

## History as a Statement of Politics

We divide time into two phases- Time we have captured in written words as historic, and time that is largely unwritten about as pre-historic. On the practical level History is traced through the birth and destruction of kingdoms, life stories of distinguished personalities and episodes of battles or revolutions. Various such 'important milestones' of History are considered and a historian connects them, forming a chain of events (that he believes) lead to the present. Historian in this sense is not a chronicler of History but a constructor of it. He determines what to write and what to leave out. A true discourse of the past is a myth. A true history does not exist. A History can only be an interpretation. Even though history is based on existing documents and archeological evidences, it is subjective because each history is a statement of the historian's politics as opposed to a scientific experiment which is objective and free from politics.

Process of writing history acquires importance on this context. Historiography (The art/ science of writing history) becomes an important tool in understanding History. A reading of the History can be done objectively only when you place it in context with the actual process of writing. An understanding of the writing process enables the reader to gain an insight into the politics of the author and the various elements that convinced him to re-construct the past in this particular way. A scientific discourse on the other hand do not require a student to study these subjective elements in order to understand it completely. A scientific experiment produces the same result even if it is performed by another scientist, in another place, during another time. But Histories written by two different historians will not be similar even if it they are based on same historical documents. Hence it is imperative that history should be read with an idea of how it was constructed. Rang De Basanti (Paint me with the colors of spring) is a 2006 Indian film co-written and directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra based on the story by Kamallesh Pandey. It featured an ensemble cast comprising of Aamir Khan, Siddharth Narayana, Soha Ali Khan and R Madhavan. The story is about a British documentary film maker Sue McKinley (Alice Pattern) who arrives in India to make a film on Indian freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad, Rajguru, Ashfaqulla Khan, and Ram Prasad Bismill. She was inspired by the diary entries of her grandfather who served as a jailer in the British police during the Indian Independence movement. Captivated by the story of the young revolutionaries who died with a smile on their lips she sets out to trace their history through her medium-film. Bhagat Singh and his comrades are major historical figures for a historian who subscribes to the Indian version of History. A British woman is taught another version of history, one that is written by British historians and fed to her in schools and colleges. The patriots among the colonized are terrorists in the books of the colonizer. While the historical facts remain the same, each discourse of

of the Jewish master and slave he is breaking away from the accepted modus operandi of a historian.

Sue McKinley and Amitav Ghosh are two strangers in a new land trying to construct its history amongst unconcerned natives. By selecting representatives of the marginalized as protagonists of the discourse they transcend the restrictions of accepted conventions of Historiography.

### **History as a Product of Historiography**

Second aspect that marks this film distinctly different is how it depicts History and the process of constructing history in two parallel narratives. In the first narrative the actual story of Bhagat Singh and his co-patriots are narrated. Second narrative line depicts how the process of film making take place. In effect it presents the past alongside present and blends their boundaries with some inspired scripting and technical fineness.

When Sue McKinley finds her characters in a bunch of college drop-outs they are rather skeptical about her plans. The group headed by Daljit 'DJ' Singh (Aamir Khan) is depicted as aimless youngsters who does not care about their past or future. They are engrossed in the present spending their days and nights partying, spray painting public places and riding bikes recklessly. They don't care about their country's past and are indifferent to the pathetic condition it is right now. They are in love with the carefree life so much that they keep on asking Sue why one would give up his life for a country which is so corrupt, over populated and struggling with unemployment. Initially they make fun of the poetic dialogues they have to utter and keeps on.

Making jibes at their own history. As the process of filming goes further they are drawn more and more into their history and gets evolved as persons too. Till then they had considered history as an isolated piece of discourse that is no longer valid in the present. As they become involved in the process of creating history they understand that past is not past. In *Antique Land* we notice that the writer is not merely describing history, he is an active participant in creating history. He is transacting with at least four different cultures and languages spread across different countries and continents to trace Bomma's life story. What he unearths is not earth shattering discovery. Like Thomas Gray who wrote an elegy for the rude forefathers of the hamlet Ghosh celebrates the uncelebrated. A proper understanding of the life story of Bomma can be made only in relation of the process of Historiography as practiced by Ghosh. The unremarkable life story of Bomma will make no sense in relation to the accepted Historical discourse. After all he has not fought in battles or conquered kingdoms. Ghosh spends considerable time in Egypt to get familiar with ordinary people. *Antique Land* is full of insights about the ordinary life of Egyptian

## Conclusion

In an Antique Land by Amitav Ghosh and Rang De Basanti directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra works on two levels-as works of history and as works on the process of constructing History. By depicting these two genres as parallel narratives and blending them towards the end these art works fulfill the real objective of writing History- a better understanding of the present. Most of the time a writer has a tendency to disassociate History from the present. Present is depicted to be a logical evolution of certain past events. Such a depiction of History is too simplistic and unrealistic. History remains dynamic for two reasons.1. Present is no longer present in the next moment, it gets engulfed by History continuously.2. Even when you study History restricting it to a time frame it keeps on changing according to the political perspective of the Historian. Thus a discourse of history can only be understood in relation to the process of its creation by the Historian. These two works have succeeded in depicting History as a continuum by methodically demolishing the established boundaries of genres to find more accurate and honest ways of narration.

## References

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