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**RESEARCH PAPER****Exploring the Dynamics of Personal and Historical Realities in  
Selected South Asian Postmodern Novels**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the different ways that historical narrative changes in the selected postmodern fiction. South Asian English literature has prominently demonstrated its profound concern with history and its significance in the current global context. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of English novels through Pakistani and Indian authors that are commonly categorized as postmodern historiographic literary metafiction. Postmodern fiction writers typically diverge from the conventional portrayal of historical events. Postmodern fiction writers typically diverge from the conventional portrayal of historical events. This study focuses on four novels: Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. Utilizing textual analysis as a qualitative and descriptive research approach, this study applies Linda Hutcheon's theoretical concept from 1985. These novels employ unique storytelling techniques and multiple perspectives to reinterpret conventional history, challenging the dominance of traditional historical fiction. The study concludes that such novels alter conventional historical narratives by incorporating elements of intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and fragmentation.

**KEYWORDS** Historiographic Metafiction, Linda Hutcheon, Narratives, Postmodernism, South Asian Literature

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**Introduction**

The emergence of postmodernism in the 1970s ignited a debate within the realm of writing. It originated from either apathy for modernity or resentment towards it. It evoked meditation, emotion, and existence with the notion that something had reached its conclusion and finalized, particularly throughout the latter part of the 20th century. Jean-Francois Lyotard coined the term "incredulity towards metanarratives" to describe this trend, which challenges people's thinking and beliefs that rely on assertions of objectivity and reality. It revolutionized the prevailing patterns as it exerted influence across various domains of art, including musical instruments, the study of philosophy, society, architecture, literature, and history. Postmodern theory revolutionized the methodology of historical writing.

In the latter half of the 20th century, some intellectuals and scholars including Linda Hutcheon, Hayden White, Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow pioneered debates on the relationship between history and literature. History is the process of critically analyzing past events in order to understand their significance. Keith Jenkins (1991) states: "History

is a compilation of discussions regarding the world. It is a means of engaging with the world and attributing significance to it, rather than creating it" (p. 20). This research primarily focuses on Linda Hutcheon's seminal work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). Examining the selected works from a historical perspective has utmost significance. Hutcheon refers to the collective genre of postmodern historical fiction as: "Historiographic metafiction employs metafictional strategies to emphasize the fact that recorded history is a human creation, rather than an objective representation of the past" (p. 93). As observing all his argumentation, the selected South Asian texts effectively employ metafictional techniques to challenge and interrogate conventional historical narratives. In her influential work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, the renowned Canadian intellectual Linda Hutcheon (1984) coined the term "Historiographic Metafiction is a form of writing diverges from contemporary history by portraying history as a fabrication and a falsehood" (p. 20).

It contradicts the prevailing notion that history is able to teach in a fair or equitable manner. Postmodern historiographic metafiction establishes a correlation between the functioning of history and the execution of fiction by asserting that any understanding pertaining to history would solely originate from written or fabricated sources, as the past is not an absolute fact that has to be personally experienced by a historian. Brenda Marshall (2013) states in teaching the Postmodern historiographic metafiction is a form of postmodern fiction, challenges the entirety of conventional history:

"Postmodernism is historical. However, not the form of 'History' that makes us believe we can understand the past. Postmodern history involves both narratives and challenges. Whose history is told? On whom name? To what end? Postmodernism is about forgotten histories. Never-before history. Histories are often overlooked, altered, or eliminated. It challenges the idea that history is chronological and predetermined, with a clear pattern for humans to understand. It's about chance" (p. 4).

Pakistani and Indian English fiction writers, including Amitav Gosh, Salman Rushdie, Muhammad Hanif, Khushwant Singh, and Bapsi Sidhwa, incorporate historical metafiction themes in their novels such as *Sea of Poppies*, *Midnight's Children*, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *Train to Pakistan*, and *Cracking India* respectively. Amitav Gosh, a polymath, delves into India's multifarious cultural history via his works of fiction and non-fiction. The majority of his literary works showcase India as an imaginary backdrop, illustrating his profound affection for the nation. Gosh adeptly highlights pressing national issues that require urgent attention and resolution. His art not only showcases his talent, but also reflects his profound dedication to justice, humanity, tolerance, truth, pluralism, national history, and democracy. Furthermore, his primary motifs revolve around utilizing travel as a means to eliminate barriers, which sets him apart as a modern Indian author who is on the same level as English fiction writers of global renown.

Kamila Shamsie, an eminent figure in contemporary literature, skillfully constructs stories that explore the intricacies of national identity and the subtleties of socio-political environments. Her novels, such as *Burnt Shadows*, offer a critical interrogation of today's political regimes and whose plots probe into the nature of cultural legacy and personal subjectivity. In a research study, Duce states in *In Love and War: The Politics of Romance in Four 21st-century Pakistani Novels*. Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, which was shortlisted for the 2009 Orange Prize, covers significant global events over a span of five centuries. These events include the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945, the partition of India and the formation of Pakistan in 1947, and the aftermath of 9/11 in Afghanistan and America from 2001 to 2002 (2011).

Similarly, the powerful storytelling by Khaled Hosseini underlines the value of lived loss in political transformation. This is true with his literary pieces, including the *Kite Runner*, in which the endurance of the human spirit when faced with odds is assertively depicted. Additionally, his position as a UNHCR goodwill ambassador highlights his dedication to promoting and supporting humanitarian efforts. Michael Ondaatje's literary trajectory is characterized by a unique utilization of travel as a recurring theme to untangle the complexities of memory and personal identity. The novel *The English Patient* is a remarkable examination of the pursuit of belonging, surpassing regional limits to address the global endeavor to find a place of belonging.

The selected novels being a postmodern historiographic metafiction, questions the validity of the dominant narrative of traditional history that upholds a particular interpretation of the past. This text challenges the process of turning the past into a narrative by connecting historical events with elements of mythology, imagination, and invented concepts. These specific characteristics make it possible to categorize these novels as historiographic metafiction. The texts diverge from the modernist method of identifying cause and effect and emphasize human relationships, communication, the position of expertise, and indeterminacy.

### Literature Review

The definition of "postmodernism" fluctuates in accordance with multiple interpretations and for this reason; the term has become a stage for confusion and debates among the numerous theorists on the issue. In the present day, the current modernism is either acclaimed or despised, but in truth, naturally represents the present world as well as its relevance in the lives of any individual. As defined by the theorists, Linda Hutcheon, Ihab Hassan, Jurgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, their version of postmodernism is appraised. However, their vision was not enough to explain the precisely movement in absolute quantifiers, as this trend is all the time under implementation, therefore, it is subject to alterations owing to its dynamics.

Olivia (2017) notes in her research study titled *Perspectives on Postmodernism and Historical Fiction* reveals that Ihab Hassan conducted a thorough examination of historical texts to identify the earliest usage of the term "postmodernism." He discovered that Federico de Onís first used this phrase in 1934 in his work "Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana" (p. 233-242). Historiographic metafiction is a concept that became popular in the late 1980s by Linda Hutcheon, a renowned Canadian theorist. In her acclaimed publication, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she asserts that the works, known as historiographic metafiction, are "Popular and well-known novels that, in a paradoxical way, simultaneously assert historical events and figures while being highly introspective" (2003, p. 5). Hutcheon (2003) argues that these novels dismantle every element of the traditional historical narrative fiction they imitate, blurring the distinction between what is factual and what is envisioned.

As a result, they challenge the contemporary method of constructing the past. They adopt the perspectives of insecure individuals that lack independent viewpoints and disregard their own experience, while the conventional subject serves as a dependable means of self-realization and self-narration of one's past. Instead of a singular, recognizable tone, these novels incorporate several narrators, which compel the reader to exert effort in order to derive any meaning. The lack of a narrative distinguishes such fiction. Against the linear record of conventional historical representation, the novel uses anti-linear time sequence and different locations. Novels also include reasonable exposition. An appropriate beginning, middle, or end with customary closure is considered. An arbitrary

end replaces traditional closure. It's important to note that postmodern fiction also challenges ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, and spirituality.

As it is obvious from the name historiographic metafiction is self-consciously subjected to the narration of the past as it combines metafictional elements with three main genres of literature, theory and history. To such extent, "the crossing of boundaries between reality and fiction, myth and history, historiography and historical fiction, individual stories and collective history have become one of the hallmarks of postmodernist historical novels" (2003, p. 5). It challenges the traditional distinction between histories and literatures, as each are intertextual and multilingual constructions. The literary side of history is examined by asking questions concerning old meanings. Hutcheon suggests that historiographic metafiction challenges historical reality by challenging its particular norms. Fictionality and materialization of actual events are implied. Historiographic metafiction explores the underlying truth and falsehood in the past, highlighting the complexity of truth and its numerous interpretations. These novels explore the possibility of conventional reality due to their historical awareness, challenging and revealing the truth. Hutcheon says:

"They have both been shown to be delivered through the force more through credibility than particular forces of objectivity; both have been marked as systems of speech, arriving with their much formalized narrative, not in the rough daily language, and none in the text and not in the designing terminology, in the braiding terminology. They have already been observed to be extremely intertextual, drawing on the text of past networks in its quilt-textuality" (2005, p. 105).

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, published in 1981, marked the emergence of postmodern historiographic metafiction in the Indian literary scene. Several more modern English books also explore other historical events, such as the division of the Indian subcontinent, September 9/11, and World Wars, and colonization. Similarly, the novels *Burnt Shadows*, *Sea of Poppies*, *The Kite Runner*, and *The English Patient* are all classified as historiographic metafiction. These novels explore and comment on many historical events such as the atomic bombings in World War II, the divisions in the Indian subcontinent, and the post-9/11 era, raising important ethical and legal questions. Numerous experts and professors have extensively documented the event as Nunning Ansgarin Crossing borders and blurring genres: Towards a typology asserts:

"A small amount of information indicates that a plane flew over an unprotected city and released a single bomb that was subsequently described along with the number of casualties caused. However, it was clearly abhorrent. Undoubtedly, this marks the beginning of an entirely novel era" (1997, p. 237-238).

## Material and Methods

The current study is characterized by its descriptive nature and qualitative approach by utilizing textual analysis that specifically examines the location, characters and occurrences within these writings. The data consist of four literary works: *Sea of Poppies*, *The English Patient*, *The Kite Runner* and *Burnt Shadows*. The research examines the influence of various historical occurrences on the emotions and responses of characters in specific situations. The chosen texts are analyzed in several components such as sentences, words, idioms, and phrases. This current study utilizes the theoretical concept of Linda Hutcheon (1985).

## Results and Discussion

*The Kite Runner* is a compelling narrative that spans several decades, capturing critical moments in Afghan history from the 1970s through the early 2000s. The novel is set against the backdrop of a changing Afghanistan, starting from the relatively peaceful reign of King Zahir Shah, through the Soviet invasion, the ensuing civil war, the rise of the Taliban, and finally, the post-9/11 reconstruction era. The story is told through the eyes of Amir, a young boy from the Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul. Amir's closest friend, Hassan, is his father's Hazara servant's son.

It seeks to reveal the interesting nature of their friendship by examining their relationship, which is cordial yet, carries a hidden undertone emanating out of their differing ethnic and social classes. The primary motif around which builds the whole plot of the novel is assassination attempt. Thus the victory which Amir wins in the kite contest is not free from betrayal of Hassan who was sexually assaulted while he went to return the kite which belonged to Amir – an incident that is an indelible stain in Amir's conscience and wages a silent war in Amir throughout his life.

The worsening political climate with the invasion of Soviet forces and the start of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan throws Amir and his father out of their home and they move to the United States to live with his uncle, in California. Many years, later, Amir is a man, married, living in America with his own business and prospering as a writer. Nevertheless, the ghosts of his past do not leave him alone and force him to return to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan to face his old fears and atone for his sins. In the course of the novel, Hosseini allows a glimpse behind the curtain of private lives of Afghan people, as they struggle to survive the changes that revolutionized the face of their nation.

The political and cultural changes that the novel portrays are not only limited to the events in the literal Afghanistan but also expand to themes such as redemption, guilt, and sin, which determine the present and future. This novel discards the official version of history and writes its own version of events through the lens of individual memory, narrative ambiguity and metaphorical imagery, thus fostering a much better comprehension of Afghanistan's past. In the novel there is an attempt to emphasize the historical narrative, but due to personal memory of Amir it is impossible to present something completely objective.

The novel begins with Amir's reflection from the year 2001: "I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975", the book undertakes the journey of the creation of the main character" (2003, p. 1). This statement is important on the level of introduction to the character of Amir and his personal guilt, but at the same time, for the way it establishes the subjectivism of the narration and the way events will be further viewed by the reader. This statement is significant not only for its introduction to Amir's character and his personal guilt but also for the way it sets the tone for interpreting the events that follow through a subjective lens. Amir's recounting of his childhood, the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy, and the subsequent rise of the Taliban is all filtered through his personal experiences and emotions.

This subjective take is a critical departure from traditional historical accounts, which often strive for a detached and objective narrative tone. Hosseini uses Amir's personal story to highlight the way individual experiences are contradicted or challenged official historical accounts. The unreliability of Amir as a narrator further contributes to the novel's historiographic metafictional elements. Amir admits to the reader that he has withheld information and only selectively disclosed certain facts, a revelation that comes

to a head when he confesses his betrayal of Hassan, his half-brother and servant's son: "I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. May be Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba" (2003, p. 77).

This confession not only casts doubt on the veracity of his earlier narrative but also mirrors the way historical narratives are often shaped by those who tell them, omitting uncomfortable truths to create a more favorable image of themselves or their nations. Hosseini's use of symbolism, particularly through the kite fighting tournaments, serves as a microcosm of the broader historical and social changes in Afghanistan. The kites, vibrant and soaring, represent the heights of Afghanistan's golden years, as remembered by Amir. However, they also symbolize the cut throat nature of Afghan politics, as kites battle each other viciously, and the last kite flying is seen as the winner at the expense of all others. This is seen as an allegory for the various regimes that have risen and fallen in Afghanistan, each cutting down the other to emerge victorious.

Through its blending of personal narrative with historical event the novel exemplifies historiographic metafiction. The author challenges the traditional, authoritative narrative of history by presenting a story that is colored by personal memory, marked by narrative unreliability, and rich with symbolic meaning. This approach not only provides a more nuanced understanding of history but also invites readers to question the very nature of histories are written and remembered. The text is also a story about forgiveness and redemption, themes that play a crucial role in the way individuals come to terms with their pasts. Amir's journey back to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab, who is suffering at the hands of Assef, is not only a personal quest for redemption but also a metaphor for the potential of national healing and reconciliation. Amir's reflection that "For you, a thousand times over" (2003, p. 2), originally said by Hassan, becomes a guiding principle in his quest for redemption.

The text encapsulates the novel's approach to history: Indeed, people cannot escape from the past though everyone should learn to pay for their sins so that they can overcome their victories in future. Can one question the work of critics who conceived of histories as written as stabilized text, and instead propose histories as ongoing processes that are constituted through the act of memory and acts of redemption?

*The English Patient* is one of the novels that touch upon such themes as the relation between individual histories and the overarching historical narratives based on the narrative technique and linguistic style of the text. In this respect, the novel is considered a metafictional take on history as it explores the construction of history through the oppressors, breaking the traditional historical narrative mold by featuring various characters and the concept of time. This is a powerful and complex novel, which encourages the understanding of the difference and relation between individual and historical memory amid the context of World War II.

The novel fits the definition of historiographic metafiction perfectly because it combines global historical events with the life stories of the characters, thereby demonizing the history from its ostensibly objective and exhaustive perspective. It deals with four main characters, whose paths are coincidentally crossed in an Italian villa during the final stages of the Second World War. The hero of the novel introduced by the title the English patient, is a heavily burned man and a mystery in regards to his personality and background. He goes to the coastal region where he is taken care of by Hana, a young Canadian nurse who decided to remain with him even if practically, the war is near its end. Into their lives come two more characters: Caravaggio, intelligence operative from Canada and a family friend

who is physically disfigured because of the war and Kip, a Sikh, in the British army who is a professional bomb disposal man and he deals with the bombs that the Germans have planted.

The characters are either wounded or have psychological issues related to the physical state of their bodies since the war impacts them significantly. Ondaatje constructs this series of interactions as a means of telling a broader story that encapsulates many individuals' personal experiences while alluding to political and social movements. Count Almasy, an English patient and a Hungarian desert explorer whose true identity, is in constant confusion; his nationality alone is not standard and not definite. His ill-fated romance with the intrepid explorer Katherine Clifton is depicted in a chronological manner, and the centrality of the desert in the male subject's life becomes apparent not only from his interactions with the character of the desert but also through flashbacks illustrating the chronology of his relationship with Katherine. Kip's story highlights the contributions and complex positions of colonial soldiers in the European theater of the war, dealing with themes of loyalty, alienation, and the often overlooked perspectives of non-European participants in the war. Meanwhile, Hana's and Caravaggio's stories explore the personal cost of the war, dealing with loss, grief, and the difficult process of healing and rebuilding in the aftermath.

Through its nonlinear narrative structure and rich, poetic language, *The English Patient* challenges traditional historical narratives by focusing on personal experiences and the subjective nature of storytelling. Ondaatje's novel not only questions who gets to tell history but also highlights the ways in which personal narratives are offered alternative insights into historical events. In doing so, it reveals the deep entanglements of personal histories with the global events of World War II, emphasizing the human dimensions of history that are often lost in broad historical accounts. His use of a non-linear narrative reflects the fragmented and subjective nature of memory, paralleling the uncertain contours of history.

The narrative unfolds through multiple viewpoints, each adding layers to the story's historical context. He notes the fluidity of historical boundaries, "We are communal histories, communal books and all I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps" (1991, p. 261). The text challenges the novel's thematic emphasis on the contractedness of historical and geographical boundaries. Almasy, whose nationality and name remain enigmatic, embodies the complexities of identity during wartime. His affair with Katharine and his identity as a desert explorer symbolize the personal narratives lost in official histories. Ondaatje illustrates this through Almasy's introspection: "I am a desert and a map of legible pain" (1992, p. 139). This metaphor captures his personal and geographic dislocation, challenging the notion of a coherent, unified self or history.

Kip's character represents the colonial tensions within the British Empire. As an Indian sapper who defuses bombs for the British Army, his relationship with the West is fraught with contradictions. Reflecting on the atomic bombings, Kip's disillusionment culminates in his realization of the West's otherness: "These countries stuffed with history... and none of it buried, all peddled" (1992, p. 304). This disillusionment speaks to the shifting allegiances and perspectives that challenge monolithic historical narratives. The desert setting is pivotal, symbolizing the erasure of borders and the ambiguity of historical narratives. It is a space where identities are concealed or transformed, mirroring the novel's exploration of history as a construct. The desert is described as "a place of illimitable emptiness, an outstanding product of bareness" (1992, p. 138), highlighting its role as a blank slate akin to the unrecorded histories the characters embody.

Memory's role is central in the novel where personal recollections intersect with global events. The characters wrestle with their memories, each seeking redemption or closure. Ondaatje reflects on this, stating, "We are the real countries, not the boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men" (1992, p. 256). Contrary to the rule of patriarchal history, this reflection counterpoints the establishment's self-crafted historical accounts and offers a novel historical perspective—that of witnessing. In the novel by Ondaatje, the concepts of the historical novel are subverted: the narrative is not about the significant events of the world that took place in the twentieth century, but the story significantly involves personal histories that became intertwined with the global ones. His metafictional approach to historiography in the novel is exceptionally complex and insightful, and it brings the reader to contemplate the histories as memorized by people, thus creating a critical evaluation of the concept of history.

*Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh is a historical novel that is based in mid-19th century Britain and India and fundamentally revolves around the Opium Wars, which, in a way, were highly influential in paving the way for the onset of British colonization in India and the further enhancement of the opium trade between India and China. It is the first of this trilogy set in 1830, with a multicultural cast of characters connected in a ship called *Ibis* travelling from India to Mauritius. The facts tell that the story is set in 1838, or right before the First Opium War.

The socio-economic relations of colonies, particularly India and the opium trade during the British colonial domination, are the central themes depicted in the novel. As a result of this pressure, farmers are forced to cultivate opium rather than food crops, which has caused many problems, including distress and displacements among rural Indians. This trade carried out under the force of the East India Company, is depicted to have hurt India by enriching only the colonial powers at the expense of native agriculture. The disturbances involve the ship the *Ibis*, which is cast as a representative of the microcosm of the British Empire. It also brings an assortment of cargo—no longer simply opium and trade. However, also a group of indentured coolie passengers en route to Mauritius, which in many ways follows the theme of journey and migration. These are Deeti, a young widow from a village where opium is grown, who is escaping from a horrible family; Kalua, a low-caste ox-cart driver who saves Deeti and escapes with her; Zachary Reid, a mulatto, low-ranking American officer, embarking on the ship as a sailor; Serang Ali, the leader of a detachment of Indian sailors-lascars; and Neel Rattan Halder. Interlinking these political histories with individual tales of hardship, struggle, and identity throughout the novel, Ghosh connects colonialism and trade.

Ghosh keenly describes the linguistic, acculturation, and integration processes that prevailed on the ship and perfectly mirrored the social relations of colonialism at the time. The voyage of the *Ibis* is a journey towards new identities and destinies, forged in the crucible of the colonial era, setting the stage for the unfolding narrative of resistance, adaptation, and survival in the subsequent novels of the trilogy. *Sea of Poppies* is a rich historical tapestry that delves into the depths of the opium trade's impact on India and the lives of its characters, offering a profound exploration of the roots of the Indian diaspora and the complex weave of colonial relationships.

Through its detailed historical setting and compelling characters, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the transformative and turbulent times of the 19th-century colonial era. The novel set at a time when the British East India Company was deeply involved in the opium trade between India and China. Ghosh presents this historical setting not just as a backdrop but as a catalyst for character interaction and plot development. The novel meticulously details the economic and social ramifications of the



trade, illustrating its exploitation and the resultant cultural exchanges. He states, "Opium financed British rule in India" (2008, p. 123), directly linking the personal struggles of the characters to broader historical forces.

The novel's characters – Deeti, Kalua, Zachary, Serang Ali, and others – are drawn from various cultural, racial, and social backgrounds, symbolizing the colonial era's global interactions. Deeti's journey from a simple village woman to a traveler on the *Ibis* is a profound transformation, reflecting broader social changes. Ghosh describes her revelation: "The ship would liberate her from the caste of her birth, and even her religion, making it possible for her to reinvent herself in a new land" (2008, p. 76). This transformation highlights the fluidity of identity in the colonial context. The *Ibis*, a vessel that was previously used for the transportation of enslaved individuals but has now been repurposed for the shipment of opium and afterwards, bonded laborers, functions as a miniature representation of colonial life.

The relationships amongst those who were on the ship demonstrate the intricate hierarchies and social structures of the broader imperial realm. Ghosh employs the ship as a means to investigate concepts of captivity and liberation, subjugation and potential. He writes, "The *Ibis* was a world unto herself, her decks swarming with babel of tongues" (2008, p. 201), emphasizing the ship as a space where diverse narratives and histories converge. The text emphasizes resistance to oppression. Serang Ali, a lascar leader, and Zachary, a freed African American sailor, illustrate contrasting forms of resistance and survival. Their storylines connect with Indian characters, showing cultural and racial harmony. The author captures this interconnection: "In the world of the *Ibis*, it was not blood, but jahaj-bhai, ship-brotherhood, that bound people together" (2008, p. 340). This theme underscores the novel's critique of colonialism and its exploration of alternative forms of community and identity.

The novel not only provides a vivid portrayal of the historical impact of the opium trade but also challenges the traditional narratives of colonial history by highlighting the interconnectedness and agency of individuals across cultural and racial divides. Through its richly drawn characters and intricate plot, the novel emphasizes the complex dynamics of identity and resistance within the colonial framework, offering a powerful critique of historical and contemporary issues.

*Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie is an expansive, cross-generational novel that spans more than half a century, weaving through significant historical events from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945 to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York. The narrative connects these events through the lives of its characters, showing how personal and global histories are deeply intertwined. Before the atomic bomb destroys Nagasaki, Japan, the tale begins. Young school teacher Hiroko Tanaka is betrothed to German expatriate Konrad Weiss. Hiroko suffers severe burns in the aftermath of the bombing, leaving her with lifelong bird scars on her back that symbolize her loss and survival. Hiroko runs away from Japan to Delhi in India with the help of her friend Mrs. Murakami. She starts living with Elizabeth Burton, Konrad's half-sister, and her husband, James Burton, who works for the British colonial government. Evie falls in love with the Burtons and Sajjad Ashraf, a young Indian Muslim boy working for the family in India.

This paper explores themes of friendship and sorrow in the relationship of Hiroko and Sajjad as India nears its independence and the partition of India and Pakistan. Years after their marriage, the pair moved to Pakistan and reared their son Raza. During this period, Raza and his family felt the impact of Pakistan's political volatility and the role of the United States in the events in the region. Raza conducts covert operations that embody

the political backdrop of the political realism period, especially the Soviet-Afghan War. After 9/11, the novel ends in New York City and Afghanistan. Harry Burton, an intelligence officer in Afghanistan, and his niece Kim, who befriends Raza in New York, are now the focus of the story.

This section examines that 9/11 affected people around the world, bringing together issues of displacement, identity, and the emotional costs of political struggles. *Burnt Shadows* explores the way history affects people across continents and time through its epic plot. The author uses her characters' personal lives to investigate historical events, highlighting the universality of human experiences in the face of global crises. Hiroko Tanaka, the heroine, is deeply affected by the Nagasaki atomic blast. Hiroko's relationships and global travels are shaped by this catastrophe. Shamsie describes the moment Hiroko looks at her lover, Konrad: "She saw his eyes travel to her back, to the pattern the bomb had seared onto her – the pattern that marked her as uniquely touched by history" (2009, p. 47).

The text not only underscores the personal impact of historical events but also highlights the way individuals are marked by history, often in irreversible ways. As Hiroko moves from Japan to India, then to Pakistan and finally to the United States, her life story reflects broader themes of displacement and the search for belonging in a rapidly changing world. Her relationships – first with Konrad, then with his sister Ilse, and later with the Burton family in Pakistan – illustrate the merging of different cultural and historical backgrounds. The author articulates this blending of cultures and histories: "We are the countries we have inhabited and are the marks left on us by the people we have loved, by the people who have hurt us" (2009, p. 213).

Through Hiroko's journey, the novel portrays the complexity of identity in a globalized world. Loss is a recurrent theme in the novel manifesting not only through the loss of loved ones but also through the loss of homeland and a sense of belonging. Each character in the novel bears some form of loss, which shapes their actions and decisions. For instance, Hiroko's fiancé, Konrad, is lost in the bombing of Nagasaki, a personal tragedy that reverberates through generations. Shamsie reflects on this continuity of loss: "History is the third parent" (2009, p. 276). This metaphor suggests that historical forces play a crucial role in shaping personal and collective destinies, much like familial relationships. The latter part of the novel focuses on the post-9/11 world, examining how global politics influence the personal lives of the characters.

The relationship between Hiroko's son, Raza, and the American intelligence community underscores the tensions and misunderstandings that often arise in international relations. She captures this interaction: "What is it about borders and boundaries that compel one to trespass? I thought the world was becoming a global village" (2009, p. 325). Through Raza's experiences, Shamsie critiques the simplistic notion of globalization, highlighting the complex realities of a world divided by cultural and political lines. In *Burnt Shadows*, Shamsie constructs a narrative that is deeply embedded in historical contexts, from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki to the aftermath of 9/11. She examines that personal and collective history are connected as global events shape individual identities through her characters. The tale asks readers to consider whether history affects their lives in order to bridge cultural barriers.

## Comparison

To conduct a comparative analysis of the four novels, *The Kite Runner*, *The English Patient*, *Sea of Poppies* and *Burnt Shadows*, a table is created to emphasize important elements

of each novel, such as the setting, concepts, storytelling style, or historical context. In this comparison, it is apparent that each work narrates its respective historical context and thematic matter.

**Table 1**  
Analyzing features of the selected novels

Aspect	The Kite Runner	The English Patient	Sea of Poppies	Burnt Shadows
<b>Setting</b>	Afghanistan, United States (1970s-2000s)	Italy, North Africa, England (World War II)	India, Indian Ocean, Mauritius (1830s)	Japan, India, Pakistan, United States (1945-2000s)
<b>Themes</b>	Redemption, friendship, betrayal, ethnic tensions, father-son relationships	Identity, memory, love, effects of war, cultural intersections	Colonialism, displacement, identity, opium trade	Global conflicts, cultural identity, displacement, impact of war
<b>Narrative Style</b>	First-person, retrospective	Non-linear, multiple viewpoints, stream of consciousness	Omniscient, multiple intertwined narratives	Linear progression with shifts in perspective
<b>Historical Context</b>	Fall of monarchy, Soviet invasion, rise of Taliban, post-9/11 era	European theatre of World War II, exploration of deserts	Pre-Opium War era, impact of colonialism in India	Atomic bombing of Nagasaki, partition of India, post-9/11 era
<b>Character Focus</b>	Amir (protagonist's personal growth and guilt), Hassan	The English patient (Almásy), Hana, Kip, Caravaggio	Diverse ensemble (Deeti, Zachary Reid, Neel Rattan Halder, others)	Hiroko Tanaka, her family, and extended connections across nations
<b>Symbolic Elements</b>	Kites (freedom, competition), scars (past sins)	Desert, maps (boundaries, identity), body burns (past scars)	The ship Ibis (journey, transition), opium (exploitation)	Birds (scars, survival), cross-cultural relationships (interactions)
<b>Impact of History on Personal Lives</b>	Deeply personal narrative intertwined with national turmoil	Personal stories deeply embedded in global conflict	Personal destinies shaped by economic and colonial forces	Individual lives dramatically shaped by global political events

The authors employ various topics for investigations and narrative types to deal with complex matters such as identity, migration and embodied gradual activism, as demonstrated by the following table. All the novelists enact their narratives from the modern day and past and combine reality and fiction to create captivating and profound stories that depict the human experience through the lenses of unambiguously dramatic historical changes.

## Conclusion

The selected novels demonstrate fictional history which remains an effective tool to uncover singular narratives amidst sweeping, often tumultuous domains. Each novel presents a unique vision of history by contrasting historical events as external forces against personal contingencies. The following are some of the thematic concerns of these novels: the possibility of redemption in the context of political upheavals, identity and memory, especially after the Second World War, the alteration of lives for the reason of colonial opium trade and the ever-enduring impacts of international conflicts, from the Nagasaki impact to the post 9/11 world. These accounts add substantial layers to the understanding of historical processes that took place and show the soul's firmness and complexity. They also help to 'erase' the historical amnesia and demonstrate that history cannot be reduced to the seemingly-ordered chain of events. However, it is a dense weave

of people's existence, each bearing the traces of their individual and collective past(s). These authors employ various strategies in narrating their stories, like first-person narrations and reminiscences, structural fragmentation and multiple narrations, aiming to make readers consider history from numerous perspectives. This increases awareness and participation in ways that pertain to the past. Thus, the textual chunks discussed highlight the continued relevance of historiographic metafiction as a powerful tool for shaping historical narratives. The authors urge the reader to question the very definition of the historical and the narrative, suggesting that constructing such notions as history and memory is a process where the narratives we perpetuate shape the view of reality we choose to accept. These works deepen knowledge about the impact of history on oneself and others by engaging the reader's emotions and reason. They stress how individual and 'subjective' recollections and feelings interrelate with objective and coherent socio-historical processes in the continuous flow of time.

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