

Tribhuvan University

Blurring the line between history and Fiction in Saad Z. Hossain's *Escape from*

Bhagdad

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By

Narayan Aryal

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Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Narayan Aryal has completed his thesis entitled “**Blurring the line between history and Fiction in Saad Z. Hossain's *Escape from Bhagdad***” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2072/12/20 B.S. to 2073/12/15 B.S. I hereby recommended his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Raj Kumar Baral

Supervisor

Date: 2073/12/15

Tribhuvan University
Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English
Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled “Blurring the line between history and Fiction in Saad Z. Hossain's *Escape from Bhagdad*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Narayan Aryal has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Tribhuvan University

Date: _____

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Narayan Aryal

Abstract

Utilizing the concept of new historicism Stephen Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, Louis Montrose and H. Aram Veeger, this research concentrates upon the textual representation incorporate traces and fragments of historical truth in tacit manner in the novel Saad Z. Hossain's *Escape from Baghdad*. It also examines how the fragment of historical truth and cultural ethos enter the textual world in micro form. The truth which enters the text in this manner is subjectivized and textually manipulated. Self-consciously outrageous and at times silly to the point of becoming sophomoric, *Escape from Baghdad* achieves its true emotional impact through expressions of genuine wit bound to powerful meditations on the inanity of war, and on the special inanity of a particular 2003 war. *Escape From Baghdad* by Saad Z. Hossain is a historical war novel which deals mainly with the issue of war-torn Iraq. Along with the presentation of prolonged conflict, the author has excavated the history of Iraq in the novel. The novel *Escape From Baghdad* has taken help of society, politics, culture and religion to flourish its ideas. Set in the scenery of Iraq war, it has depicted the notion of Druze's history, the origin of Islam, its fragmentation into Shi'a and Sunni, the Mukhabharat and other regional and tribal groups. The novel relies more upon politics and less on religion to mature its ideas. The pain of domestic civil war faced by much of the Iraqi people is scattered in the novel throughout several characters in several chapter. The ancient Iraqi city of Baghdad and Mosul are cited several times to show the terror, horror and havoc of the war.

**Blurring the Line between History and Fiction in Hossain's *Escape from
Baghdad***

Fiction is regarded as imaginative creation of the author where he chooses different characters, plot, setting, event and dialogue. However, mere imagination of the author does not constitute any work of art. To some extent it has to rely upon different aspects of society. Each and every work of art is the true reflection of socio-cultural, historical and environmental aspect of either author's life or the event that is chosen of. Authors try to mix the past experiences, present situation and future speculation in the novel. Fiction, a genre of literature, mainly exploits the imaginative faculty of the author. It may introduce experiences that we have dealt with or we have never thought of. Society, its member, institutions, social characters, culture, politics etc. have remained an integral part of fiction throughout its origin. Fiction, on the other hand, can deal with the past events of society. History, the study of past as it is presented in the written document, can be the part of fiction. History is the chronological presentation of ancient happenings for the information of present and future.

Escape From Baghdad by Saad Z. Hossain is a historical war novel which deals mainly with the issue of war-torn Iraq. Along with the presentation of prolonged conflict, the author has excavated the history of Iraq in the novel. The novel describes in its full strength not only what it is at the present but also what are the factors to drag in its present status. The novel also has depicted the events that are imaginative and they have never occurred, to be fair, they are less likely to occur. However, freedom of imagination of the author is limited. Although the novel has presented the events that has never occurred in real life, for example, thousand years life of Druze, his Genes, superpower of a mere watch etc., all the characters and events in the novel

have acted in thematically intelligible way. The author has presented fictitious person, events and setting, but he is not trying to invent psychology that is different from human conduct.

Society and social phenomena have diverse impact upon literature. No work of art can be created in vacuum, being far from people and society. The novel *Escape From Baghdad* has taken help of society, politics, culture and religion to flourish its ideas. Set in the scenery of Iraq war, it has depicted the notion of Druze's history, the origin of Islam, its fragmentation into Shi'a and Sunni, the Mukhabharat and other regional and tribal groups. The novel relies more upon politics and less on religion to mature its ideas. The pain of domestic civil war faced by much of the Iraqi people is scattered in the novel throughout several characters in several chapter. The ancient Iraqi city of Baghdad and Mosul are cited several times to show the terror, horror and havoc of the war. Furthermore, this novel aggregates the historical event of the post 2001 happenings of Iraq, more specifically Baghdad and other fictional event. Apart from this, the ancient places like Greece, Jerusalem, Syria, Myanmar, and Laos are also cited in the novel to present the history of Druze. The novel revolves around the feelings of Iraqi people who are feared of war and cannot even come out of their own home for shopping and travel. They are forced to travel illegally in the black water tanker. To travel a minimum distance they have to face much more security checks. It presents the situation of society where nothing is in control of the public and government. The alleys are controlled by extremist social and religious group. Betray, robbery, war, explosion, murder is illustrated through several characters like Kinza, Dagr, Hamid, Hoffman, Afzal Taha and so on. Kinza and Dagr represent two distinct psychology of society; one being calm although losing everything and another being violent to gain nothing. People's life inside the four wall starving for food and

medicine for long period and the skeptical attitude of inhabitant to each other has been the part of the novel.

The novel has political colour to the huge extent. Events of the novel are set in the immediate aftermath of Iraq war. It is composed around serious side wars and several conflicts. It doesn't necessarily delve too deeply to show the character of each military group and their ideology, but has shown the tussle between various international, regional and tribal group. The political intervention of American not only in the politics but also in the micro management of Iraqi society and culture are presented vividly in the novel. The events of novel are based more in the city of Baghdad after the invasion of American army to Iraq especially to revenge Saddam Hossain. Every aspects of society are heavily politicized from administration to hospital. American army has so much power in Iraqi administration that they can take each and every record without any proof. Hospitals have also become the part of politics and conspiracy. Business, education, culture of the Iraqi has been destroyed heavily. Moreover, it talks also about the history of Baghdad when it was controlled by Mangoles by killing millions of Iraqi people. They destroyed books and libraries to block the Tigris. Exploitation of resources by Americans and revenge for that loss has made the city of Baghdad more chaotic.

The novel has also relied upon some of the Islamic religious values. It has presented the idea of Shi'a group and Sunni group to develop the idea of civil war. They are fighting with each other to gain nothing. Revolt against the American system has caused the conflict between national groups. To take control over the cities the extremist groups are threatening the lives of their own nationals. Children are deprived of education since the schools and colleges are no longer the safe place. Characters talk themselves to show the value of Islam religion. Avecinna talks about

the core value of Islam which has divided them and the entire Islam. It is said that religion have layers of knowledge and common people are only told of esoteric knowledge. Most of the parts of the novel are developed through the idea of religious happenings. The Druze history is well developed by introducing Caliph Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah. This religious character is introduced as much powerful person and proclaimed as Mahdi, the final prophet of Islam. He was accused of not as the son of Muhammad and Fatimah but, rather, the son of Christian and Jewish forefathers. The fiction not only describes the past events of Islam but also makes some projection to be happened in future. The Islamic belief of Al-Hakim will be present when the state is in danger is shown with immense importance. The cause behind the creation of other religious group like Mukhabarat and Al Qaeda is presented parallel with the Druze and Islamic history. It can be seen that the Druze's watch is somehow presented all over the fiction from the beginning to the end. Furthermore, the history and significance of watch is also illustrated to pace the acceleration of the plot. The watch is shown as a map which helps the Druze to preserve the knowledge. Watch hides the knowledge of findings what Druze have yearned.

The simple plot of the novella is followed by a parallel history of Golem-like figure who turns out to be a Druze, with a malfunctioning watch once gifted to early 20th century. The novel circles fear, loss and obsessions of Iraqi people filled with the hatred to United States marine and entire system which are joined in various part of the plot. The story looks simple when Kinza and Dagr capture the torturer of Saddam Hussain- Hamid. The mythical and historical colour to the novella gave different insight and flavor. It then turned to be historical than fictional novel. It mixes the history of Geber, his power, struggle to save his knowledge, conspiracy by his own relatives and kin, fight against Druze and the mystery of the watch. The sector of

medicine has to do much in the novel. Almost all aspects of society are touched in the novel and medical sector is not an exception. The investigation of Dr. Sawad to the genes of Afzal Taha and his exploitation of the hospital utensils are probed in the novel. The administrative and government system is so much ruined that anyone can disguise himself/herself to another character.

To study this novel new historicism has been used as methodology. It is a literary theory which relies upon the notion that literature should be analyzed and described within the context of history of the author, the events that happened and the criticism made on it. It examines literary work in a broad historical context, examining both how the author's time affected the work of art and how art reflects writer's time. It tries to find out the social atmosphere, cultural settings, norms, values, taboos, traditions, social process and structures to interpret the work of art. It believes that literary art is not only the output of author's imagination, rather, it is the manifestation of social believes, cultural practices, religious dogma, political happenings and so on. Moreover, new historicism attempted to reintroduce the concept of history into literary studies. Unlike historicists belief of art as mere product of history that author's believes, it gives emphasis to critic's opinion too. Furthermore, it is a notion which believes that literary works should be considered as a product of time, place and historical events rather than separate work of art. It is a reaction to a theory called New Criticism which emphasizes on the formal analysis of work of art. New historicism, on the other hand, seeks the relationship between text and political, social and economic circumstances in which it was originated. New historicism furthermore focuses on four main ideas. Firstly, literature is historical; it is not only the record of one's mind. Secondly, literature is not a separate field of human activity.

Thirdly, like literary works, man himself is the social construct and finally, the historian/ critic is trapped in his own historicity.

The debut novel of Saad Z. Hossain has got enormous praise and criticism. It is praised for its model of mixing various spectrums of arts like myth, history, culture, religion and so on. Similarly, it is also adorned for its blend of history and fiction. However, one of the various objections it has gained is the use of jargon and technical words. It is well praised for the concept of Iraq war it has presented so lively. One can notice the drawbacks of war while going through the novel.

Vijayta Lalwani observes the novel as one of the creative works of art which describes the havoc of Iraq war. She calls the novel as a satirical novel which mocks the cons of war. She praises the vision the author has used to describe several events.

Saad Z. Hossain's *Escape from Baghdad* may be the hippest, weirdest, most creative and visionary book yet to emerge from the full-on debacle that was W's still simmering Iraq war. Hossain's unique blend of satire, mythology and speculative fiction makes ESCAPE a hold-onto-your-hat tilt-a-whirl joy to read. And, quite possibly, a future classic in its own right. (16)

Lalwani also praises the novel for its unique blend of spectrum of genres. She calls it a mix of satire, fiction and mythology. She is perplexed because of its uniqueness.

While describing the incidents, she says, the author has chosen diverse fields to probe his points.

James Lovegrove takes the novel as historical novel. He calls it an account of history which relies more upon the incident of America's invasion to Iraq. He is amused by its genre and style. He also praises the mix of various genre of literature. He is against the horror, terror and fear of war.

....Set in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, Bangladeshi author Saad Hossain's debut novel is a riot of mordant humour and gonzo storytelling. It starts out in relatively realistic mode, as a mismatched but engaging pair of chancer anti-heroes — diffident former maths professor Dagr and loose-cannon black marketer Kinza — fall in with Hamid, erstwhile Ba'athist torturer, who says he knows the whereabouts of a fortune in gold bullion. (8)

Lovegrove considers the novel not only as war novel, but also as combination of various genres. He finds the event presented in the novel interesting because it has used various aspects of history, imagination, war and so on. The political tussle between United States and Iraq has touched the heart of the critic. He finds the genre and style of the art appealing.

Another critic Raj Kumar Baral talks about the context of novel vividly. He makes intensive analysis of the novel from style to subject matter. Moreover, he takes it as one of the novels which raised the voice of minorities. He also highlights the theme of the novel.

..... In this context, Bangladeshi author Saad Z. Hossain composed a novel called *Escape from Baghdad* at the end of 2015 based on United State's invasion to Iraq. The title of the novel resembles its synopsis or this is the story of some character fleeing away from the threat of war. Basically known for his fiction, science fiction and black comedy, Hossian in this novel also presented the historical Iraq war in comic style. Along with this, despite of real happenings, he has fantasized it to create a beautiful art. However the author is not in the side of war, rather he has presented war as inhuman and ugly incident. (48)

Baral also talks about the mix of genres in the novel like other critic. Hossain seems to be opposite of war since he has not praised the influence of America over Iraq. He also talks about the character and style of the author. He prepares bases for his criticism first by illustrating background information for several war.

Another critic Colby Buzzell finds the novel interesting because of its events and setting. He keeps this novel as a multidisciplinary work of art. His hatred towards the conflict can be seen through the words he has chosen of. However, he is not ready to take this novel as war novel.

Saad Hossain's perplexingly weird debut novel, *Escape From Baghdad!*, captures the pure insanity of the Iraq War. At the same time, it's not a war novel. Instead, it's a skillfully constructed literary IED that brings together the sharpest aspects from multiple genres. It's a Tarantino-esque *Heart of Darkness* set in war-torn Iraq, filled with absurdism and dark humor, a mash-up of satirical Joseph Heller-style comedy and sci-fi fantasy with a gratuitous mixture of good old-fashioned ultra-violence.

(13)

Buzzell praises the novel for its subject matter and calls it a multi genre of art. He admires style exploited by this work of art. He is also against the war which the novel has centered around. He is shocked by the style which author has used to explain the war of Iraq. His point is clear in the view that he never takes the novel only as war novel.

The novel has shown the history of Iraq by exploiting some of the fictional ground. The main intention of the novel is to show the horror, terror and fear of civil war in which the Iraqi people are compelled to participate. Although it has been plenty of time the war has started, nothing has been gained. Nothing is in the control

of either Iraqi people or the government. It shows the destruction of Iraqi culture, values and societal beliefs. The war has left women and children only in the society. People are living in rampant absurdity. The main thrust of the novel is to show how people are enforced to engage in war. The politics is not in the hand of people of Iraq. The administration has collapsed; streets are full of blood, dead body and guns. Nowhere is safe in the city and even the house are closed as if it has been long time no one is residing there. People are living as if there is nothing to gain and lose in life. The central characters of the novel Kinza, Dagr and Hamid have nothing to gain and nothing to lose. Everything they had gained was destroyed by the war. Apart from war, the novel also focuses on the history how Iraq was created and how Islam was emerged. It highlights the history of the superpowers of the Islam and the tussle of power.

This research examines how historic-political realities are hidden beneath plenty of textual, fantastic, humorous and farcical elements of the novel, *Escape from Baghdad*. The very setting of this novel evokes an implied sense of the geography of Iraq. The tussle rampant in Iraq is suggestive of the aggressive tussle that leads to the inception of plenty of crises and violence. With the nuance of blending various realistic and far-fetched imaginative things, this novel hints at the then historical reality. Realities about the history of Iraq, military coup, dwindling democracy, the soaring Islamic fundamentalism are implicitly hinted in this novel.

Two down on their luck black-marketers, Dagr and Kinza, have inherited a very important prisoner: the former star torturer of Saddam's recently collapsed Ba'athist regime, Captain Hamid, who promises them untold riches if they smuggle him to Mosul. With the heat on, they enlist the help of Private Hoffman, their partner in crime and a U.S. Marine, who undertakes to help them escape the authorities. But

getting out of Baghdad is no easy task. The city is crawling with traps and alive with 5000 years of history. Soon they are embroiled in the search for a serial killer and the mysteries of an ancient watch that doesn't tell time. Hounded by religious fanatics, crazed librarians, alchemists, special elements of the former Iraqi secret service, not to mention the United States army, the odd foursome must survive long enough to discover the truth. And in this place where life is constantly under siege the truth may be, quite simply, the secret to eternal life.

In affirming his love for his lost son, Dagr struggles heroically. But in extending true sense of love and compassion to his progenies, he is always cold and hard-hearted. Darg and Kinza have lost their mother. He should give not only the love of father but the love of mother seeks its own pace. But he is so lost in the inner mental condition. It seems he is incapable of extending true love of parents to his children. The following extract exemplifies how cold hearted and hard-hearted he is in extending his paternal love to his son and daughter:

Dagr smiled sourly. I am a market parasite. I help corrupt soldiers still medicine from the thresher, our friendly neighborhood American military base, so I can sell it at a huge profit to needy people who were once my friend. I have shot at a fourteen year boy who was probably related to me, just for jumping out of an alley. I have okay, Kinza held up a hand. I am not speaking of your now. I am speaking of a professorial you. Would the man who taught me economics at the Abu Bakar memorial have a problem with what I want to do?(3)

Abu Bakar's father does not think about addressing the actual problems of his son and daughter. There is nothing to eat at home due to desertification and draught. As the head of family, he is required to think pragmatically about the daily problems of the

household. But he does not do his responsibility which he should do. Contrary to the expectant of his son and daughter, he goes on fabricating fairy tales. By telling fairy tales to his son and daughter, he wants to divert their hunger.

The researcher makes use of the theory of new historicism. New historicism examines how the textual representation incorporate traces and fragments of historical truth in tacit manner. It also examines how the fragment of historical truth and cultural ethos enter the textual world in micro form. The truth which enters the text in this manner is subjectivized and textually manipulated. New historicism, though developed in the 1980s, becomes influential with the works of prominent new historicist, Stephen Greenblatta, who first of all took it to analyze the particularly the works of renaissance period. Moreover, new historicism changes its view to history as objective monolithic, linear, casual, static and authentic and equally views that every text is the product of socio-economic, political and cultural context. Thus, new historicist takes history as the matter of interpretation, perception and it is subjective. So, new historicism, in this way, breaks all the traditionally established facts and proceeds by taking history as heterogeneous, unstable and progressive. In this regard, M. H. Abrams argues:

History is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events which can be used as the background to literature of an era, or which literature can be said simply to reflect, or which can be adverted to as the material condition that in a unilateral way, determine the particularities of a literary text. A literary text is embedded in its context and in a constant interaction and interchange with other component inside the other network of institutions believes and

cultural power relation and practices and products that, is their ensemble, constitute what we call history. (184)

For him, all the texts including literary or non-literary are ideological or cultural constructs which should be interpreted according to the particular context. Not only has this, but literary figure or writer of any genre invented the history on the basis of material reality. In contrast to traditional concept of objective truth, singular, objective, monolithic history, new historicism focuses on multiple subjective and heterogeneous histories and challenges to the history constructed by those who are in power.

Muslim traditionalists and Islamic fundamentalists silence other internal voices and abuse the authority of the text for authoritarian purposes. Secular fundamentalists follow the same pattern, but in the name of enlightenment, progress, and science — and as a means of showing the misogyny of Islam— while ignoring the contexts in which the texts were produced, as well as the existence of alternative texts. In doing so, they end up essentializing and perpetuating difference and reproducing a crude version of the orientalist narrative of Islam. The following extract is expressive of reality regarding how violence erupted the entire zone of Bhagdad:

Hamid was not a happy man these days. His face had puffed up to misshapen Quasimodo lump, where eyes, nose and mouth were swimming in irregular proximity to each other. Once vain man, he could no longer bear to look at any reflective surfaces and thus wore dark glasses at all times. He was in constant nagging pain, a condition Kinza was in no hurry to leave. Too, he had a clearer idea now of the route Kinza planned to take hopping from bastion to bastion of shi'a

dominance. Not a Saddam Sympathizer inside, his life worth a toothpick in a gun flight in these streets. (10)

Women in Iraq, as in other Muslim communities have always been subjects of argument in terms of different parts of their identities. Their identity is often questioned by secular fundamentalist and the feminism is viewed as suspicious by Muslim traditionalists and Islamic fundamentalists.

This new outlook on history also brings about a new outlook on literature and literary criticism. Traditional literary historicism holds that the proper aim of literary criticism is to attempt to reconstruct the past objectively, whereas new historicism suggests that history is only knowable in the same sense literature is through subjective interpretation: our understanding of the past is always conducted by our present consciousness. Louis Montrose lays out that as critics we are historically bound and we may only reconstruct the histories through the filter of our consciousness:

Our analyses and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points; that the histories we reconstruct are the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves, historical subjects. Identity is fashioned by social institutions. Literature is another form of social construct, which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society. Literature is a cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. Therefore, social, political, religious, and economic factors of a given society determine the literature it produces. (23)

For Montrose, contemporary historicism must recognize that not only the poet but also the critic exists in history. The texts are inscriptions of history and representation, and interpretation of the texts of the past. Montrose suggests that this kind of critical practice constitutes a continuous dialogue between a poetics and a politics of culture.

Dagr's uncle works in the house of a wealthy man in Bhagdad. His uncle works as a cook in the house of the wealthy man of Bhagdad. His uncle tells Dagr's father about a plan. Dagr's father does not tell about the plan. The plan is to sell Kinz to the man whom Dagr uncle works in Bhagdad. Dagr's father does not feel any sort of guilt in selling his daughter to a wealthy man in Bhagdad. The rigid upbringing of Kinz enables him to treat daughter as a commodity that can be sold and traded with certain things. The following extract describes how she is sold by her father:

The insurance company, meanwhile, had not paid. Beset by random acts of destruction, outlandish claims, impossible force majeure, they had done the only the sensible things and filed for bankruptcy. The directors had subsequently fled to their villas in Beirut. And so went the bulk of amal's stock portfolio. In the end, the man had been reduced to the single shop, which was incidently, the one he had first started out with, a piece of circular fate that drove Amal to despair often enough. (17)

Dagr locates the long struggle for reform of family law in the context of the perennial lack of democracy in the region. She points in particular to the low participation of women in parliamentary life as explaining the lack of serious headway in the reform of family laws. Contests between reactionary forces of both secular and religious stripes and liberals keep reform of family laws held hostage.

The tendency to go against the establishment of the 1960s refers to an “anti-establishment cultural phenomenon that developed first in the United States and the United Kingdom, and then spread throughout much of the Western world between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s, with London and other various metropolitan cities being hotbeds of early countercultural activity” (Markfield 69). As the 1960s progressed, widespread social tensions also developed concerning other issues. It tends to flow along generational lines regarding human sexuality, women’s’ rights, traditional modes of authority, experimentation with psychoactive drugs and differing interpretation of human freedom.

As the era unfolded, "new cultural forms and a dynamic subculture which celebrated experimentation, modern incarnations of Bohemianism, and the rise of the hippie and other alternative lifestyles, emerged” (Markfield 76). This embracing of creativity is particularly notable in the works of British Invasion bands. In addition to the trendsetting Beatles, many other creative artists, authors, and thinkers, within and across many disciplines, helped define the counterculture movement. Several factors distinguished the “dissenting voice of the 1960s from the anti-authoritarian of previous eras. It hides the stark reality of coup and subsequent theocratic rule.

Jamal, like others, reiterates the necessity to demonstrate the compatibility of gender equality with Islam in order to achieve a fundamental overhaul of existing family laws. This is precisely the task that feminists, starting in Bhagdad world early in the twentieth century, have taken upon themselves and persist to this day with intensified efforts. She reveals the following hard-hitting remarks with respect to this issue:

Sometimes more or less, Amal shrugged. There is no pattern. In the beginning, some of us tried to ambush him. He took a bullet in the

chest and kept on walking. Two days later, he cut a little girl's throat. Last week, he threw my neighbor down the stairs. Broke his legs for no reason, we do not even know what he wants. I think he is one of those American serial killers like they have on TV. Excellent tactics, Dagr said. Terror in the night, random, violence, swift, excessive retribution, sort of things the Spartans, used to do the helots to keep them in line. (19-20)

Traditional interpretive communities continue to exert their influence to the detriment of reform efforts. The overall lack of democracy in the Arab world and absence of political will reinforces a patriarchal interpretation of Islam in the service of secular and religious political elites.

New historicism subverts the historical presentation of power holders and official history. It rejects the autonomy of text and trans-historical views on literature. Instead of dealing with history as a set of stable thing, new historicist deals any text with diversity of dissonant voices. New historicism claims that history is neither linear nor progressive and power is not confined to a single person or single level of society, rather power circulates in a culture of material exchange. H. Aram Veesser explains the five fundamental assumption of new historicism as:

That every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; that every act of unmasking critic and position uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practices it exposes; that literary and non-literary text circulate inseparably; that no discourse imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truth nor expressed inalterable human nature; finally- that critical method

and a language adequate to describe the culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (11)

For Vesser, new historicist assumption of expressing, unmasking, critiquing and circulating the embedded religio-cultural, socio-political material onto the common ground for the assessment of all the people changes the unchangeable, alters the unalterable and separates the inseparable about human truth.

Tendencies to communalize Islamic feminism are on the rise. The new secular conviction reaffirms inclusivity as it brings with it a new vitality. The majority of feminist scholars have focused their energy on the field of Koranic interpretation. They have successfully uncovered the Koran's egalitarian message. The genesis of gender inequality in Islamic legal tradition lies in the cultural norms of early Muslim societies. While the ideals of Islam call for freedom, justice, and equality, Muslim norms and social structures in the formative years of Islamic law impeded their realization. Instead, these norms were assimilated into Islamic jurisprudence through a set of theological, legal, and social theories based on certain underlying assumptions. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

Later that night, they were released; Hoffman's squad, handpicked, the fantastic five of misfits from the Greater Ghazaliya division, unleashed like hounds from the starting gate, tearing through the narrow streets in their steel demon, breathing Garuda fumes and the threat of massive fire, roof-mounted automatic cannon rattling in its cage, Hoffman cackling incessantly from the visions of bad mushrooms, his driving erratic and dangerous, the belly of the beast converted into a gaming den, foul-player button-jamming NFL action, while Tommy spat random reports. (37)

The picture of it in her mind is of an ax striking soil and suddenly rich black oil bubbling up to the surface. This is what is happening to her, memories struck upon, rising up from the depths. She gazes out the window in the direction of the brasserie, but what she sees is not the skinny waiter beneath the awning, black apron tied at the waist and shaking a cloth over a table, but a little red wagon.

New historicism focuses primarily on view of discourse. Discourse is social language created by particular cultural condition. Foucault concerns discourse in terms of knowledge. Discourse cannot adequately explain culture of social power, rather discourse is formed for getting different sorts of power and is imposed in the society. Lois Tyson adds more about discourse “to maintain dominance of power must circulate in numerous discourses namely religion” (301).

The narrator tells that a religious Islamic teacher, who always comes to teach her how to read Koran, justifies the assassination. No matter what be the fault of a person, his death is not justifiable. But the narrator is painfully shocked to hear the accusation of the religious master. Even if a recidivist criminal is murdered, his or her death is not justifiable. Being the religious cleric, Quari sahib says that the assassination of Benazir is justifiable. Religious gurus are supposed to talk about nonviolence, peace, forgiveness and humbleness. Religious figures ought to oppose violence. The following extract throws light on how Islamic bigotry plays an instrumental role in shaping critical conscience of the public:

The three ladies had lost a lot. Their menfolk lay dead or dying across the city. Some were buried, some rotting in pieces, some thrown into the air in violent red embers. Sons, husbands, and brothers were absent, so much so that there were doubts if they had ever existed to begin with, for the women rarely spoke of such things. One might even

consider that it was no great loss, this sacrifice of men to the grand war machine, for the men had constructed the machine in the first place, in dim caveman times, and it was their natural fate to keep feeding it now. (41)

The socio-cultural practices of Islamic doctrine are not conducive to the dissemination of progressive and ennobling thoughts. These thoughts range from feminist ideas, materialistic conception of life, modernist mentality, and secular thought to other pragmatic principles of the post-enlightenment society of the west. Another additional finding of this research is that the author-narrator has to demonstrate a great deal of masculine characteristics though she is relegated at her family in Baghdad to the enfeebled and enervated girl.

Foucault has been always interested in mechanism of society, human thought and ideas, concepts, experiences, discourse formed in any society or culture. He also focuses that on divergent interests get intersected with each other in different issues like power, knowledge and truth. His ideas are not only on mere power but it is manifestation and different technique which produces truth to lead an individual to subjection. Regarding such concept of Foucault, McGaul and Grace write:

Resistance is more effective when it is directed at technique of power rather than at power in general. It is technique which allowed for the exercise of power and production of knowledge; resistance consists of refusing this technique. But the unearthing of power technique in their modern configurations requires conceiving of the social body as the multiplicity of force relation. Foucault suggests that power is intelligible and susceptible to analysis to down to its smallest details, in terms of the historical strategies and set of tactics designed to

mobilize these techniques to political advantage. But importantly, oppressive forces of domination do not hold the monopoly in the capacity to invent tactic. (86)

Foucault questions the historical condition for the emergence of truths. For such purpose he demonstrates the historicity of different disciplines and the concepts of objects related to such discipline along with power relation.

Unless and until such repressive trends and conventions are eliminated, it would be really harmful to install modernity and feminism in the Islamic countries. She holds Islam responsible for the theocratic structure of Islamic countries. What prevents democracy from coming to the darker zones and territories of Islamic continent is the indestructible bond between politics and religion. Due to this bond between politics and religion, progressive notions like human rights, liberty, and individual freedom and materialistic conception have not flourished in almost all the Islamic countries. The following extract is reflective of parameters that contribute to the erupting violence:

The hallways had been narrow, cluttered with the smell of cooking, the sound of his daughter shrieking, running from door to door, under the impression that the whole building was hers, the other tenants mere extensions of her will. Each of the doors had been painted blue by the engineer landlord, who believed fiercely in the efficacy of paint, and it had worked out for him, in the end, for he had died on the street on his way to work and not home in bed as he had feared. (45)

The threat of secession is the most blood-curdling threat of the time in which Dagr had to stand against the tyranny and annihilation. Its fatal effects trickle down to some

of contiguous territory of Bhagdad. The burgeoning power of the Islamic extremists in today's Bhagdad should not be much of a surprise.

According to Foucault, power is not always repressive; it bears the qualities of productivity and creative potential. It is not the ruthless domination of the weak by strong. For him, power does not move in one direction instead it circulates to all directions to and from all social levels all time. Power is never ending process and in the way of formation. In this regard, new historicist has great affinity with Foucault as he states:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere. Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relation serves as a general matrix- no such duality extending from the top down. There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. Where there is power, there is resistance. This resistance is never in position of exteriority in relation to power. One is always inside power. There is no escaping it. There is no absolute outside where it is concerned, or that history being the rules of reason, power is the rules of history, always emerging the winner. (95)

From this definition of power and its scopes, it is obvious that power does not get percolated hierarchically. It subverts the traditional concept of power as only tool for subjection and domination since it turns the negative concept of power upside down. Power is all pervasive and deserves equal weight.

The narrator dismisses the rationale for the oppression of Islamic women in the society of Islamic world. This narrator is moved by the rebellious spirit. This

revolting spirit is directed towards the injustice leveled against women. Girls are seldom encouraged to go to school in Islamic society. More than two third of Islamic girls are forced to grow up without seeing the faces of school. The following extract is illustrative of how rebellious spirit arises from the growing anarchic condition:

What is that,Dagr asked? Tragedies, dear, tragedies, mother Davala said airily. Destroyed homes and missing families, lost loves and soured ambitions, futures catastrophically forked into directionless mire. What is there to speak of, little boys, when all possibilities are gone and life is reduced to single moments of consciousness, unmoored from either past or future? Great silences stack up on each side, like my sisters here. We suffer impenetrable silences, the absence of those voices stilled forever, and when the sum of these is great enough, there seems no more purpose in speaking. This is life for those of us left behind. (46)

When Iran passed from apartheid to the liberal democracy, the common people had expected lots of things. They had expected that freedom, security and civil rights will be guaranteed, practiced and extended even to the grass root level. Soon this expectation evaporated. The majority of suppressed and subdued people sank into despair. Dagr miserable quandary typifies this condition. The end of apartheid is supposed to herald his freedom. But he has to pass his whole life in imprisonment.

New historicism focuses not only on discourse, power and truth but equally on marginal issues. It critically analyzes narrative of high politic and deconstructs the hierarchy existing in history and foregrounds the suppressive hierarchic existing in history and foregrounds the suppressive hierarchical narrative of marginalized group like such as women, poor, working class people and so on. Lois Tyson opines:

Focus on the historical narratives of marginalized people has been such an important feature of new historicism that plurality of voices, including an equal representation of historical narratives from all groups, help ensure that a master narrative- a narrative told from a single cultural point of view offer the only accurate version of history will no longer control our historical understanding. At this point in time, we still do not have an equal representation of historical narrative from all groups. The historical narratives of some groups are becoming more and more numerous such as those of women and people of color. (278)

Here, Tyson describes that new historicism raises the marginalized issues of society like marginalized women, culture, race, history, gender. Discourse is Foucauldian concept in which he connects the ideas of knowledge and power. Discourse is a discipline which departs away from linguistic concept of structuralist, formalist and communicative approach. Foucauldian idea of discourse is such approach which “gears towards a counter-reading of historical and social condition. Discourse creates power which ultimately creates knowledge that is truth. Discourse is always in the process of formation, correlation and transformation which take place after certain event” (Markfield 123).

Lack of political will to hold responsible militias and Iraqi central government forces responsible for abductions and deliberate killings has been a long-standing concern throughout the country. The continued existence of sectarian, unregulated and unaccountable militias is both a cause and a result of the country’s growing insecurity and instability. They make it much harder to establish effective and accountable security and armed forces that are able and willing to protect all sectors of the

population and enforce the law equally. The following extract reveals how religious sectarianism leads to anarchic violence:

Many, oh many men need killing who walk this earth. Many men for whom death is too good a punishment, Mother Davala said, seven months ago, Captain Eric Hollow of the occupation forces thought he saw a man on a truck with an AK-47 during a midday patrol through a crowded market. He opened fire with his machine gun, emptying his magazine. He must have been blind. It was my great-grandnephew, playing on the truck bed with a piece of wood. He was three years old. A round blew his entire head off. When the boy's father started crying hysterically, the captain arrested him for inciting a riot and took him away. (48)

There is some mention of the role religious leaders could play. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, an influential Shia religious leader, played a critical role in helping break the deadlock that allowed Haydar al-Abadi to become the new prime minister instead of Maliki. He has called for arms to be carried exclusively by official security forces and for restraint to be exercised. He is supportive of peaceful coexistence in Iraq and some commentators suggest that he can be a powerful moderating force. Meanwhile, a joint Sunni and Shia fatwa was issued in June urging Iraqi citizens to back the security forces and condemn.

Subjectivity or selfhood is identified by culture that is the product of society. Subjectivity or selfhood is guided by ideology formed in society. Subjectivity is shaped by and shapes the culture into which subject is born. Individual identity is not merely the product of society. Neither is it merely a product of individual will and

desires. Instead, individual identity and cultural milieu reflect and define each other.

Tyson further elucidates this in the following extract:

Is human identity socially determined or are human beings free agents?
 For new historicism, this question cannot be answered because it involves a choice between two entities that are wholly separate. The proper question is what the processes is by which the individual identity and social information (such as political, education, legal and religious institutions and ideologies) delve into the complex discursive network. Every society constrains individual thought and action within a network of cultural limitation while it simultaneously enables individuals to think and act. (84)

In this extract Tyson proves that subjectivity or selfhood of people is constrained by plenty of predictable and unpredictable forces. Identities of people at large are shaped and sustained jointly by social structure, ideologies and political, educational, legal, religious and institutional strains.

Due to the entrenched interests regional neighbors have in Iraq, these states are likely to play an important role in crafting or undermining any long-term solution to the conflict there. Polygamy Islamic orthodoxy, high level of gender biases and institutionalized discrimination of women are some of the crucial factors that lead to the extreme subjugations of women. The pervasive influence of Islamic doctrine in each and every compartment of life has weakened and harassed female characters unbelievably.

Sultana mobilizes those tortured and tormented female characters to resist injustice and atrocity leveled against them by their respective husbands. Their subordinated, excluded and alienated lives prove that they are subaltern people in an

Arabic land that is under the grip of Islamic patriarchy. Total separation of daughters from most of decision making sections brings to a halt the chance of growth in women's movement. The connection between Islamic doctrine and patriarchal society of Baghdad has foreclosed all the avenue of opportunities of freedom and empowerment. The following extract demonstrates facts regarding Kinza's curiosity to relocate elsewhere in the zone of non-Baghdad land:

The men inside the hummer cringed into fetal positions, screaming instinctively, as the vehicle careened around the street, homemade bombs, the weapon of choice for insurgents in many parts of the country. Up above, his ears plugged with opium and Ravel, Ancelloti lolled in the gun turret, oblivious. Behruse punctuated with a lit cigar and split his sides laughing. What the fuck, Behruse, Hoffman said, righting the vehicle. What the hell is wrong with you? That shit is not funny. (66)

Religious faith is one thing, making this faith as the medium to dominate others is the most callous and atrocious practice that ruins the prospect and possibility of freedom. Eugene is an example of how religious faith degenerates into fatal dogma. When dogma is imposed on innocent people, it ruins the possibility of creativity and life force. The dogmatic arrogance of the protagonist's father paves the way for the degradation of family harmony and responsibility.

James Markfield dwells upon Foucault's attempt to trace the proximity between the thematic of repression and the microphysics of power. The way power operates in a subtle and silent way is dubbed by Foucault as the microphysics of power. Any cynical notion of power hardly fits into the procrustean bed of the

microphysics of power. Foucault projects the disembodied and diffused notion of power. Markfield makes the following remarks about Foucault's treatment of power:

First and most generally, power is not simply punitive—it does not just deny, silence, restrain. Power can also be, in fact need also be productive; a purely cynical form of power, says Foucault, would never last. Although we have come to accept confession as a liberating revolt against the silence of the Great Repression, confession is itself a form of the subtle workings of power, one that in fact promotes discussion and analysis of sexuality. Foucault reiterates the trope of what he calls the microphysics of power—i.e., the diffused and disembodied aspect power. (1)

According to James Markfield what is required is not a theory but rather an analytic of power, which must free itself from the juridico-discursive representation of power that governs both the thematic of repression and the theory of the law as constitutive of desire. Foucault's explanation for the popularity of the juridical notion of power which neglects everything that makes for its productive effectiveness, its strategic resourcefulness. Power is only accepted as a pure limit set on freedom, a capping of freedom, its fulfillment rather than its abuse.

Islamic men's obsession with virginity of girls is one of the substantial causes of the subordination of women. When a girl is born, her parents begin to think about her marriage. Rather than thinking about the education and sound upbringing of girls, their parents only think about their daughters' marriage. The moment a girl is born in Arab lands, the parents immediately begin to think of an appropriate marriage. With the idea of future allegiance, suitable families with eligible sons are studied keenly. While Baghdad girl remains unmarried, she must stay a virgin. On the other hand,

virginity prolonged is deemed a family disgrace. Now that Munira had turned twenty one years old, her unmarried state was causing her father grave discomfort.

As Iraq rebuilds its military forces it is vital to correctly diagnose the problem that needs to be remedied. Underlying all other symptoms the central reason for the defeats suffered by the ISF is a failure of political and military leadership. Almost all Iraq's military problems stem from the failure of leaders to anticipate crises, plan for them, allocate resources and fight corruption. As one Iraqi Army officer told the author after the fall of Mosul: "this is not just the army's failure, it is the government's failure." But smart, brave leadership can fix a lot of Iraq's military problems too. Iraqi political and military leaders can work hard to maintain the cooperation of international security partners, in finishing off the current war.

Walzer saw Foucault's ideas as nihilistic. In this view, Foucault did not believe there was any purpose for society and all laws are unnecessary. Foucault takes man and woman simply as the effects of prevailing social practices, codes and disciplines. Since no normative or natural code exist to guide man and his collective activities, human beings find themselves in deadlock if they are solely driven by Foucauldian thought. If sovereign power or sovereign state exists, only then the question of overthrowing it with suitable alternative comes. If power exists in several fragmented forms pervasively, how can the power of resistance move? Michel Walzer delivers the following views regarding how thought of Foucault weakens the power of revolution:

Foucault is not a good revolutionary. He isn't a good revolutionary because he doesn't believe in the sovereign state or the ruling class, and therefore he doesn't believe in the take-over of the state or the replacement of the class. It is precisely the idea of society as a system,

a set of institutions that must give way to something. When Foucault is an anarchist, he is a moral as well as a political anarchist. For him morality and politics go together. To abolish power systems is to abolish both moral and scientific categories. Foucault does not believe that the free human subject is a subject of a certain sort, naturally good, warmly sociable, kind and loving. Men and women are always social creations, the products of codes and disciplines. (61)

If man and woman is the product of social relations, how do they happen to get new insight and vision to go against establishment and status quo? How can the same system give birth to a new consciousness which is subversive? This question deserves deeper contemplation. Foucault has not given explanation about how a new vision and idea arise against that very system out of which these new vision and idea arise. Michael Walzer thinks that Foucault's thought does not inculcate belief in the possibility of revolution. Those who want to launch revolution should have firm footing in normative principles. But Foucault has already sabotaged normative values. That is why Walzer says that Foucault's thought does not seem to be conducive to revolution.

Iraqi political leaders can continue to re-staff the military with more capable uniformed leadership. Political and military leaders can push real anti-corruption reforms and the tough application of military laws. Smart leaders can chose to resist pressure to build new institutions and instead can back the sensible option. Visionary leaders can fight the remainder of this war against Daesh in a manner that will support national reconciliation, using tools like the decentralization of local security decision-making and recruitment. Iraq stands at a crossroads. The choice is very simple. Put

the right people in charge of security and give them the right authorities and resources and allies.

Within cocoon of comforts and luxury, women are living like caged birds. Family, religion, system of governance and other so-called graces of life exclude confine and enervate women of spirit and energy. Even the dominant social institutions like marriage, family and cultural centers have contributed to the subordination and subjugation of women. Within material comforts and luxury, women are doomed to languish emotionally and psychologically. Their position is no less than the position of a victim. The following extract is expressive of regarding Islam and its effect:

It is certainly one of the dividing lines of Islam, Avicenna said. Among our philosophers, the esoteric core is almost universally accepted. The Sunni orthodoxy maintains that the inner meaning is truly fathomable only by the divine will. It is out of reach of mankind, in other words, and we must be content with following the literal will of God. Make sense to me, Hoffman said. Most people do not bother with all this shit. Just give us clear easy rules to follow. (73)

In Kuran it is mentioned that those who touch alcohol, both men and women, go to hell. Allah gives harsh punishment to those who are tilted towards alcohol and addiction. In Bhagdad, addicted men belonging to the lower rung of social ladder are punished harshly and then compelled to pay huge fine. But the men belonging to the upper strata of society enjoy the privilege of drinking alcohol. In the case of women, this law is imposed harshly.

They have failed to meet their military duties, the ministries and security institutions should fight against corruption and nepotism within the military. Armies

nowadays are not completely dependent on traditional methods. They have become dependent on the intelligence effort and information, which are equivalent to traditional methods. Kinza is looked upon with great pity by her female cousins, but her husband will usually reject, possibly taking a second wife or even seeking divorce. As every Saudi woman knows, divorce brings the loss of everything—status and children. A divorced woman soon becomes socially isolated and ostracized. Recently, Hazrat Al Saud, another royal cousin afflicted with alcoholism, had been divorced by her husband. Her young children, who now lived with their father and his other two wives, had been forbidden all contact with Harzat. The following extract sheds light on this side of ostracism and isolation faced by displaced people:

Sabeen drove with the exacting precision of a German car mechanic maneuvering a prototype. Iraqi police, she explained, loved pulling over women drivers, especially ones who did not wear the full hijab. While she carried a revolver in her purse and a shotgun under the passenger seat for exactly these kinds of emergencies, it was just common sense to follow traffic rules. She had been, she said, obliged to shoot two would be rapists so far. Silly men, they had come at her with knives. Hoffman could only marvel at her blunt pronouncements and spent the entire ride staring with idiotic rapture at her profile. (88)

In Islamic countries, this often relates to members of the lower economic classes, social castes, and peasantry as these are often the marginal, illiterate, and dispossessed, though social expectations of women allows for the presence of subaltern peasants in all classes. Since this trend in Iraqi historical and social studies has been so influential, modern Iraqi literary, dramatic and cinematic texts have reflected a strong interest in the suffering of the subaltern classes.

Loneliness, seclusion and alienation are the part and parcel of lives of the women married to wealthy elite men. Their husbands were often outside on business. Their sons and daughters are away from their houses for study. So mothers are always alone and solitary. There are neither husbands nor children at home. That is why women often turn to alcoholism. She narrates that when her sons and daughters and husband left her at home for a long time, she felt terribly lonely. The painful sense of loneliness weakened her immensely. Frightened by increasing sense of loneliness and alienation, she could not help taking alcohol. Though Islamic doctrine forbids women to drink and though marriage can crash due to the addiction and alcoholism of women, Sultana failed to resist her desire. She turned to alcoholism to ward off the killing sense of loneliness. The situations and circumstances which drove Sultana to addiction and alcoholism are created by the selfishness and self-centrism of males. Kinza was the first one who had actually bothered doing a physical examination of all the patients, including the violent ones. The lobotomy greatly intrigued him. These were the times he had killed his guards, of course. The old administrator kept Kinza sedated, and even then, the sedations were far too strong for a man.

The importance of an army to any country is to maintain its presence, ward off external threat, and protect its borders. This is what forms the basis to many countries when it comes to formulating its military policies and plans. However, the case was different in Iraq because of the exceptional security circumstances Iraq went through.

The core finding of this research is that Iraq is trapped in the crisis generated by deep rooted religious differences. Certain traces of historicity are hidden beneath the textual details of the novel, *Escape from Baghdad*. Unless and until such repressive trends and conventions are eliminated, it would be really harmful to install modernity in the Islamic countries. It is obvious that Islam responsible for the theocratic structure of Islamic countries. What prevents democracy from coming to the darker zones and territories of Islamic continent is the indestructible bond between politics and religion.

Due to this bond between politics and religion, progressive notions like human rights, liberty, and individual freedom and materialistic conception have not flourished in almost all the Islamic countries. The concerted action of Iraqi authorities and international partners could also prevent or dampen any attempt by some Iraqi and/or Kurdish forces to exploit the situation for their own particular gains. The Kurdish military is likely to promote its own interests in areas with Sunni Arab populations. The challenges in the case of Iraq are the need for better trained and equipped brigades and for a more unified chain of command.

A risk for international support in the absence of measures as suggested is the negative diversion of Western supplies. A first step for improving the impact of international support could be to focus only on those brigades that are under the command of the Ministry of the Peshmerga, so as to prompt political willingness to cooperate on a political roadmap. Kurdistan is not extraneous for foreign interferences. Historically, geographical proximity and Kurdish human continuum with Turkey are core factors in Ankara's interest in the northern Iraqi region. This strategic alliance is essential for Turkey that seeks to prevent by all mean the creation

of a unified Kurdish state stretching from Erbil to the Syrian Kurdish stronghold of Rojava.

While progressively disarming the militias and selecting those that might be part of a unified regional or Iraqi defense and security apparatus, efforts should focus on the Iraqi ‘culture of war’ and the need to establish alternative messages with the support of the main representative groups. Although the political process is paramount, it should not be forgotten that the current situation is empowering some actors over others.

The situation on the ground appears more volatile than ever, especially since the recent offensive of the Iraqi Security Forces to retake the city of Ramadi and the ethnic difficulties encountered in Sinjar since the Peshmerga retook the city. The fact that every military victory is today presented as a Peshmerga victory, even though the Kurdish units are not the only ones fighting the ISIL, could indeed complicate Baghdad’s efforts to foster Iraq’s national unity. While the war against the ISIL could, quite paradoxically, be a unifying factor if it is inherently fought as ‘Iraqis for Iraq’ and not as members of militias for foreign sponsors, political divisions and the (foreign) hidden agendas at play represent structural obstacles to long-term stability. The Iraqi Security Forces are paralleled by a mix of Sunni and Shiite militias that are integrated within the Popular Mobilization Forces and (many) other groups that do not fall under government authority.

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