Man and his environment, or even to know man himself. Carr believes that “The real point about generalisation is that through it we attempt to learn from history, to apply the lesson drawn from one set of events to another set of events” (66). So, linguistic and narrative factors are certainly prominent in history; they cannot be ignored or rejected. Once again, the generalisation in history takes it closer to metaphor and allegory, and in literature history can be used as irony or at least in ironical mode. That depends upon how a writer manipulates his historical content.

Carr recognises the cognitive aspect of history. There is an essential relationship between historical facts and the historian’s mind. Or, we can say, history is reborn in his mind and intellect. Carr says:

The past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present. But a past act is dead; i. e. meaningless to the historian, unless he can understand the thought that lay behind it. Hence 'all history is the history of thought' and 'history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying.' (22)

Here imagination is in play in history. The historian relives the experiences by way of imagination. It seems imagination is as important in historiography as it is in art. At another place Carr writes: "History", says Professor Oakeshott, who on this point stands near to Collingwood, "is the historian's experience. It is "made" by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making it" (22). It seems the historian comes much closer to the novelist who, according to D. H. Lawrence, renders his own sicknesses. Carr writes:

Freud, reinforcing the work of Marx, has encouraged the historian to examine himself and his own position in history, the motives – perhaps hidden motives – which have guided his choice of theme or period and his selection and interpretation of the facts, the national and social background which has determined his angle of vision, the conception of the future which shapes his conception of the past. Since Marx and Freud wrote, the historian has no excuse to think of himself as a detached individual standing outside society and outside history. This is the age of self-consciousness: the historian can and should know what he is doing. (139)

Thus the historian explores his self and society. He draws things out of his unconscious and environment. Or, we can say, memory, introspection and retrospection do have a place in history. Introspection and retrospection can result in contents that are fragmentary and may not be chronological; postmodern approaches to historiography also validate such elements.

F. R. Ankersmit also gives some space to cognitive dimensions of historiography in his essay "Historiography and Postmodernism". To him, memory is more important than historical facts. Obviously, it will result in different versions of history which will be contaminated (interfused) with subjectivity, and there will remain no space for investigating the factual dimensions of what is given. He writes:

History here is no longer the reconstruction of what has happened to us in the various phases of our lives, but a continuous playing with the memory of this. The memory has priority over what is remembered. Something similar is true for historiography. The wild, greedy and uncontrolled digging into the past, inspired by the desire to discover a past reality and reconstruct it scientifically is no longer the historian's unquestioned task. We would do better to examine the result of a hundred and fifty years' digging more attentively and ask ourselves more often what all this adds up to. The time has come that we should think about the past rather than investigate it. (Ankersmit17)

Investigating the past objectively is not the aim of the historian now, but to think it in his own self. Different people think differently depending upon their intellect, social and cultural position, and above all the effects the past has on them.

Anders Schinkel analysing different ways of forgetting and the play of memory in his essay 'History and Historiography in Process' also corroborates the subjective factors in historiography. According to him, our consciousness is basically selective as our perception is selective. Some elements in our perception feature more prominently; some go to the background, for they are not so prominent. But the question arises, what elements can be prominent? What determines the prominence of certain elements? And, there is a kind of forgetting, as given by Schinkel, which he calls "repression" and defines it as "forgetting things because we do not want to remember them" (08). This kind of forgetting seems to be deliberate, or it is urgently needed by the self. This implies perception and selection are intrinsic to the self that in turn means one's perception is one's self, or at least drawing out of one's self. Schinkel writes:

Our memory is necessarily selective: we cannot remember everything vividly. Again, some things will virtually disappear in the background, whereas other things will remain close to the surface, ready to be called upon. Repression is an extreme case of selective memory

Which selection is made, be it in our perception of the present or the past or in our memory, is always influenced by a person's feelings, character, interests, and so on. (11)

The inference is that memory and perception are drawing out of one's self which subsequently delineates one's identity and traces out one's roots and origin. Again referring to E. H. Carr, the historian is essentially a product of history. What the past, his past, has made him will be vivid in his feelings, character and interests, or in his self. Writing of history virtually becomes writing of one's self, identity and roots.

According to Schinkel, Ankersmit links the notions of history and memory to the notion of identity. Due to some radical break up between past and present, as happens with diasporic communities, a civilisation's identity is lost and a new one formed, consisting primarily of the awareness of the loss of the former identity. For that matter, because of such radical historical events, even communities can change their identity and build new identity on the bedrock of the earlier one. This 'awareness of the loss of the former identity' is the pivot on which the whole gamut of the formation of new identity moves in rounds and rounds. It gives some faint but effective marks of nostalgia - going back to one's home - pessimism and hope to the delineation of one's identity. So the new identity is never purely new, instead it is always coloured with the past.

Perspective is not completely subjective. Schinkel writes:

From Whitehead's claim that 'the subject emerges from the world' it follows that a perspective is never completely subjective. An individual's perspective is constituted by the position this individual has in the world, by the place he or she occupies in the spatio-temporal network of events internal and external to his or her body. So the perspective is unique to this subject, but therefore not purely subjective. A perspective arises from both objective and subjective factors. (18)

The subject emerging from the world implies that the objective reality is itself contained in the subject, and the past lies within the present. What is inferred is that a perspective is objective reality moulded in the matrix of one's subjectivity. That

further implies, what a subject is now has its causes in the past, in history – what Carr calls ‘the product of history’.

One comes to the point that writing history is tracing one’s own identity, which then, even though altered sometime back in the past, becomes “objective immortality” (Schinkel 17). The historical events of the past are now objects for the historian, and have become unalterable facts with importance in and for the future. Besides, they are now analysed in different angles, presented and represented in different perspectives, thus form different narratives.

For E. H. Carr, “History therefore is a process of selection in terms of historical significance. To borrow Talcott Parson’s phrase once more, history is ‘a selective system’ not only of cognitive but of causal orientations to reality” (105). It seems history goes mid-way between concrete fact and imagination; this resembles the functioning of metaphor. According to Aristotle, “Mid-way between the unintelligible and the commonplace, it is metaphor which most produces knowledge.” The concrete fact is commonplace, and the imaginative aspect creates the complexities: narrative mode is significant in history.

The historian himself is also a determining factor. His roots and identity, his background and outlook, the ideology he follows etc. influence and shape his writing of history. Carr says, “The historian, before he begins to write history, is the product of history” (40). So, history comes before the historian, and he just renders his own self, or the making of his self.

Contemporary literary theories, like postmodernism and postcolonialism, have brought history and literature still closer, or, we can say the two are now more deeply interfused. History penetrated into postcolonial literatures; and literature came to be

recognised in history through postmodern approaches and analyses. The points on which problems would rise were: truth (fact) and fiction (imagination); historical narrative and fictional narrative.

With the blurring of genres, intertextuality and uncertainty of truth, the disciplines of history and art (literature) at least overlapped, if not superimposed. Literature now draws from many disciplines; and style and language have got prominence in historiography also.

Richard Evans holds that writers like Roland Barthes would deny any distinction between truth and fiction, for history was essentially a form of literature and not a science. According to Evans, Barthes would regard every historical account as a construct arising from a dialogue between the historian and the past, the same view as put forth by E. H. Carr. This implies that narrative and subjectivity are constituents of history.

F. R. Ankersmit, while being on Hayden White's side, further corroborates and approves aestheticism in historiography. He concentrates on historical language and its functions in historiography. According to him, historical language has the same opacity as we associate with things in reality. He also presents the view that historians in their theoretical reflections take historical language as part of reality itself and the other way round. He writes: "When the dichotomy between language and reality are under attack, we are not far from aestheticism. Does not both the language of the novelist and of the historian give us the illusion of a reality, either fictitious or genuine?" (8). Ankersmit further substantiates his views by referring to Gombrich who, according to him, in his work holds that the work of art, which in other words is the language of the artist, is not a mimetic reproduction of reality but a

replacement or substitute for it. Language and art are not situated opposite reality but are themselves a pseudo-reality and are therefore situated within reality.

According to Ankersmit, content is a derivative of style. As historical views are incommensurable, historians concentrate on the style embodied in every historical view. He holds that wherever style and content might be distinguished from one another, we can even attribute to style priority over content. Ankersmit refers to Gay: “. . . in the words of Gay, “manner”, style, implies at the same time a decision with regard to “matter”, to content” (9).

Ankersmit proposes a characteristic feature of statements which he calls ‘intentional context’. Such a type of context makes the form of a statement as important as the content. Referring to Danto, Ankersmit also holds the view that this intentional nature of statements is clearer in literature where the writer has to choose a particular and appropriate style also. And, it is because of this, we have formalism, Eliot’s impersonality theory, I. A. Richard’s theory of value and ontology of the text like concepts and approaches in literary criticism and theory where style and language are analysed.

According to Ankersmit, literary texts share this feature with historiography. He writes:

And this is a feature which the literary text shares with historiography; for the nature of the view of the past presented in an historical work is defined exactly by the language used by the historian in his or her historical work. Because of the relation between the historiographical view and the language used by the historian in order to express this view – a relation which nowhere intersects the domain of the past –

historiography possesses the same opacity and intentional dimensional as art. (10)

So, what Ankersmit does, he delineates the close relationship between history and literature on the level of language, style and narrative. This also clears way for historical events being analysed as metaphors and allegories, at least in historical novel. However, Ankersmit holds that even in historiography the metaphorical dimension is more powerful than the literal and factual ones. He says, "...there is reason to assume that our relation to the past and our insight into it will in future be of a metaphorical nature rather than a literal one" (17). Metaphor is the way of literature and art. Its being effective depends highly upon the language used, style and structure. It produces knowledge independent of its basic content. And, it is always atemporal and ahistorical.

So, one can understand how much scope is there in historiography for literature and narrative. And, when historical events are used as content in fiction, obviously style and structure gain priority over the factual nature of the events. In fact the events as used in fiction are judged and analysed with respect to other versions and interpretations of the past. Here also, the dialogue between the novelist and his subject matter gains one's attention, for the novel is a construct produced by him.

Hayden White is very much known for changing approaches to historiography; he gave a new turn to the historical thought by giving a prominent place to imagination and form (language) in the writing of history.

His formalist approach to history gives a pattern to it, a structure and form that contain the meaning. Thus language goes figurative and metaphoric in historical

narrative. Not only metaphor, White enumerates metonymy, synecdoche, and irony in history also. His theory of the tropes takes history very close to literature, an art.

Hayden White understands the historical work to be ‘a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose structure’. So it is a historical novel or for that matter the novel in general: a novel also is a verbal structure. The novelist chooses its form and structure according to the content and beneath his perspective and presentation is a discourse in narrative mode. And, that is a very effective way of forming a discourse which does not intersect and transverse the novelist’s point of view. What finally emerges from all this is that style becomes primary in fictional narrative and so it is in historical narrative. As, a novelist conveys his meanings and messages through his style, so does a historian; his historical style predetermines the way he proceeds, his way of explanation and stance - social, political and cultural. Hayden White contends: “But in general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (Tropics 82).

According to Hayden White, fact and fiction are in a continuum, for the process of fusing events, real and imaginary, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process. In other words, both the novelist and the historian require a potential like secondary imagination of S.T. Coleridge which is esemplastic and fuses things as in metaphor. And, White also holds the opinion that “. . . the historian has to constitute the facts by the choice of the metaphor by which he orders the world” (Tropics 47). One of the outcomes of White’s argument is that style is prominent in history in the same way as it is in literature. As for White, style predetermines the way the historian proceeds, how he

explains historical events, and what political stance he takes. Giving so much importance to language and style in the writing of history, White seems to say the same thing in historiography as Eliot and Richards say in literature, or as the critics in New Criticism hold. We need to find everything in the text and its texture and structure. The use of language becomes a source of (epistemology) meaning and explanation. Finally, one gets at the point that content and form are correlated in literature, and history as well.

Literature has recourse to history for the usage of many historical events as metaphors and allegories. For instance, the postcolonial novel, and historical novel itself, uses historical sources to suggest many things that go beyond history. What people say, the purpose of history lies beyond history, literature takes history closer to that purpose. It is through literature that one views a historical event more than itself in different angles; one can go beyond the boundaries of history to understand that event in other dimensions which are not possible in history.

The point is, literature has recourse to history, and history has recourse to style and narrative for the same purpose. It is the historical style that gives one some width and freedom to roam in different quarters of suggestiveness. The poetic process of fusing events can be achieved through style.

As perspectives and perceptions differ, styles differ. And, the implication is that a single historical event is presented in different angles, which in turn gives rise to many different understandings and analyses. Considering the example of the burning of the Rosenbergs, and the presentation of the same historical event in Doctrow's *The Book of Daniel* and Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*, it is

understood that there is no history but narrative. This means the actual and exact happening gets lost, and the writer's style and perspective get prominence.

Hayden White's metahistory is against the positivistic notion of history. This sounds like I.A. Richards' opposition of logical positivism in literature. Through the theory of tropes, White gives history what Richards gave to literature. And, White himself says in an interview, "I only used the concept of tropes metaphorically. It is not supposed to be taken literally" (4).

So, his use of tropes itself is metaphoric and not literal. First he imposes the formalistic pattern of tropes on history, and then he terms his use of tropes metaphoric. That way he distances history twice from positivism, and it goes two bounds close to literature through language. Tropes and metaphors are linguistic constructions; they demand more than information and knowledge on the part of the historian. Subsequently, they lead one beyond historical knowledge and information of facts and dates.

What a literary critic gets, besides many other things, is that form is prominent in history as it is in literature. And, form and content function in correlation to each other, or it can be said that form is a part of the content, for through presentation the historian produces his truth and meaning. As, according to Hayden White, "To choose the form is already to choose a semantic domain", ultimately, through the use of narrative, which is not informed with logic, history gives some scope to fiction also. Generation of knowledge produced through facts, and fictionalisation of historical events are ingredients of history writing. White says: "What is the "fictional function" in non-fictional discourse, or in discourse which tries to be non-fictional? Because anyone who writes a narrative is fictionalising" (Interview 8). That is, just like E.H.

Carr, White endorses fictional elements in a discourse that is generally supposed to be free from them. And, fiction in turn implies subjectivity and the historian's own creativity. These things pin down on ideology and perspective. Ideology and perspective are not a moment's making; hundreds of years of experiences make one ripe to adopt an ideology and to develop a perspective on worldly issues. And, experiences are always subjective, and effects of many known and plenty of unknown factors, hundreds of big events and thousands of pretty small ones.

Literature is not so much concerned with the physical events, facts, dates and statistical information as it is concerned with effects, feelings and the context. Literature is not there to give one knowledge and information that has been derived through empirical means and experimentation. It shows the effects of objective events on one's subject vis-a-vis the environment and the unfamiliar context that always lingers around the events, latent and concealed. In other words, it shows the effects and consequences of the past upon one's self. And, the past itself is in haze and smudges; it cannot be recovered intact. White says:

It's impossible to legislate the way people are going to relate to the past because, above all, the past is a place of fantasy. It does not exist anymore. One can only study it by way of things that have been left as effects; the events of history by definition are not replicable. We cannot repeat it as you can repeat physical events in a laboratory. You cannot replicate - by definition - historical events. They are no longer perceivable. So they cannot be studied empirically. They can be studied by other non-empirical kinds of methods; but there is no way of finally determining what the best theory for studying and guiding research in history is. (Interview10)

The statement, “One can “only” study it (history, the past) by way of things that have been left as effects . . .” is of immense importance for my study of Vassanji’s use of history in his fiction. What Vassanji renders through his fiction is not more than effects of the past. A novelist does not need physical events reproduced in empirical ways. He presents the effects and consequences of the past upon some people in some context in his perspective formed under some ideology.

The postcolonial novel exploits history and historical events very extensively. It also points out the effects of colonialism and imperialism upon people in a particular perspective. The diasporic writings also show the effects of the past events, migration, the zone of contact where one’s culture touches the other’s, the immigrants’ relation with their origins and roots, the dilemma their new generations face – all these are effects of the past. And, they are presented through narrative.

The past exploited in the novel is not in itself intact, pure and just physical events repeated empirically; it is, as according to White, a place of fantasy where the novelist- historian works to recreate it through the effects it left upon his subject – his imagination is the prime force in that domain. Subsequently, the historical events thus used in the novel function rather differently – at least we expect them to be ingredients of the narrative not as mere physical events which do not lead one beyond them. They are figures of speech and structures of language. They are metaphors, metonymies and allegories. They are a different discourse which is very much influenced by culture as well. Through the writing of fiction where Vassanji goes back into his past in India, or he recreates and chooses his past world in India and East Africa, he gives a basis to his ideological position from which he views his diasporic relationship with these regions and cultures, and thereby asserts his freedom to choose his past and the world he belongs to.

As Vassanji renders the effects of the past, he certainly points at the causes also. Thus, in a sense, he gives a cause-effect relationship, and he ultimately reduces his world to agents and agencies that are presumed to exist behind it. He often blames some unknown factors for these effects. All this lies in the semantic domain of metonymy, as explained by Hayden White (Introduction 35).

So, in historiography, as in literature, effects are significant. History can be the presentation of effects of the past; literature is the presentation of effects of various events and other factors on humans. It is wisely said that where there is no narrative there is no history, and narrative runs through literature in all its parameters also.

Fiction is a world created just in word, i. e. language. It is created by manipulating language through the play of one's imagination. Or, it's the play of language inspired by imagination. Whether earth ever meets the sky or not, who knows empirically. But there has always been the horizon. And, the horizon is a reality. Fiction provides us with an alternative reality, an alternative world that exists in itself. According to Ewa Domanska, "[Hayden] White is aware that since humans "discovered" the world of fiction, the truth started to be thought rather than lived." The implications of these statements can be aesthetization of reality, in fiction or in history.

The historian, according to Hayden White, also excludes content and structural elements; he gives prominence to certain other elements. This presenting on a particular line, deliberately and artistically, is common in the writing of fiction and that of history. Emplotment, as termed by White, is the handiwork of the historian as well as the novelist. The novelist chooses and selects so that the content and the form are in concord to give the intended meaning fully, and suggest interpretations beyond

language. As the novelist uses different structural elements to suggest and convey meaning, so the historian employs, according to White, some formalistic techniques like ideology, tropology and argument to impart meaning and historical knowledge – ultimately the historical truth.

Vassanji delineates his identity, his world and his self by writing who he was or has been. He traces his roots and origins in India and East Africa and, thus, shows how his world extends across cultures and nations. As according to Ewa Domanska, “Men choose who they are by choosing who they were.” Thus Kellner interprets White’s notion of freedom as “to choose a tradition is to belong to it” (7).

Vassanji writes the history of his ancestors in India and in Africa, as such, he belongs to these cultures and traditions. Or, at least, he does his best to belong to them. Simultaneously he discovers his own self; or, he relocates his self in India and Africa, and finally he is nowhere in an in-between world though he carries these worlds within him. So, they emerge on his unconscious and flow out as memory and reminiscences. He retrospects his past, thus chooses his past as much as his memory allows him, which in turn makes his present. The point is that Vassanji does have recourse on history and the past. He does it through fiction; he discovers the power of imagination; creates or recreates his own world, rather revisits and relives his own home and nation. In that alternative world of his, he chooses his past and (re)constructs his present. That is exactly what, according to Hayden White, the historian does while writing history.

The most crucial and significant aspect that Hayden White suggests and propounds is the emplotment. According to him, the historian makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating

others. He terms process of exclusion, stress and subordination as emplotment. And, this stance of his is further reinforced by the opinion that “every history, even the most ‘synchronic’ or ‘structural’ of them, will be emplotted in some way” (Introduction 8). Emplotment in the writing of history is the vantage point to view historiography when brought to juxtaposition with fiction, especially the novel; this allows us much width to interpret history on different levels, and subsequently paves way for multidimensional interpretations in which historical narrative plays a great role. Thus, style along with the tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony make the complete semantic domain of ‘the verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse’ (Introduction 2). White says, “. . . we grant that it is one thing to represent ‘what happened’ and ‘why it happened as it did,’ and quite another to provide a verbal model in the form of a narrative, by which to explain the process of development leading from one situation to some other situation by appeal to general laws of causation” (Introduction 12). It somehow sounds like the principle of Probability and Necessity suggested by Aristotle as the stronghold (building principle) of the plot of a ‘fictional narrative’. That process of development in consonance with the general laws of causation is nothing less than the plot of a literary structure. So, whatever be the factual outline of a history, it contains a well developed narrative that can be assessed and analysed on literary and stylistic levels. The tropological mode in which the historian writes determines the semantic level he chooses to operate on. And, doing so, aesthetics is a way of epistemology in history as well. Assessing on these lines, what according to White is the historian’s problem is: “...to construct a linguistic protocol, complete with lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic dimensions, by which to characterise the field and its elements in his own terms...and thus to prepare them for the explanation and representation he will subsequently offer

of them in his narrative” (Introduction 30). The thing that aestheticises this process more is that this preconceptual linguistic protocol is essentially prefigurative in nature, and thus, the tropological mode in which it is presented characterises it. Being prefigurative is to be poetic. Figurative language contributes to style and structure. That way the event itself goes beyond its being to furnish different semantic lines, which can be worked out through analysing the poetic language (and form) of the verbal structure. So, in the words of White, “In short, the theory of tropes provides us with a basis for classifying the deep structural forms of the historical imagination in a given period of its evolution” (Introduction 31).

Vassanji’s use of history in his narratives is his tactics and strategy, his manipulation of history, where he plays politics to reconstruct ‘his lost world’ in East Africa that he claims to be his home, or his lost home. Vassanji writes in “The Postcolonial Writer: Myth Maker and Folk Historian”, “The writer must write if only to create that lost world – for whatever reason – which soon exists nowhere but only in memory” (*A Meeting of Streams* 66). He regards the writer as the “preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker” (*Meeting* 63). So, by recreating the past which exists in the writer’s memory, he preserves the tradition of the group he belongs to. In other words, it can be said, that he represents that group and renders its identity as drawn out of his personal unconscious. Does it mean the writer’s personal unconscious establishes the group’s collective unconscious?

Vassanji himself admits the taxing research he does for his writing. He even says that his writing is also ‘reading’, for he reads a lot to write. That means he learns information and knowledge from books; where does memory play its role? Narrating his stories in retrospection and as coming out of the narrator’s memory is just a narrative strategy. And it is as immensely effective as his manipulation of history.

Applying Jung's psychological principles, Vassanji manages to give the reader an impression that the narratives are personal and collective unconscious, so, true and real experiences. That way a genuine and authentic identity of the community can be established. He says in an exchange with Chelva Kanaganayakam:

. . . when the people of East Africa read my novel [*The Gunny Sack*], I'm moved by their response. They identify with it. They recognise that their past had something important in it; they acknowledge it. Up to now they have had the usual immigrant syndrome – that is, when you arrive here, you forget the past. When *The Gunny Sack* was read, there was tremendous response – something that I never imagined when I was writing it. Once they acknowledge the past, the past becomes real.
(Kanaganyakam 25)

Who does Vassanji mean by “the people of East Africa”? His own community in the region, or his people dispersed in Europe and North America? Does not he mean the Blacks? However, the Blacks of East Africa do not “acknowledge” “his” past. There are responses in literary world against his representation of the African and his claim to East Africa as his “home”. In yet another interview with Shane Rhodes, Vassanji says something different:

I do not see the novels as capturing African-Indian history. I just wrote the novels to investigate certain aspects of the life that I knew. The intent was not to write a history but to use history and to see what happens to a certain group of people over a certain period of time. Each of the novels forefronts a narrator so as to indicate that this ‘history’ you are reading has been focused through a certain individual prism; in

this way, for me, the process of trying to understand the past, of featuring characters who are in the process of reconstructing it, is an important part of my fiction. (SCL/ELC 117)

History focused through a certain “individual prism” cannot preserve the “collective traditions.” And, Vassanji’s intension is not to write history as such, but to “use” history. His manipulation of history is taken up by Godwin Siundu in and Peter Simatei in their research papers.

II

Vassanji writes the liminal space that the immigrant occupies. He subverts the European notions of history which value “the pure” and “the intact”. He evolves a temporal lineality to a spatial plurality with special reference to a place as, Kenya, Tanzania, America and Canada. By invoking history to explore how it affects certain people, he traces hybridity in the present. As Wilson Harris contends that cultures must be liberated from the destructive dialectic of history, and imagination is the key to this. As explained earlier through many historical philosophies, writing of history is so flexible as to come closer to fiction writing. Giving his account of his urge of writing in *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*, Vassanji says that he has chosen “the way of history and fiction” to discover his self that he finds in an in-between world, in a liminal space. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin say, “. . . the recent approaches [to postcolonial theory] have recognised that the strength of postcolonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridised and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies” (36-37). That is the world which Nurdin obtains in *No New Land* after Missionary has exorcised the past and rendered it ineffectual; the world in East Africa where these immigrants are both

Indian and African. Answering a question about his identity, Vassanji says, “I see myself as an Afro-Asian” (Kanaganyakam21). But he does not see any obvious merging of these two cultures, and continues, “Our Indianness was already transformed by the Africanness” (21). So, his view of East Africa is a place where a confluence of three streams: colonial, Indian and African, happens, but with a ‘difference on equal terms’. That is how Vassanji falls in postcolonial tradition, or in more concise terms ‘the immigrant genre’. He mostly deals with migrations and issues associated with them like, confronting new worlds unprepared, problems of assimilation, racism in multicultural societies, nostalgia for home, memories of the past et cetera.

Referring to Rosemary Marangoly George’s *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*, postcolonial fiction is generally taken as ‘the immigrant genre’ in the west (172). However, though the immigrant genre emerges out of the global history of colonialism, postcolonialism encompasses much more than what this genre carries in its scope. It is actually a sub-genre of postcolonialism. Rosemary writes,

What happens to the category of ‘postcolonial literature’ after this sub-category of the immigrant genre is carved out of it? Rather than shrinking, the category of “postcolonial literature” would expand to include all twentieth-century literature produced from any location that is informed by the dynamics of colonialism. Under this rubric, all literary texts that unsentimentally interrogate the seductive pleasures of “feeling at home” in homes, genders, a specific race or class, in communities and nations, could be read as “immigrant fictions”. By expanding the parameters of the “postcolonial”, one recognises that no

single formulation, however elastic, can do justice to this vast terrain. Locating literature within global English is only one project among the many possible discussions on postcoloniality. (197)

Though writings of the immigrant are not exclusively postcolonial, the immigrant literature does come in this category of literary output. The immigrant is one manifestation of history of colonialism. There are other manifestations also. The literatures of the people native to postcolonial spaces are also postcolonial. Postcolonialism is even a reading strategy.

The fiction of Vassanji is distinguished in the sense that it is different from other settler literatures and immigrant writings. Indians in East Africa enjoyed a privileged status in the colonial order, and were made subject to repression by the natives only after they gained political power. They became easy victims of political dissent and many pitfalls of national consciousness like, “those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period”, in Frantz Fanon’s terms. And, to make the matter complex, the literatures of the natives neglect Asians; their other writings show the treatment given to Asians at the hands of Africans as complementary to the end of colonialism in East Africa for they collaborated with the colonial powers and helped expand colonial hegemony in the region.

Such things are related to the apolitical stance of the immigrant, and the wide gaps in cultural interactions together with racial and ethnic prejudices and conflicts prevalent in a place like East Africa. Nevertheless, Vassanji’s fiction belongs to the immigrant genre with some postmodernism in novels like *The Book of Secrets* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*.

III

The point of my concern is how much valuable and crucial is narrativity (and narrative) in the representation of reality, exactly as discussed by Hayden White in his essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”. The elements and components of narrative are discussed by Gerard Genette, and its generalisation and universalisation is confirmed by many narrative theorists. However, it is a fact that narrative is informed by culture and society. So, many cultural aspects which are unique to some society get their place in narrative. As such, the narrative in the postcolonial and diasporic novel is unique in itself. To explain the point, these novelists use, for instance, magic realism as a narrative technique or, as Vassanji uses oral history. To reinforce this particularity of the narrative in the postcolonial novel, these novelists have historicised their works. The use of history pins down these narratives to some specific places and time as well as specific contexts.

The use of the first person pronoun “I,” and autobiographical mode is common to these fictions. Thus, the novelists participate in the phenomena of colonial history or diasporic lives through their consciousness that they render in their fictions. They render their first hand experiences, their feelings and their own consciousness. However, generally, narrative is supposed to be in the third person pronoun, and “I,” “you” are pronouns of a “discourse”.

Narrative is certainly informed by the story teller’s making; his being, his position with reference to his past and present, his socio-cultural position, racial and ethnic backgrounds; it is in fact informed even by his age and experiences. A child’s narrative must contain “bat,” “doll,” “apple” and “birds” like words, its style must be

immature, simple and crude. A learned man's narrative definitely contains his knowing and learning; narrative is highly personal and subjective.

The structure of Vassanji's novels seems to be determined by certain historical periods and historical content. He has some historical time in mind, and he gives form to his content accordingly. The structures of *The Gunny Sack*, *The Book of Secrets* and *Amriika* substantiate it more clearly; *Uhuru Street* gives the fragmented life of these immigrants in Africa – it has a cyclical structure but in pieces and fragments. In *The Gunny Sack* Vassanji gives many events and incidents with as many displacements related to colonial and postcolonial Africa, episodic in nature, but the 'gunny' acts as the most unifying strategy. Likewise, there is a story within a story in *The Book of Secrets*. And *Amriika* has three parts associated with three different and discreet periods of history. Answering a question about *The Gunny Sack* not being like a traditional realistic novel, Vassanji says, "First I have a story in my mind. And then I deal with how it is going to be told. And then I go on to structure, and structure in my case comes later. I do not try to fit a story to a structure. What I try to do is [to] fit a structure to a story – or connected stories" (Kanaganyakam23). That means, in Vassanji, content takes a form. It implies, he cannot change the content, but he can find out an appropriate form that fits "his" content. That means, in Vassanji, content determines form. The stories in his narratives have a level of discourse; the most acute aspect of which is political. It is there all through his fiction. In an exchange with Susheila Nasta, he says:

. . . I could name the country. I could name the political leaders. I could name actual events which many other African writers have not been able to do or have refused to do. In that sense the novel becomes very political because it obviously has a stand on real political events and

real political figures.... We are what we are now because of certain political decisions made nationally and internationally. (Nasta 72-73)

Through various metaphors, similes, irony and allegory; using a lot of figurative language, basing characterisation on history, and using magic realism faintly, especially in *The Book of Secrets*, Vassanji renders the immigrant life – so complex, complicated and even fragmented with shattered hopes, keen sense of guilt and betrayal – of his community overseas. Vassanji has grievances against these political decisions. This makes “home” a contested site. Through his stories, Vassanji recreates the past to claim East Africa as home, and the people there reject his claims as mere ‘politics of home’. The point, however, is that the political discourse underlying Vassanji’s narratives seems to be the prominent narrative component. It is mostly here where his consciousness appears to be.

IV

A brief history of the countries of East Africa is given herewith.

Kenya: The colonial history of Kenya dates back to the Berlin conference of 1885 when the European powers first partitioned East Africa into spheres of influence in their Scramble for Africa. On July 1, 1895 the U. K. Government established the East Africa protectorate; on July 23, 1920 the colony of Kenya was formed. From Oct. 1952 to 1959 Kenya was under a state of emergency arising from the Mau Mau rebellion against British colonial rule. During this period African participation in the political process increased rapidly.

Kenya became independent on Dec. 12, 1963. Jomo Kenyatta belonging to the Kikuyu tribe and head of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) became the first president. A small but significant leftist opposition party, the Kenya People’s Union

(KPU), was formed in 1966, led by Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, belonging to Luo tribe. The KPU was banned shortly after and its leader detained. No new opposition parties were formed after 1969, and KANU became the sole political party. At Kenyatta's death in Aug. 1978, Vice President Daniel arap Moi became the president.

Uganda: In 1888 the British government gave the British East Africa Company control of Uganda. In 1890 Germany and Britain signed an agreement confirming that Uganda was in the British sphere of influence. In 1894 the British government made Uganda a protectorate.

Uganda became independent from Britain on Oct. 09, 1962. The first constitution was federalist. The first president was Mutesa, King of Buganda, and the first prime minister was Milton Obote.

However, Obote had no intentions of sharing power with the president. In 1966 he staged a coup and the president fled abroad. Obote became a dictator. And, in January 1971, when Obote was in Singapore attending a meeting, Idi Amin staged a coup.

There were about 72000 Asians in Uganda in 1972, many of them shopkeepers and businessmen. Amin gave them 90 days to leave the country. To distract attention from the terrible economic situation resulted from the Asian Exodus, Amin decided to invade Tanzania on October 30, 1978. However, the war turned into a disaster for Amin. Early in 1979 the Tanzanian armies invaded Uganda and Amin's forces fled.

Tanzania: In 1885 the Germans began taking over the region of Tanganyika. They were led by Karl Peters who formed a company called the German East Africa Company. Meanwhile the British had taken control of Zanzibar. In 1890 Britain and

Germany signed a treaty thereby dividing the area between them. Britain took Zanzibar and Germany took mainland Tanzania. In January 1891 the German government took direct control of Tanzania. However, from the start the Germans faced resistance in Tanzania. The first uprising was the Abushiri revolt of 1888. From 1891 to 1898 they fought a war with a people called Hehe. From 1905 to 1907 was the Maji Maji rebellion. Africans were forced to work on cotton plantations and eventually southern Tanzania rose in rebellion. At least 100000 people died as a result of fighting and starvation.

When German armies surrendered in November 1918 at the end of the World War One, Tanzania fell in the hands of the British. In 1953 Julius Nyerere was elected president of the Tanganyika African Association. In 1954 it was renamed the Tanzania African National Union. Tanzania became independent on December 09, 1961 with Nyerere as the Prime Minister. On December 09, 1962 Tanzania became a republic and Nyerere became the President.

In 1967 Nyerere adopted a policy of socialism. He made the Arusha Declaration in which he outlined his vision of a socialist Tanzania.

Zanzibar: In 1698 Zanzibar fell under the control of the Sultanate of Oman which developed an economy of trade and cash crops with a ruling Arab elite. In 1832 Sultan Seyyid Said moved his Sultanate from Muscat to Zanzibar. In 1890 Zanzibar became a British protectorate.

Zanzibar gained independence from Britain in December 1963 as a constitutional monarchy. A month later, the bloody Zanzibar Revolution, in which several thousand Arabs and Indians were killed and thousands more expelled and expropriated, led to the republic of Zanzibar and Pemba. That April, the republic

merged with the mainland Tanganyika and was subsumed into Tanzania of which Zanzibar remains a semi-autonomous region.

V

Derived from Chanan Singh's 'The Historical Background' as contained in *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*, I herewith describe some historical background of Asians presence in East Africa.

Asian presence in East Africa dates thousands of years back, and has stood every blow that came with changes in political situations in the region. Asians had always been interested in trade and commerce and never took sides when there were political crises. They adopted neutrality and managed to continue their activities along the coast.

In the great struggle between Christianity and Islam, the Portuguese destroyed Arab trade systems and established their monopoly. Asians survived. During the German and British colonial rules, they managed to maintain their presence in the region. Chanan Singh writes:

Seyyid Said made explicit and successful efforts to involve Indian traders, administrators and financiers in his ventures. They did not participate on any scale in the push into the interior any more than Indians had done before the arrival of the Portuguese but in Zanzibar itself and on the coast their numbers steadily grew. In 1844 it was estimated that there were some 1200 Asians resident in East Africa; by 1860 there were some 6000. In Zanzibar the key post of Customs Master was almost always held by an Indian in this period, its holder acting as banker and financial advisor to the Sultan as well as being

collector of customs revenue. Indians were the virtual monopolists of retail trade. (3)

With the British and the Germans, the Asian presence increased and reached the interior of the region. The East African territories of the British were extensions of their Indian empire. Some regarded East Africa as a natural outlet for the surplus population in India. Indian administrative system was put in vogue; Indian coinage was made official. Railway lines were constructed with Indian labour. Railways made the interior reachable and the Indian traders started flowing in.

It was because of coercion by the white settlers who used political pressures to achieve economic ends that Asians began to play a part in the political history of the area to safeguard their interests, and old connections with India began to be significant. Consequently, Britain had to see East African politics in the context of Indian nationalism.

There were clashes of interest between the white settlers and Indians. The Highlands of Kenya were exclusively reserved for the Europeans, and Asians were not given franchisee rights. This culminated in white abuse and suspicion of Asians. Concerning Africans, Chanan Singh writes, "As Indians went inland under the umbrella of the colonial power, they came to play additional economic roles and to assume positions hitherto monopolised by Africans themselves. As various African peoples responded to the new economic opportunities, rivalry between them and the Asian businessman and trader was bound to develop" (9). So an economic and incipient political rivalry between Africans and Asians was always there.

Asians have share in the political and economic development of the area. They have been there as opponents to the white settlers and prevented them from making a

government of their own in Kenya. They have also small contributions in nationalist movements of East Africa. Their contribution in the economic development of the region is larger and remarkable.

VI

I have focussed on the ways Vassanji uses to create discourses. He writes as an Asian-African driven out of Africa and living in the west. He builds his personal history on the same plane as that of the history of his community. He invokes the past to negotiate his present, and the present of his community.

That all sums up in his quest for his identity and roots. Thus he reaches his origins in India, claims Africa to be his “home,” sensitivises his consciousness in the west, and does “homecomings” (homegoings) in Africa through his fictional narratives. Semoitically, the structure is as important as the content. These narratives derive meaning from a combination of the structure and the content. Here, narrative functions as theme. Actually, in this case, narrative emerges out of the writer’s thematic preoccupations. Vassanji has many grievances against some forces – the political power of Africans, the World politics and his fate. Consequently, his narratives are analysed in political perspectives also and are shaded with pessimism and cynicism.

I have also taken account of historical narratives which either confirm to Vassanji’s use of historical material or go contrary. I have also included what the “African writers” say. That way I have tried to make clear an alternate history which Vassanji creates to erase, or at least overwrite, the history of Africans, and to rewrite history in his own interest. The structure of the narratives contributes to the general thematic concerns of the writer. History and myth have been used as metaphors,

metonymies and allegories to carry things beyond history. Subjectivity and selection of historical events and facts in historiography, one historical event presented in many ways, negotiation of the past and the present – such concepts have been employed from theories and philosophies of history and historiography.

Terms like “savage,” “black,” “servant,” “slave” et cetera have been used liberally from either Vassanji’s texts or that of the scholars who have evaluated them only to make clear the connotations that these terms convey. “Indian” and “Asian” have been used synonymously.

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