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**Email : [editor@expressionjournal.com](mailto:editor@expressionjournal.com)  
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## A CRITICAL STUDY OF REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY IN *THE OATH OF VAYUPUTRAS* BY AMISH TRIPATHI

Lalita Kangude  
Assistant Professor  
Savitribai Phule Pune University  
Pune, Maharashtra

### Abstract

Many contemporary novelists are seen to be reinterpreting and representing the history in the form of a novel. This combination of history and fiction is one of the most famous trends amongst all the novelists of all the periods in the history of literature. Amongst them some of the noteworthy names are, Sir Walter Scott, Wilbur Smith, Jose Saramago, Umberto Eco, Dan Brown etc. Till the modern period this representation of history in the form of the novel has got a little regulated form. There was a very little scope left for the multiple interpretations of history. Deviations from (alternative account of the significant and recorded historical events) officially recorded history are considered to be a less welcome change. However, things started changing with the emergence of various movements like phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, civil rights movement, black movement etc. In the field of history too, some scholarly voices started raising doubts about the authenticity of the recorded history and 'historical objectivism' as a motive for historiography. Thus, came into existence a new trend of looking towards history, historical revisionism. This particular stance of reinterpretation of history has been used by some popular fiction writers, like Dan Brown, very effectively. As a result, his novel named '*The Da Vinci Code*' became the huge success of the period. In India, this experiment was done by many contemporary novelists. Amish Tripathi, one of the contemporary novelists of this list, has written *Shiva Trilogy*. It became the most successful of all. His all the three novels in this series named, '*The Immortals of Meluha*', '*The Secret of the Nagas*' and '*The Oath of the Vayuputras*', were extremely popular novels of the period. More than one million copies of these novels have been sold till date. These novels are normally considered as a novels belonging to the popular genre and are neglected by critics, scholars and serious academicians. But, the fact is that these novels are having a mass appeal, moreover, they make serious claims while reinterpreting the history in present time, like possibility of humanization of history, feminist outlook and claims about the power relations. The present paper is trying to focus all the above mentioned issues in an elaborate manner to ensure that the popular fiction, which was considered as a relatively nonacademic writing too has a serious line of thinking. If considered seriously it unveils the reflections of most of the contemporary literary theories.

### Key-Words

New Historicism, Reinterpretation of History, Postmodernism, Critical Theory.

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### **Introduction:**

There was a tendency of forgetfulness of the history for some times in the research of humanities and social sciences. This was caused by the influence of science on the research methodology. It was positivism which was claiming the sole right of asserting the truths. Such type of positivism had forgotten the history in its discourse. The main reason for this was the positivist's obsession of objectivity. Objectivity as a feature of the truth is well suited in natural science but due to the nature of social sciences and humanities, it could not hold the key to the truth. Thus, various movements started raising their voice against positivism. This re-acknowledgement of history started with the post-phenomenological development, primarily at the hands of Existential thinker and Phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's predecessor Husserl, promulgated the *epoche* (bracketing) as a tool to arrive at objective, most certain and scientific truth. Whereas, Heidegger in his search of being, founded that 'being is thrown into the world'. It is obvious, being's episteme is constituted by the surroundings in which he is thrown. It implies that the objectivity of the truth is contextual and not context free like in *epoche*. Subject always carries a framework to accumulate the knowledge. Gadamer, following the line of Heidegger, suggests that, without a framework no knowledge is possible. The reason behind such positions is their exposition on ontology- that is 'being is understanding and interpreting'. When being is thrown into the world he achieves his essence through the interpreting via understanding.

These philosophical attempts of the modern philosophy anticipated another

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important movement that is called 'hermeneutics'. It is normally defined as 'science of interpretation'. If every being is contextual and historically constituted then there is a legitimate multiplicity of interpretations. The one interpretation is just impossible even to imagine. Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher, strongly recommends this as a methodology for research in humanities and social sciences. He acknowledges the possibility of conflict of interpretation but says this conflict is resolved dialectically and rival interpretations can be considered as a complimentary to each other. Such philosophical developments caused various attempts to go for interpretation again and again to unveil the truth of the history or any text.

Reinterpretation of history is studied here from postmodern point of view which also legitimizes the plurality of the views and interpretations. However, as far as Gadamer is concerned he takes deviation from important postmodern position on language. Postmodernism says that language is just a system of significations and nothing is outside of the language. According to him language is the medium of being in this world. If being is understanding, since understanding takes place only in language, being is linguistically mediated.

## Section - I

A representation of the history is nothing but trying to present history in a different way. In the postmodern era this representation has achieved tremendous importance as it tries to speak out the hidden details of history. These hidden details once uncovered may give us a different point of view towards our past. Although, it is not going to change the past happenings but it will definitely change one's perspective of looking towards the things around and is going to matter as far as future happenings are concerned.

Basically, history is a very well regulated recorded presentation of happenings. A historian is not supposed to judge the happenings with his/her point of view. S/He is obliged to present the incident as it was happened. This is how the history has been presented throughout the ages. So, normally it became a monotonous and straight way presentation of the events. However, it has been believed that when one tries to present such history in the form of a novel he has to take an extra care regarding as far as the story of the novel is concerned. The novelist is not supposed to alter the significant events of the history under any circumstances. Of course, the imagination has to play its role when the descriptions of a character or dialogues between the characters are concerned, but the crux of the incident was never changed.

However, things started changing with the emergence of various movements like Black movement, Feminism, Civil Rights movement etc. In the field of history some scholarly voices started raising doubts about the authenticity of the recorded history. Pulitzer Prize winning historian James McPherson, writing for the American Historical Association, described the importance of revisionism.

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"The 14,000 members of this Association, however, know that revision is the life blood of historical scholarship. It is containing dialogue between the present the past. Interpretation of the past are subject to change in response to the new evidence, new perspective gained by the passage of time. There is no single, eternal immortal 'truth' about past events their meaning. The unending quest of historian for understanding the past that is "revisionism" is what makes history vital meaningful. Without revisionism, we might be struck with the images of Reconstruction after the American civil war, that were conveyed by D.W. Griffith's the *Birth of a Nation* and Claude Bower's *The Tragic Era*. Were the Gilded Age entrepreneurs 'Captains of Industry' or "Robber Barons"? Without revisionist historians who have done research in new source asked new nuanced questions, we would remain mired in one or another of these stereotypes. Supreme Court decisions often reflect a "revisionist" interpretation of history as well as of constitution."<sup>5</sup>

This view has been shared by many people and everybody started coming out with his or her own interpretations of the events that took place in history. These reinterpretations reflect the persons own understanding of that particular event. This understanding is the result of his/her own way of thinking developed by his/her social, economical and cultural background. Thus, these various reinterpretations gained authenticity as well as a wide acceptance. This particular stance has been supported by many historians too. Thomas Kuhn, the historian and philosopher of science, rightly points it out,

".... in contrast to the science, in which there tends to be (except in times of paradigm shift) a single reigning paradigm, the social sciences are characterized by 'a tradition of claims', counterclaims and debates over fundamentals".

This expanded or extended scope of history offered a chance to each and everybody to express their point of view towards the history. It makes them better understand the undercurrents of past happening which might have resulted into the shaping of their future.

In the field of fiction several contemporary writers started accepting this stance of looking at history from a totally different point of view. They brought together history and fiction. This Fictionalization of history has been practiced by number of novelists throughout the world. The novelists like Umberto Eco practiced this in the novel called *The Name of the Rose*, *Baudolino*. Dan Brown did it in the novels like *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels and Demons* and *The lost symbol*. These novelists tried to challenge the well accepted and established beliefs about the history. They tried to contest the major as well as significant happenings of the history. In order to defend this standpoint Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code* claims that,

"History is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash the loser is obliterated, the winner writes the history books, books which glorify their own cause

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and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, "what is history but a fable agreed upon? By its very nature history, is always a one sided account." " (Brown 340)<sup>2</sup>

All these novels were the tremendous successful novels of contemporary period. Millions of copies of these novels have been sold and a huge number of people were deeply influenced by them.

## Section - II

Now, as far as India is concerned, the same experiment that has been done by Amish Tripathi in *Shiva Trilogy*. Amish has written 3 books named – *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. Now to be specific, I have chosen the third and last book of this Trilogy called *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. The book was released on 27 Feb, 2013 through Westland press and completes the mythical story about an imaginary land Meluha and how the locals has been saved by a nomad named Shiva.

Now, the experimentation that I talked before which I largely observed in this novel is, Amish has humanized the well established Gods of Hinduism. Shiva, the main character of the novels, which is the most important God of Hinduism, has been shown in the form of a human, who has all the feelings and emotions of a common human being. He has been shown doing all the worldly tasks that a common man would do. He is fighting for 'Good' and against evil and planning all the strategies that a good warrior would plan. He has shown as a great warrior who has declared a war against evil i.e Somras, for the betterment of the society at large.

People who were accompanying him are Sati, Gopal (Chief of a cult called Vasudevas), Ganesh, Kartik, Brahaspati, Bhagirath and so on and so forth. In his opposition there were emperor Daksha, Bhrgu the great sage, Parvateshwara etc. The novel, very interestingly, depicted the war between these two sides in which ultimately Good wins over the Evil. In the novel Amish showed all the great deities in Hinduism, in the form of humans. This is nothing but a trivialization of the history, especially a religious history, which can be considered as a highly objectionable task by several traditional historians.

This novel of Amish Tripathi became exceptionally famous and had millions of copies sold till date. *Hindustan Times* praised it and compared it directly with the '*Lord of the Rings*'. Thus, as an academic person, I tend to think about the reasons behind in success. Such a huge number of people have enjoyed this novel, which simply means the novel has influenced as well as appealed them somewhere. The philosophical issues that Amish discussed throughout the novel have also played one of the major roles in the success of the novel. The novel which definitely belongs to the category of popular fiction not only entertains the people but educates them too. Amish has been elaborately and convincingly discussed the crucial issues like gender discrimination, caste system, racial matters etc. He provides the reasons for every claim that he made which is why his claims remained convincing and are also accepted by his readers.

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At one place in the novel he claims that, "Anandmayi: Parvateshwar, there is your truth and there is my truth. As for the universal truth? It does not exist."

Parvat-: "The universal truth does exist though it has always been an enigma to human beings. And it will continue to remain an enigma for as long as we are bound to this mortal body." (Tripathi 59)<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion:

Based on Michel Foucault's philosophy New Historicism started as a new stream in literary criticism. This has a certain lineage to hermeneutics, started from Dilthey and Heidegger. Literature is not a distinct character than history but it is part of the history in the sense that history plays major role in the giving birth to any literary piece of art. This attempt of reinterpreting the history shows affinity to the category of hermeneutics mentioned by Paul Ricoeur- 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'. The element of suspicion is the real stimuli for reinterpreting the history. There is great amount of mistrust in the established history. The truth brought to us by the established history is disguised. So, hermeneutics of suspicion rejects the given history and tries another way to look at it which is fresh and critical enough. This is precisely done in New Historicism.

Applying the tool of interpretation is new practice as far as Indian mythologies and historical facts are concerned. Humanization of history in case of Indian history has so many challenges to face. But, western postmodern movements have shown the importance of critical look at the history for restoration of human dignity and for better progress of humanity. Displacement of binaries and relooking at power structures and political set up of given history is essential paradigm for various social awakenings in the society. It creates the culture of critical thinking where ideologies and hidden interests are exposed. This is done very well by assuming the possibility of multiplicity of interpretations. In order to do this it is necessary to accept that truth is dynamic concept and not a static one. Once it is established as static concept the ideology formulates and hegemonic practices automatically erupt.

This proves that the text is the product of the history and play of meaning in the text is rooted in the history. Similarly, text also becomes the influential constituent of the history. If we look at the text from these perspectives the image of the history appears differently than the given one and it will show the microscopic image of the roots of various contemporary social issues.

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