

Employment of Historical Narration in the Select Novels of Kunal Basu: A Study

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Abstract

The present research entitled “Historical Narration in the Select Novels of Kunal Basu: A Critique” is to explore Kunal Basu’s treatment history and its narrative methods. This study examines Kunal Basu’s representation of history and fiction with reference to his novels The Opium Clerk, The Miniaturist, Racist, The Yellow Emperor’s Cure, and Kalkatta. In the process, the study traces the evolution of Kunal Basu as a novelist and how far his works reflect the culture and history of his times. His creativity is focused with precision of historical, Political and cultural implication of Kunal Basu’s imagination. The primary objective of this study is to describe the historical experience by a study of the novels of Kunal Basu. A second objective is to identify the changes that his creative sensibility undergone during his literary career. This locates certain epistemological issues within the theoretical field of the representation of history and examines the transaction between history and fiction employed in the novels of Kunal Basu.

(Key words: *Epistemological issues, Historical narration, Representation of History, History and Fiction***).**

Introduction

The research paper titled “Historical Narration in the Select Novels of Kunal Basu: A Critique” investigates Kunal Basu’s select novels: *The Opium Clerk*, *The Miniaturist*, *Racist*, *The Yellow Emperor’s Cure*, and *kalkata* with reference historical representation. This paper deals with Kunal Basu’s conjunction of history and fiction and his art of narrativization. Kunal Basu is contemporary writer to provide a sizeable body of critical literature on his work. He restores one’s faith in imagination, magic, and fantastic history punctuated by love, tenderness and conviviality. Kunal Basu was born 1956 in Kolkata. His parents Sunil Kumar Basu and Chhabi Basu were prominent luminaries in the field of Bengali literature. They made him to become an avid reader and prolific writer. Kunal Basu is a man of extremely genial nature and an immensely erudite scholar. Kunal Basu’s novels envisage divorce themes and modes of address with multiple position evading strong interpretations. Thus, he fused a discursive range of topics like art, history, class and culture into vibrant and fantastic pieces of fiction, Basu draws parallels between fiction and history and people and culture. Kunal Basu’s literary overview is small but it is remarkable for its seriousness of intent and solidity of substance. He views writing system as a process of self discovery. He has affirmed the Indian history, cultural identity by reflecting its multiplicity and broadened our understanding of the countries great heritage. The research has consulted five major critics of Kunal Basu but no author has touched the theme historical narration so the research deviates itself from other major critics and it assumes originality.

Biography of the Author

Kunal Basu’s novels are historical fictions and the engaging treatment of history in his fictional world is testimony to his deep Knowledge and attachment to history as a genre. He is distinctive in his approach and representation of history in his fiction and unlike his predecessors and other contemporary Indian English diasporic writers he negates the idea of representing the known and mostly presents the unknown and uncharted histories. Basu does not represent only Indian history and even what includes Indian history in his fiction, he does it without exoticizing. His representation of history is governed by his fertile imagination and despite himself being an Indian he writes about China, Portugal, the Victorian British and Malaya. He is settled abroad but does not represent the issues of acculturation in the life of an Indian immigrant. He does consider himself as a NRI but instead is truly transcultural and transnational in his approach and thought. He is unwilling to explore his Indian roots, traditions, philosophy and culture and the pertinent issues of Indianness and foreground his Indian identity in his novels. Kunal Basu is a writer, who has to become a part of the power centre and to be recognized in the literary canon.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

The present research intends to analyze the historical representation, interrelationship between history and fiction and historical narration of Kunal Basu’s select novels. It endeavors to understand the historical oppression, Indian Socio-cultural deprivation and subsequent themes such as Indian politics, cultural implications and Socio-Economic condition

of India. This study also deals with subverting history, epistemological issues, New historicism, and tropes of orientalism.

Review of literature

This research paper presents review of literature related to the major critical works done on Kunal Basu. This paper provides the major major controlling ideas of the core issues taken for the study. This study supplies a survey of literature and establishes how the present research paper deviates from other critics in the appraisal of critical text written on Kunal Basu's novel. A single attempt at a scrutiny of historical narration Kunal Basu has not been made and this study fills in the gap. Keeping in the mind the paucity of critical studies and evaluations, an attempt is made in this paper to study exhaustively Kunal Basu's employment of historical narration.

Kunal Basu is being a post-millennial contemporary writer, the body of critical research literature regarding his work is meager. There are some critics and reviews largely in favor of and praise for Basu's novel. There are some others, who are not so favorable about his creative cogito. His defenders appreciate his varied choice of subjects, his ability to authentically portray history, amalgamate and balance history and fiction. His detractors offer an opposite point of view, wherein they criticize Basu's lack of fluidity in the language in his fictions, it is because of his our dependence on history. Such an ongoing and vivacious critical debate about his novels has made his reception in the postmillennial academic circle tricky. The researcher has consulted five research articles to make literature review. In the process, the researcher has found that, there is only one full-length critical text available. Now, this literature review presents five critics of Kunal Basu: the critic Lawrence Basu whose critical entitled "Race, Science and a Novel: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue" analyses Basu's novel *Racists* to examine issues like the purity of science, race and care against the backdrop of a distant past. This article traces the moral dimensions and obligations of science and the healthcare system of the past.

The critical Angshuman Kar has written a chapter in a book titled *Postliberalization Indian Novels IN English: Politics of Global Reception and Awards*. His title of the book chapter is "Commodity fiction of Post-Rushide Indian novels in English: Kunal Basu and the politics of Decanonization". This work explores Kunal Basu's literary works, where Angshuman Kar situates and contextualizes Basu in the global literary market.

Rituparne Roy has written an article titled "OF Art and the Artist: Kunal Basu's *The Miniaturist* a Mughel and modern novel" in a book titled "Writing Indian Anew: Indian English Fiction where he indents to explore the relevance of the relationship between art and artist. She states that, *The Miniaturist* deeply introspects the art and the artist though primarily it deals with the artist's predicament. She praise the visual quality of the novel as its most striking feature and describes the pages of the novel akin to paintings of an album.

Somrat Laskar has published an article in the anthology entitled *Indian fiction in English: mapping the Contemporary Literar Lanscape*. His work titled "OF Disease and Elusine Care: A Study of Foiled Cultural Interaction in Kunal Basu's *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*" in which Laskar argues that the wag Basu in this novel represents China's inhibitions in engagement in inter-cultural interactions. This critical work is a curious take on Kunal Basu's *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*. It underlines a newer engagement with India's Eastern

neighbourhood by the post-millennial Indian English novelist Kunal Basu. This essay states that, India's relationship with China has been tricky and complex over the past few decades.

Rakes Sarkar's article titled "*The Lives of Others* and the narrations of ours: Critiquing the Interface among marginality, Historicity and Fictionality in Kunal Basu's *The Yellow Emperor's Cure* and *Kalkatta*" analyses how Basu's novels treat the marginalized in times of transition like the Boxer Rebellion of China and the fall of the communist government in West Bengal and how Basu as a writer of historical fiction transcends the bounds of conventional historiography. Rakes Sarkar's essay finds the point of view intersection between the fictional depiction of the marginalized and the truth of the transitioning history in the novels of Kunal Basu.

There is only one full-length published book, *Romancing The Strange: The Fiction of Kunal Basu*. It is an anthology of critical research explorations on Kunal Basu's works that contains twenty critical articles covering Kunal Basu's first two novels *The Opium Clerk*, and *Miniaturist*. These essays are varied and provide critical insight into a multiplicity of issues regarding Basu's intersections of fiction and history, penetrating critical scrutiny and analysis of characters and plots of these two novels. This critical text also records a conversation of Basu with Amitava Roy in which he touches on many incidents of his life and creative world. So far the research has consulted five critical works written on Kunal Basu's novels but single work does not touch on the employment of Historical narration, hence the present research fills and it assumes originality in the critical annals of Kunal Basu.

The Miniaturist as a historical novel

The novel *The Miniaturist* is second novel of Kunal Basu. The theme of the novel is representation of history. Every event in history has an after-life. It matures, ages, grows and thus transforms as it migrates in time and space. Subjective interpretation infiltrates, and a particular slice of history gets tentacle, inviting further investigations and explorations. Basu's *The Miniaturist* can be reckoned as one such investigative piece of history that tells the story of an unsung miniaturist from the sacrosanct crypt of Mughal regime of India under Akbar. There is to be found a wonderful consortium of facts registered and an imaginative inspection of 'facts unregistered.' In this chapter, the present researcher is trying to examine this confederation of events with special reference to the practice of religion, which was manifestly one of the most vital aspects of Akbar's rule. Along with this, the position of the women and the tenement of an institution popularly known as the harem which was one of the most pompous and luxurious possessions of the ruler, that is elicited with attention. Finally, this paper illustrates Basu's representation of the art of miniature painting of Akbar's regime.

Kunal Basu's novel *The Miniaturist* can be called as an artist's gradual growth to maturity following the scheme of patterns, shape, and portrait, the three sections of the novel. He received the various commissions for painting from the Darogha with reluctance. He was extremely prompt and meticulously egregious in delivering them. Then slowly, he was possessed by a passion to meet the Emperor, a passion that was soon to become an obsession with him. Ever since, he saw the Emperor at the Qamargah, the seeds of this desire have been sown in his heart and mind. From the mischievous young artist, he soon turned into a quiet

sulking youth. Listening to stories of Akbar from his mother and his friend Salim Amiri, the paintseller, this yearning was further conflagrated. This longings and desires could no longer be restricted. The emperor has ordered the making of *Akbarnama*, where all his heroics and his court proceedings and his hunting expeditions, would be documented in miniature paintings. But consumed by his ever increasing passion for Akbar, Bihzad started painting his personal *Akbarnama*, his very own “Akbarnama” where he unabashedly painted and registered his love for Akbar. He imagined the emperor as his lover and pages after pages of ‘forbidden love’ came alive from the tip of his brush. The gratuitous paintings were kept carefully hidden between the sheaves of paper. His stepmother would feed the artist in him with stories and anecdotes that made the intransigent artist furthermore rigid towards the apodictic ways of the age and time.

The intoxicating perfume in his mother’s parlour, her inebriating beauty and charisma, and the *Mufarikh*, the opium laced sweetmeat that he was so fond of, soon led him into the web of incest. This incest perhaps was only an ancillary to his obdurate obsession for Akbar.

Unfortunately his ‘Akbarnama’ was intercepted and fell into the hands of his rival Adili, who then brought it to the notice of the Khwaja and soon the news of the artist’s audacity reached the emperor. Bihzad was banished. He was to leave all that, he possessed by dejure including his love for Akbar. The asperity of the punishment, was mellowed by his chance meeting with Hilal Khan, once the head-eunuch at Akbar’s Harem, who embraced him into a loving friendship and gave him refuge in his *serai* in the midst of the scalding dry desert. Bihzad became ‘Rangila,’ the pleasure seeker, roaming about the markets and streets of Hazari. This event conjur tales, and his earlier experiences home led to his refuge in Hazari. He visited the slave markets of Hazari. His pen could not be controlled by his rigid objurgating. It was at the *serai* of Hilal Khan that, he met the Sufis, danced and drank wine from the same cup with them. He met Father Alvarez, emissary who is sent to Akbar’s court to teach Akbar the truth of Christianity. He saw the picture of a lady with an angelic face holding an infant in her hands and he drew ‘The Lady’. From a painting she became a goddess. People came from all corners, towns and cities, to have a glimpse of ‘The Lady’ and offer their obeisance. Words reached the King of Hazari, Haji Uzbek, and he came to witness this magic of ‘The Lady’ that was spreading like wild fire.

Haji has chosen Bihzad has become his son-in-law and brought him to his court where the latter was given a seat, closest to the Haji’s. Bihzad became a courtier, the Khwaja of an invisible *Kitabhana*, at the court of Hazari. But, Hazari proved to be a *terra incognita* for the artist Bihzad. His court was not at all like Akbar’s court Bihzad was so familiar with. It was menagerie of strange animals owing to the unctuous fetish of the Haji for strange beasts and their customs. Bihzad met Zuhra, Haji’s daughter, and his bride. Her priapic escapades with her thirteen year old eunuch in presence of Bihzad stimulated a confusing sense of seduction and vexation at the same time. Her reluctance and indifference tortured Bihzad and he gradually lost himself to wine melancholy. A calamitous earthquake reduced Hazari into a mass of putrid bubonic corpses and debris. Bihzad hurried to Hilal khan’s *serai* only to find it in a dishevelled state, and his friend Hilal Khan is dead.

The astute artist in him grew bitter at the thought that, he had only painted an imperfect universe. He decided to blindfold himself. Bihzad, the rightful master of Akbar’s

Kitabhana, was relegated to a mere beggar and a blind helpless one. He was maltreated, abused, tortured and his life became a colourless daub, a plangent soiree. But there came the Bird Women to his rescue. They took him along with them to the mountains, where they lived, and took care of him till he recuperated and recovered, both from his mental buboes and his physical wounds. One day the Bird Women brought along with them another victim, almost lifeless, and Bihzad, though still blindfolded, could easily tell by running his hands on the face of the man, that he was the postal runner, a friend who had shown him compassion and kindness in Bihzad's days of misery at the town's market. It is from the runner, that Bihzad learned that Akbar the emperor was now on his deathbed.

Released from all sorts of quandary, Bihzad set forth for Agra, reaching there he learned that the order of expatriation was taken off his head. As Bihzad was brought to the dying emperor's bedchamber, Akbar himself took off Bihzad's blindfold. He saw Akbar's blood kept in a bowl by the side of the dying emperor's bed. His eyes beheld Akbar, now only a shadow of his earlier self. The dying emperor had one wish that he wanted Bihzad to turn into an artist one last time and draw him (Akbar). Bihzad went back to the pigeon house, the caves of the Bird Women. The past is amorphous, formless and Basu is an invitation to such a form. In this *recit de voyage* of the artist, Basu has incorporated certain aspects that deserve special mention and close inspection.

Representation of History in the novel *Racists*

Kunal Basu's novel *Racists* is an aggressive critique of the practice of racial discrimination in any form. The novel is situated in the 19th century Victorian Europe and its African colonies. It is an engaging tale of a curious, impetuous and elaborate experiment undertaken by two scientists, in a quest to identify the superior race and to calibrate the reason behind this superiority. History bears evidences to such fanatic experiments during that period to settle the inconclusive debate on race. This disconcerting palaver of an idea is well transfused in the novel by Basu in the debate between the two scientists, Bates and Belavoix. Their ceaseless, unyielding penchant to know the truth of racial differences forms the staple of Basu's tale. Since cognition is also a kind of narrativization, the present researcher proposes to examine closely Basu's unearthing of the non historicised past with a special unword for the racial pyromania, that was prominent at that time and still exists in a sugar-coated form.

The novel *Racists* is about the conflict between prominent scientists, Bates and Belavoix, regarding the discourse of race. They agreed to conduct an experiment, which they thought, and prove their individual postulates regarding the racial question. There is an experiment, with two infants, one black and another white, were chosen. They were to be raised in complete seclusion from civilization in an isolated island, Arlinda, under the care of a muted nurse, Norah, who was to follow certain very strict instructions given by Samuel Bates, in rearing the two specimens. The two scientists along with Bates' assistant, Quartley, were to visit the island twice annually, for registering the cranial and behavioural developments of the specimens. Each of the scientists carried their respective instruments the scientific tools of Bates for taking the cranial measurements, and the notebooks of Belavoix wherein he registered the behavioural pattern of the specimens and as soon as they reach the island, the rigmarole of their experiment started promptly. The boy seemed distinctly

animated and excited at the sight of the visitors and the prospect of the experiment. While the girl appeared to be reticent and shy, redacting and retracting with a sudden sense of horror.

The measurement results to Bates's unshriven content and satisfaction as the cranial measurements of the white girl were more than the black boy. It was Quartley, who takes us back in time, to the very source of the dispute. The readers come to know about Bates's obsession with craniology, his laboratory, the Madhouse, which was considered as the worship house of the religion of racial sciences. It was a veritable treasure trove that proudly housed a huge array of human skulls of different races 300 skulls to be precise. It was, in other words, a racial archive. Bates was hell-bent in proving his point that has made one race superior to the other. Bates's robust enthusiasm and flamboyant arguments on racial issues, however, had failed to impress the polygenist Belavoix. It was, the rivalry roots, and since both the parties were determined to prove their own theory right, it culminated in the curious experiment mentioned above. There was no dearth of philanthropy and generous charity to support this expedition, which was to contribute substantially to the noble cause of racial sciences. Bates's wife, a rich heiress, who stayed far away in a cold county, who cavorted at the very fact of being Bates's wife, was his greatest support. Motivated by an unflinching Missionary zeal to stop slavery and the maltreatment towards the coloured race, it was this proud wife of Bates, who fuelled and financed all his experiments and study.

Bates remained absolutely resolute in continuing the experiment as was decided for 12 years, a sudden sense of impatience had crept in the minds of both Quartley and Belavoix. It is Driven by a sense of abnegation triggered by the inert time spent in the island, Belavoix finally suggested a means to obtain a hastened natural conclusion to their experiment. He decided to leave a knife for the specimens hoping that, the superior one in the chain of races would obviously kill the other. Bates inveighed and dismissed with his usual acerbity the incipient betrayal, that was taking shape in his rival's mind.

There is a tumultuous and unrelenting battle, which has to solve the conundrum of races, love trod in stealthily. Amidst this gumption to bring about a breakthrough in racial sciences, Norah and Quartley have found tenderness and comfort in the presence of each other.

They could know, that they were sprawling love. The growing resentment and disagreement between the two rivals, which was no longer tacit anymore greatly perturbed. He grew immensely restless and apprehensive regarding the fates of the two specimens and the nurse Norah. His fondness towards the boy and the girl, his love for Norah, and his waning interest in this experiment, slowly and surely made him devise strategies to protect them from being sacrificed at the altar of racial sciences.

Bates dreaded a comedown, even more than the destruction of his Madhouse. He was driven both by a sense of mad enthusiasm and frustration. The skepticism of Holmes and other members of the Royal Society added fuel to the fire. The palaver over his elaborate experiment and endeavours and the new theory of evolution propagated by a contemporary budding English scientist had wrecked Bates's peace and calm a thousand times over. He desired a final sail to Arlinda for officially bringing this entire enterprise to the end.

Belavoix was to arrive separately following Bates in a month's time. To Quartley's amazement, Bates refused to take any new instruments along with him for the final trip to Arlinda. The days passed in a reticent, languid yet anxious way, one night an event took

place, that caused the final stir of the most lethal effect. Bates discovered Norah's secret. He came to know that, Norah could speak, that she could sing. He found her in her little nest, playing with the specimens, singing songs to comfort them. He found Norah playing a game, she had devised with the two children. Bates would have killed Norah, had it not been for Quartley, who has been forewarned by a promontory sense of evil, followed Bates to Norah's cottage, armed with Bates's rifle.

Stung by a morbid sense of betrayal and disgust, Bates left the cottage as the lost scientist, the broken scientist, alleging the nurse and the assistant of killing the experiment. There was no more hope left for success of any kind, and the experiment rescinded itself. Bates appeared inexplicably calm as he sailed back for London with Captain Perry, leaving his assistant, the Nurse and the children back in Arlinda. A sudden attack by the Arab traders and their abduction of the boy left Norah and Quartley with the white girl, sad and listless by the loss of the boy. Rumours regarding the priggish scientist prevailed, as Quartley and Norah began their own experiment, 'the real experiment' (213); they were now the father and the mother of Ari, the white girl.

The novel *Kalkatta* as a historical narration

In Kunal Basu's novel *Kalkatta*, Basu conspicuously addresses the issue of migration of people in connection with the partition of India that triggered the exodus of a huge number of people from their homes, leaving them destitute, homeless and perennially haunted by a sense of location/identity-less-ness. He also addresses the sensitive issue of religion that is quite inexorably related to and associated with the partition of India. In crafting the tale, Basu also

touches upon yet another burning and almost tabooed issue of male sexual service, provided by the gigolos. This research paper intends to examine all these issues and, in so doing, tries to find out, if there is any hidden political agenda in Basu's representation of these issues. In the novel *Kalkatta*, Basu for the first time uses the first person narrative in delineating the story of Jamshed Alam, aka Jami, and his life in Calcutta. The novel has the semblance of a memoir of a Bihari Muslim refugee born in a refugee camp, called Geneva, in Bangladesh, who comes to Calcutta with his parents and his elder cripple sister with the only quest of finding a home for himself, a place to belong to and to become a *kalkattawallah*. It is Jami, who tells us how he came to this city of joy and how this city treated him. To be a part of it, he was first to rid himself of the birth certificate, that would invariably indicate his place of birth as Bangladesh and flail him into the cesspool of illegitimate aliens. The first section of the novel tells about Jami's early years in Calcutta, how stoked and relieved his entire family was when a distant relative of theirs gave them shelter in Calcutta. Relieved of the constant threats, that plagued the refugees in a refugee camp, Jami's mother Ruksana could not contain her happiness and his father Abu Alam was hopeful of a better future for his children in the society of civilized brethren under the canopy of a sky which he believed freed them of the brandishing of a refugee. They were now residents of Number fourteen Zakaria Street and the messiah, who had given them shelter was Uncle Mushtak, a communist leader. Each character in the novel has been observed, analysed and deduced through the eyes of the

protagonist Jamshed Alam, a meek, confused, ordinary Bihari Muslim refugee boy, rarely self-assertive or brash, who wanted to be a *kalkattawallah*.

Jami got his forged birth certificate and it was from then he officially started his meretricious attempt to become a part of this all-embracing and all-devouring city, Calcutta. The section 'Resurrection' quite vividly records Jami's early years in Number fourteen Zakaria

Street. A veritable menagerie the house has all kinds of people: carpenters, lechers, jewellers, milliners, and gossips. They scratched and detached, they felt sense of homelessness, a common plight, the fear of being tacked as an illegitimate alien. Jami was immensely fond of his sister and they shared a very strong bond between them. She was his best friend until he started making new friends. With puberty, Jamshed was inveigled into a new world of experiences. He had found his way from the school gate straight to the gutters. He had become friends with Rakib and his gang. They were a bunch of unruly uproarious boys with evidently underhand insidious connections. Rakib was the leader of the gang, a cool headed curmudgeon. An unsettling turn of events could only be predicted as Jamshed got himself entwined with the group. The mention of Unani doctors, butchers, mosques gives a vivid and graphic presentation of Zakaria Street a mini Pakistan in Calcutta as Jami's mother had mistakenly thought it to be. With the help of Samina, Ruksana's friend, Jamshed joined Galaxy Travels in the modest capacity of Rajesh Sharma's (Samina's lover) sub-agent. It was a meagre and not so palatable a job of filling up passport forms for 'hazy' people and making them 'real.' Jamshed, has found himself quite content with his work. He found a friend in Anirban Mitra, a proper *kalkattawallah*, who worked at Galaxy Travels. It was Ani, who has swathed him with the precious knowledge of how to become or at least pretend to be a *kalkattawallah*. Slowly but surely, Jamshed was beginning to understand the concentric pattern of the beautiful chaos called Calcutta.

At this juncture in the novel, Jami met Monica Goswamy at Galaxy Travels. She was an old customer of the Agency. They chanced upon each other a few times outside the office, and then their friendship thickened and deepened. She started taking him to expensive places in contrast to the much modest shops or Jami had been to. She was as if filling up many empty holes in his life, nursing all the disservice he has been exposed to at the hands of his loafer friends. It was a friendship that was plain and simple and salubrious, for it filled Jami with an ingratiating sense of joy and importance and his pockets with expensive gifts. It was 2011 and the Assembly election was forthcoming. Uncle Mushtak was a candidate. Number fourteen was suddenly transformed into the platform on which Uncle Mushtak's election preparations were going on at full spree. Jami was to be the most potential pawn of Uncle Mushtak, entrusted with the responsibility of performing as the counting agent owing to his knowledge of computers.

Jami's physical and psychological engagements at Number fourteen owing to the various events concerning the election have unwittingly burned the bridge between him and Mrs Goswami. A strange cold hiatus has crept in, and it had put Jami in a further unsettling frame of mind. There were troubles at Galaxy and Jami was almost desperate to gain back the comfortable retreat that Mrs Goswami had provided him. Jami and Mrs Goswami finally met and resolved the differences and part with the promise to meet on a day, which coincidentally was also the day of counting the votes. Uncle Mushtak has entrusted on Jami. Jami lost his

virginity in the luxury of a special launch-ride arranged by Monica. Simultaneously, Uncle Mushtak also lost the election bringing down with him a thirty four year old party rule.

Jami finally chose to become a male prostitute, with a mild goading and convincing from Monica Goswami, who slowly but surely had transformed from a friend with benefits to a 'party,' a client, for now she had started extorting priapic gratifications from Jami in lieu of money. Soon she had introduced Jami to her other friends. But soliciting prostitution openly would land him in trouble, and hence once again with some help from Monica, Jami joined a massage parlour Champaka. Jami had become a gigolo and had started liking his new job. It was Rani, the *hijra* manager of Champaka, who provided him with the necessary training, that would help him to become a pro in his profession. Soon quite smoothly, Jami acclimatised into the trade and became an efficient. His increasing satisfaction in his job led to the demolition of any sort of attenuation. As a gigolo, his experiences were manifold, redolent of both pain and pleasure. Things were going pretty smooth for Jamshed till Rakib and his cohorts came to know about his private trade. Rakib in his cool insidious way was hell bent to make use of the knowledge to his own advantage and upend the way Jami's life was moving. He insisted that, Jami joined his shady business giving up his present laundabusiness. Jami's life was taking drastic maundering turns, raving meanders to put him in desperate situations. His father's health was deteriorating fast and a tumour was diagnosed in his stomach. A surgery was imminent and Jami needed a lot of money for it.

Jami has a carefree stroll past with Keyatola who has occasioned a chance meeting with Mandira Gupta. It was then that Jamshed saw Pablo, Mandira's son, for the first time. Mandira's husband had left her and Pablo, when he came to know that his son was suffering from blood cancer. After this, Mandira, the culture-rich and well-educated beautiful woman, had been fighting her battle, countering her misfortunes all by herself. The section 'Paradise' deals with Jami's trundling towards an unfamiliar emotion crenulated by his emotional involvement with Mandira and her son, who was suffering from acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. Jamshed felt a strange and curious attachment towards this boy, an affection he found hard to explain. This was for the first time that, Jami was at such a close proximity with a cultured Bengali *kalkattawallah*. He was getting to know what went into their making, the constitution of their breed, and was trying, perhaps unconsciously, to imbibe the same in his recalibrating as a *kalkattawallah*. Mandira's friendship grew. He lied to his family, that he was soon to be promoted to the position of a manager in order to avoid joining his father in Satta business. Regrets have started settling in Jami along with a sense of trepidation. Jami decided to pay for Pablo's treatment at Park Retreat leaving Mandira with loads of questions and a sense of embarrassment at the prospect of accepting money from Jami for her son's treatment.

Jami's fate simpered as things in his life were getting unsettled and upended. Business was on the decline and worries were aborning, flooding in from myriad concerns like the expenses Pablo's treatment demanded and the re-entry of zealots like Rakib in his life. Jami gave an advertisement for having clients in a paper. He landed into a trap, a vicious web planted by the anti-vice squad. He was easily framed and accused of soliciting prostitution. He was quite unexpectedly rescued and stripped of all charges and set free. In lieu, he was to become a lizard. In a moment of confusion and vulnerability, Jami blurted out the truth about his job as a gigolo, to sate the curiosities of Raka Sen, the young journalist

friend of Ani, impervious to the consequences it may lead to. He was even ready to join Rakib's business.

A sense of deference and reluctance had penetrated him. It seemed, as if saving Pablo was the sole purpose of his life. Luckily he met Monica and requested her to get him a job in Dubai as Champaka was to be demolished and a kindergarten was to be built in its place. Jami was all set for Dubai, all plans and arrangements were taken care of. Rakib and his gang had come to know that Jami was now a 'lizard' for the police and a scuffle ensued in which Jami was lynched badly. A listless drifting around the city brought him to the news stands where he has utter surprise and horror, found his photo printed on a popular daily under an article titled, *Gigolo King of Calcutta*. It was the doing of Ani's journalist friend, Raka. Suddenly he was left with no place to go, Kalkatta refused him a refuge.

At this point, Yakub also brought terrible news of Miri's and Kalim's arrest and despite his frantic and earnest efforts, Jami does not save Miri from an unjust incarceration. These tragic turns of events were getting too hard for Jami to accept. His heart ached for a glimpse of Pablo. Mandira might have found out the truth about him from Raka's article. Who would not permit him to meet her son. Jami also came to know that Indra, Pablo's father had returned and felt a strange sting of jealousy. In a moment of frenzy, goaded by the mild inebriation, he had stepped out in the dark of the night to sit for his last portrait for Pablo. He died as, he was hit by a taxi, in front of the Keyatola house. Kalkatta gave him her last and final gift.

The Opium Clerk as a colonial novel

Kunal Basu's first novel, *The Opium Clerk*, though an intense and compelling story of colonial history, is a distinct departure from other pennant Raj novels. The novel covers a span from the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny to the First World War. This research examines Basu's engagement with the colonial history of India during this period. It examines Basu's representation of the Baboo culture, the complexities of IndoAnglican relationships and the British involvement in the (in) famous opium trade and its impact on the Indian society.

Hiranyagarbha, the hero of *The Opium Clerk*, was born in Patna on the eve of the Sepoy Mutiny. Saraladebi, Hiran's mother, was left with no other option but to trundle back her way to her father's house at Jaanbazar in Calcutta. Mahim, Hiran's maternal uncle, has become his most favourite companion and with him. Hiran insufflates himself with the delicious air of Imperial Calcutta and indulge in innocuous volubility sharing stories from the *Panchatantra*. Mahim exercised an inexplicable influence on young Hiran, which was reflected much in Hiran's later years. Hiran relished every single moment spent with this veritable recalcitrant *Gentoo*. Mahim's feral zest for the Western philosophy and ways of life soon incinerated similar passions in Hiran. The gumption into the erudite world of Bacons, Humes, Paines, and Bentham's created the plinth upon which Hiran's character was to be built. Hiran has started his career as a letter writer. Eventually he was introduced to Mr.Kavasji, an officer in an English firm, and because of him, he was employed the Auction House (29).

From this point on, a spate of events encumbered Hiran's life. He was required to become the tutor to the Deputy Superintendent Jonathan Crabbe helping him to understand

the ancient tales of India. Slowly but surely, Jonathan Crabbe, the Military Brahmin unravelled the darker and hidden plaits of his character to Hiran. He was an Indian Sahib, one who believed in tantric practices, and epiphenomenally was imbibing Indianness in his system. Hiran met Lilian, with a faraway distant and mysterious look in her eyes and came to know that, she was an opium addict. This was the beginning of a new episode in Hiran's life, an episode gravid with events and occasions, that were to transform Hiran's life irredeemably.

Jonathan Crabbe came up with another request for Hiran, to fend for his wife. She was suffering. Hiran could read the helplessness of the opium addiction and its deleterious effect hanging as a shadow on Lilian's brow. The imperium of the drug had left her a distraught awning shadow of her former self. It required no special effort to realize the scars and wounds that the addiction has left on its victim. The malleable 'babu' that he had become, Hiran was only but eager to help his British superior, who was fevered by an obsession to cure her. The asking of one favour was followed by another. Hiran was further requested to get Crabbe "A blackie-white boy" (98). To his chagrin, this request left Hiran in a state of perpetual unrest and pique. It was this trip to Canton that divulged to Hiran the dark machinations. Reverend Fowler, a missionary, who has meticulously woven. In a smooth manner Crabbe was once again able to inveigle Hiran to be his accomplice. Hiran once again fell a prey to arcane relation he shared with his employer and agreed to oblige his request to become a party to the felonious conspiracy.

A confused Hiran felt himself nothing better and having allowed him to walk into this mess. He failed to locate himself in the elaborate scheme of things, he has got himself into. The Rebel monks were mightily shellacked. The entire village was a sad picture of death, destruction and demolition. Despite his constant fealty towards his deputy superintendent, Hiran could see the heretical strategy and the deputy superintendent's pert manoeuvring of the same. The journey back, has brought a surprise for Hiran. The capricious Crabbes, fallen under difficult situations, has fled to England, and it has left Hiran with their final request to fend for Douglas, they have to leave behind in India owing to unknown reasons. A new burden was added to Hiran's life.

Hiran's life has become complicated as the start of the twentieth century life style. It has brought good news for the opium trade. It started dwindling under the impact of various laws, bans, treaties and restrictions, whose sole concern was to make the trade an illegal one. This has a considerable effect on the workings at the Auction House, adding to the worries and concerns of Hiran and the other workers there. The first world War came as a welcome relief to the trade, it triggered a renewed demand for the article and now the trade was to devise ways of disguising and concealing the article in order to export it.

Despite all acrimony and asperity from around, Hiran and Douglas grew strangely. It was at this time that, Mahim returned from England as a changed man. The once rebellious beef eating Brahmin, was now what may be called a trenchant revolutionary. By that time, a new wave to free India from the Imperial clutches had rocked the country and Bengal. Mahim got associated with these activities and Hiran was concerned over the immensely potent influence that, Mahim started exercising on Douglas. There were all noticeable indications that, Douglas has enrolled himself as a member of the 'Boy's Association,' and association

that was “interested in freedom” (239). Hiran, has somehow managed to find a place for Douglas at the Auction House.

Douglas was an absolute charmer at his workplace and everything was going on smoothly. Douglas was alleged of raping a girl. As a consequence of this, he left the country. He soon found himself a place as the Customs Inspector at the port of Kuching. The rubric of opium trade has, undergone a sea change. Officially ostracized, the trade, was still carried on surreptitiously. In Kuching, the trade had taken a different form. Douglas’s job was to inspect the cargos to “prevent just one article of illegitimate trade,” like the Opium. Once Douglas successfully caught hold of medicine boxes containing the “Bengal Mud,” and carried out the punitive measures that followed such illegal trade. He has made his first, indelible impression on the white Rajah of Sarawak.

Along with the routine work of inspection, there are other things that kept Douglas busy. On one of his usual days at work, he received a letter from English woman. He has observed from his window at the Customs House. The letter has contained an invitation to Mr Crabbe to come and visit Berhala, the leper colony. A portentous suspicion was also registered in the letter stating that a clipper carrying infants was heading towards the port, and the infants just like of any other cargo, were to be sold to their masters. The letter carried a plea for Douglas’s help and intervention in the matter. Douglas responded to the request and found the contents of the letter true. He was, only successful in saving one girl child from the clutches of the savage mercenaries.

Douglas’s life was no less eventful The former was more zesty and active as compared to the latter. Suddenly, Douglas usurps the centre stage of the story from our diffident, servile, timid Brahmin Hiran. Douglas apportioned his days and nights wandering his past, treading his winsome present and dreaming of a life with his soulmate Ruth and Polly, the girl child he had saved from the slave traders and whom Douglas and Ruth had made their daughter. His life at Kuching had a salubrious glow about it. The kingdom was ablaze with words of the war. Douglas and Ruth lost their daughter Polly to an unknown disease. Kuching was being declared a Republic, Douglas and Ruth started their journey for Canada with the hope of a new beginning.

Findings of the Study

In fact, history and historical novel are forms of narratives and the act of narration is more counter intuitive than it apparently seems. The narrator the former as in history and the latter as in novels performs the role of a *passeur*, a ferryman, one who carries experiences from one place to another. In this process, a sense of subversion intervenes, as there is often a forced migration of facts. From moment of inception to deliverance, there is a narrative undergone a kind of translation. Any form of narrative can be safely called a translation. if there be a law of representability, that governs all narratives. Then one can go to the extent of saying that, it is often the individual event, that decides how it wants to be represented. The event itself becomes the subject while the representer becomes the object. In Basu’s novels, there is a regular recurrence of anti-marginalization and anti-repression of historical truth. It is this law of representability that governs the representation of historical events in Basu’s novels.

Narration of Subverting History

Basu's treatment of history brings out two interesting facts. First, in most of his novels Basu has worked through a binary, the binary of the colonizer-colonized, ruled-ruled, white-black. Second, Basu seems to have a desire to challenge and sometimes even subvert the accepted official history of a period. Precisely, for this reason, he seems to operate through binaries: it provides him the scope to take sides, mostly quite unconsciously and sometimes involuntarily. He takes sides with Hiran, sometimes with Bihzad and sometimes not with a character but with an attitude that questions the meaningless debates and experiments. It will be unwise to think that he consciously uses history for the purpose of subverting it. He tells a story and in the process history gets subverted. This intention of subverting history is surprisingly, absent in *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*. This novel attests to the facts recorded in the metanarrative of the Boxer rebellion in China. He has not taken side with the rebels, but has shown the causes and effects of such a rebellion at length. This could be taken as his comment on the metanarrative of the past.

A study of the past is like a conversation with the archives. Basu time travels into the past but in the process he is carrying with him the socio-political and economic construct. There is a negotiation, that matures out of this kind of a time travel, wherein the voiceless victims of the past, who have been refused the sanction to be chronicled. That are sought and identified with. In the process, the unhistoricised past comes alive and, it is gravid with a prognostic commentary for the future.

Referring to Walter Benjamin's concept of after-life of all discourses narratives, one may safely say that the very phrase after-life is suggestive of the fact that, it has a life, it is like any other thing that has a life. like any other living object, it grows, matures, withers and fades out. History is one such mnemonic narrative. When it is represented, it undergoes a transformation, maturing, growing, withering, and at times fading out. Within the scope of time travel, when the memory of a past culture is written for the present one, it requires a kind of translation, for there has intruded within the scope of time a transformation of culture, perceptions, ideas and knowledge. In order to define this present transformed state, it, becomes incumbent for one to delve into the past and seek metaphors from there though in a culturally and psychologically distinctive way.

As cognition is also a form of narrativization, the present transacting with the past immediately recognises certain gaps and fissures in the putative conception of the unhistoricised past. This consciously/ unconsciously generates a desire, an impulse to bridge and fill up those gaps and fissures, which are then directly configured by the experiences of the present. This entire enterprise involves the very politics of self-awareness.

The fallacy of the putative factual history, which is a subjective culture construct of a particular time, and it is challenged and a fuller and more inclusive history, that addresses the premises of the present is recreated. In most of his novels, it is this ability to play with the past and the present that Basu indulges in giving us a more comprehensive socio-cultural understanding of our present times. History is being compensated with the unhistoricised details and it obtains a fuller and bigger picture. History itself is a compact of diluted facts generated by the socio-temporal conditions and a creative intervention. Basu's becomes a constructive representation of history, endowing it with a broader scope for inspection and understanding.

Narrativisation of historical incidents and characters can be interpreted as a concerted attempt at relocating the past to replace the historical time with spectral time. The spectrality of literary narratives derives from the deconstruction, it performs on the conflation of the real and the present. The scope of the real is broadened to include the past as well as the future. In spectrality, the real and the existent cannot be conflated, they are mutually exclusive. The dead and the generation do not come to exist in a sense, but in some other sense, they do. They comprise the complex phenomenon of the absent-presence. This undecidability of the presence and the nature of spectral interventions are addressed by the assumption of certain literary stances. The voices suppressed by the historical grand narratives are given new lease of life by the literary author. They are like spectral traces of historical experiences. The occasional disruption of continuum is found mostly in literature, where the writer is armed with poetic licence to use supplementarity as a kind of dismantling tool. The undecidability of the spectral interventions works as a tool of deconstruction with the help of which, the writer of fiction challenges the metaphysics of presence inherent within the history. Spectrality, works as a subversive tool for problematizing the idea of history as truth.

The Miniaturist

Basu's representation of history, in some of his novels, shows his engagement with spectrality. In the novel *The Miniaturist*, for instance, both the characters, Akbar and Bihzad, are from the Mughal period. Akbar has been recorded in history and apparently may be considered as real, while Bihzad has been deprived that sanction of being documented, and yet he survives as real. Bihzad and his story may indeed be considered as the spectre, embodying the signs, the ciphers, the monograms that address the spatiotemporal context, the paradigm of the artist, patron relationship and the freedom of the artist, manifestly by his complex position of the absent-presence in history. This complex phenomenon of the absentpresence is what Basu has very strategically construed in his novels. It does not finally cancel historicity in any way but is a way of thinking of another historicity, not a new history, but another opening of event-ness as historicity.

In each of Basu's novels except *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*, the central characters are marginalized and all in different ways. It is the marginal character, that takes the central and pivotal role in his novels. There is an interesting reverting of the concept of marginalization, it could be seen as a retort, a resistance to the very practice of constructing the suppressed. These characters are marginalised. The whole practice becomes an anachronistic interpretation mainstream, monolithic, ideologydriven history tries to suppress the powerless and all those dark shady areas that would create problems, if revealed. They are not only suppressed but also othered. This is where, as argued already, the New Historicists operate.

New Historicism

New Historicism can be defined as an epistemological relation between history and literature. It is like Janus's face one looks at the present, the other at the past and both look at the relation between fact and fiction. Basu as a writer of fiction is full of the conviction that by way of his fiction he would be able to bring to the notice of the present, a certain suppressed history or past. In his novels, Basu is not one of his characters. The narrator, in

fact, is not part of the narration, but a figure from the present. He is an objective historian. His stance is not singularly of a fiction writer, but he is also a historian. He is taking pains to bring the margin into focus and this can be reckoned as his New Historicist project in the domain of novel-writing, because he is using fiction in order to study the past and tries to situate and locate the idea of the marginalised in the scheme of things. Basu seems to be trying to analyse the context and the ideological factors responsible for marginalisation. This also explains his objectivity. His practice involves writing fiction as valid historical documents, investigating how the past is made to coexist with the present and how the seeds of the future are sown in the past as well.

Summation of the Study

Since Basu is an Indian diasporic writer of English fiction, his representation of history demands an analysis from some other perspectives as well. In the Postliberalisation and Post-Rushdie Indian writings in English, a tendency of exoticising the *otherness* of the *Orient* is clearly discernible. This particular phenomenon or, to use a better word, 'trope,' has a particular and very specific structure which has been consciously/ unconsciously imbibed and inculcated by the authors known as *Midnight's grandchildren*. They seem to be guided by a desire to market this *otherness* that they are brandished with, and this they do to their advantage, almost as a strategic essentialism, to use Gayatri Spivak's words. They are goaded by a desire to get recognition and fame in the global literary market and thus they need to *produce* that which this market demands consume. Since India as the other or the *Orient* sells in the market, most of these writers have represented India using the tropes of Orientalism. Such representations, have been identified by the critics as attempts at re-Orientalism.

Lau clearly suggests that these authors, who are acutely aware of their Oriental status, try to use the re-Orientalist tropes to their advantage, like increasing their readership and having recognition in the global literary market. The rise of this kind of fiction has, indeed, contributed to the development of a critical theory, known as re-Orientalist theory. As there is an intersection of culture, an obscurity (due to the disparity between the two cultures), which is often romanticised as exoticism, is generated and therefore the reorientalists are required to act as translators translating one culture to/for the other. But even in this communication/ translation a specific intentional gap or separation needs to be retained, for it is this separation, this *otherness* of culture which lends the romance and the desired mystical exoticism to the Orient. So, a conscious, deliberate self-othering is always operational. The tropes of Orientalism, are being regenerated with a specific and deliberate intent.

This mechanism triggers a necessity to represent India (the Orient) Indian-ness in its authentic best representation of the Orient has already claimed a stable and safe market. But in delineating this 'specific authentic, the creativity of the author is often limited and compromised. In fact, even when Basu is using the *Orient*, he is using it in such a way, that situates his novels outside the typical tropes of re-Orientalism. Details about Oriental art and history are indeed so woven in the story that, they become integral parts of the tale and never seem to be imposed. It is clear that, Basu is using the Oriental history not simply to produce an authentic image of the Orient. He has a specific purpose of re-writing that history as a form of subversive narrative.

In this context, it is relevant to mention that Basu's latest novel *Kalkatta* explores and represents the nooks and crannies of a shady contemporary Calcutta. In this novel, he touches upon the exploitation, the filth, the lives of the destitute and the venality of the rich things that make Calcutta the veritable *other*. This is indeed an image of Calcutta, that sells in the literary market. Of late, Basu has also started writing in Bengali and the theme of his first Bengali novel, *Rabi-Shankar* (2016), is the Naxal movement of Bengal. So, it seems that Basu too has started responding to the demands of the market by making the recent history of India the subject of his fiction. He is a prolific writer and is very much in the trade; he will definitely write more. So, no conclusive statement should be made on the basis of a couple of aberrations. Basu's next enterprise might, indeed, surprise us in ways beyond our imagination.

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