



**K.M. Munshi's Historical Perception in "Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan" (Historical Characters and their Depiction)**

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**Abstract:**

The present research paper deals with Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi is one of the famous figures in Indian political and literary domains. He was a person with multiple abilities, which are clearly reflected in his literary and critical works. Munshiji has penned many novels, short stories, plays, pen portrayals, critical observation, political and philosophical works and many more. However, he is primarily famous for his historical novels including 'Patan Trilogy'. He was a sound reader also. He documented some of the outcomes of his deep study of various subjects, which are considered as his essays. K.M. Munshi has seen the history with a unique angle. His historical perception and argumentative approach are resulted in many noteworthy historical literary pieces including the above said essay. He tried to make the historical characters soulful. As he said, the documentation of the historical incidents and characters must include the creator's artistic vision. He emphasized that the history should be depicted with the characters, which stand themselves as the separate entities.

The essay "Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan" (Historical Characters and their Depiction) (1934) is taken from his collection of the documented speeches *Adivachano ane Bija Vyakhyano* (The Seminal Speeches and Other Lectures), published in 1946 C.E. It is the first essay of the second part 'Sahitya Parishad ni Vyaspith Parthi' (From the Rostrum of the Sahitya



Parishad). The essay focuses on the significance of characterization in the historical artistic pieces. Mr. Kishorlal Makwana, a well-known columnist of a leading Gujarati morning newspaper Divya Bhaskar rightly said in reference of Munshiji in his column that “નવલકથા એ બોલતું ચિત્ર’ એમ માનતા હોય એ રીતે એક ચિત્ર દોરી તેઓ (મુનશીજી) સરકી જાય છે.”

(Makwana 2021) (He [Munshiji] moves slowly and silently as he was believe that ‘Novel is a talking picture) Munshiji presented his views on various historical characters and incidents with his ‘digging deep’ approach in the essay. He also talked about some historical-literary pieces with the consideration of the characterization.

**Keywords:** Munshi, Historical, Literary, Characters, Separate entity

## Introduction:

History, the word itself reveals its connection with the past. It is simply called as the series of events of any particular reign/ nation or the dynasty, which had been occurring in the past. It is evaluated as Science by many scholars and historians. As per them, it deals with the factual details of by-gone culture and civilization. It reflects simply a chronology which stands as a piece of ‘Literature of Knowledge’. On the other hand, there are many scholars who consider history as a realm of arts. According to them, history is an outstanding collection of various events and factual details of by-gone society and it also presents a complete picture of the cultural and social sphere of past. If it deals with the living and throbbing society, how can it be considered as a part of an absolutely technical sphere i.e. Science? As it includes various shades of by-gone human society, it becomes a part of ‘Literature of Power’ automatically.

It is rightly said by Thomas Huxley, an English anatomist professor that “Literature is the expression of the thoughts of society. Books are specimens of the conversations of an age, preserved in the spirit of taste and genius (Literature is the expression of the thoughts, 2024) If the same statement from Mr. Huxley applies to the present issue, it can be said that history is a part of literary genre. It also serves the foundation for the literary creation, which reflects the historical elements and incidents. Such literary creation is known as a historical literary piece.



## Literature Review:

Professor Rita and Mr. Abhijit Kothari translated 'Patan Trilogy' *Patan ni Prabhuta* (The Glory of Patan), *Gujarat no Nath* (The Lord and Maters of Gujarat) and *Rajadhiraj* (The King of Kings) into English. Ms. Deepal Trivedi spoke to Professor Kothari for framing an interview for a leading newspaper. There are some interesting points of the interview, on which Professor Kothari presented her viewpoints as a translator, especially of Munshi's work. The interview was pressed-out on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 under the headline "When His History is History".

Kanaiyalal Munshi is known for his dynamic style of writing. He was also a leading barrister, so he had an immense ability to present the certain things in front of the readers, just with the help of his pointed pen. He could present the entire portrayal of the plot, incident, character, facts, truth etc. between the two hard- covers of his literary art. After having the idea of Munshi's relevance, the interviewer asked Professor about the writing style, which is one of the specialty of K.M. Munshi. In the answer, Professor said, "Munshi had a theatrical style; it was *Rangmanch* in a novel form! It's not surprising that it worked, and even today if someone were to make a series of films, it would work." (Trivedi, 2019)

Professor Rita's observation on Munshiji's style of writing also indicates his tremendous mastery in the domain of characterization. The above mentioned three books of 'Patan Trilogy' along with many other his works present a complete and living world with the animated characters of the depicted phase in front of the readers.

## K.M. Munshi as a Prominent Literary Master and His Historical Perception:

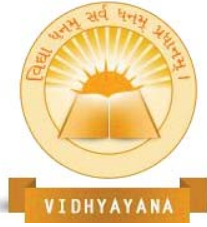
Kaniyalal Maneklal Munshi (1886-1971 C.E.) is one of the well-familiar names in the Gujarati literary domain. He was a man with various dimensions of personality such as an ardent reader, a prominent literary artist, a wise political figure, a leading freedom struggler, a studious scholar of native historical sphere etc. He could catch the historical throb of India and especially of Gujarat. He started his career as a literary artist with his first short story 'Mari Kamala', which is included in his own short story collection *Mari Kamala ane Biji Vato* (My Kamal and other Stories), published in 1912 C.E. Mr. Munshi, who had written by keeping his pen-name as Ghanshyam Vyas at the initial phase of his literary career, wrote about fifty literary-critical



pieces and made Gujarati literature enriched. He is primarily known for his immoral historical novels including Patan Trilogy- *Patan ni Prabhta* (The Glory of Patan), *Gujarat no Nath* (The Lord/ Master of Gujarat), *Rajadhiraj* (The King of Kings) among Gujarati literary lovers. Being an ardent reader, he was well familiar about the various historical depictions, chronicles and narrations. He always put his sincere efforts by presenting the facts with his artistic, argumentative and comparative narration in-front of his readers. His historical perception can be well observed in the essay “Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan” (Historical Characters and their Depiction) which was penned in 1934 C.E.

### **K.M. Munshi’s Historical Perception “Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan” (Historical Characters and their Depiction)**

K.M. Munshi was a man of the acute vision. He could see the under-cover reality just because of his magnificent scholarship. He is known as the *Swapnadrashita* (visionary) among literary lovers. He could see every issue with the accurate foresight. His essay “Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan” (Historical Characters and their Depiction) is one of the evidences of it. The essay is taken from his collection of the documented lectures *Adivachano ane Bija Vyakhyano* (The Seminal Speech and Other Lectures), which was published in 1946 C.E. It is the first essay of the second part ‘Sahitya Parishad ni Vyaspith Parthi’ (From the Rostrum of the Sahitya Parishad). It is a documented discourse, which was originally delivered at Lathi on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> convention of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (Gujarati Literary Council). The documented discourse starts with K.M. Munshi’s clarification on the various critical remarks on his characterization, especially of his historical literary pieces from some critics. According to them, Mr. Munshi had spoiled the historical characters in his novels. Munshiji satirically said that he could not learn (in the matter of characterization) much from those so-called critics. Here, he himself seems to reject and refuse his own quote, અન્યની પ્રસંશાપ્રાપ્તિની ઈચ્છા અને નિંદાનો ભય; આ બે જંજીરોથી આપણું જીવન સદાને માટે જકડાવેલું રહે છે.<sup>1</sup> (The desire to gain the praise from others and the fear of condemnation; our lives are chained up by these two forever.) (કનૈયાલાલ મુનશી - ગુજરાતી અસ્મિતાના સર્જક ઉત્કૃષ્ટ નવલકથાકાર, 2019)



Munshiji's arguments also throw the light on a controversial question of whether history should be considered as Science or Art (literature). It is a fact that science needs the evidences and art requires the imagination, realistic-logical foundation along with the artistic quality. Now, the history is something in which the sound evidences are difficult to be found. It stands on the received or the believed facts. Munshiji presented his point by an illustration. He said that the Indian (especially Hindu) communities would like to sacrifice themselves rather to question on the existence of Lord Krishna. The mythology and history present the number of incidences and *Chamatkaras* (deeds and miracles) of Lord Krishna, but none of them can present the sound evidence of His accurate period of time. It is simply the matter of faith. Here, one thing must be kept in mind that Munshiji does not want to raise question or doubt against Lord Krishna's existence. He just wants to highlight the matter of authenticity of documented history.

If the same illustration of Lord Krishna is taken for the further understanding, we can see that various theories, critics, researchers and historians have given different conclusions on Lord Krishna's life-span.

- As per *Brihat-Samhita*, which was written by Varahmihira, Lord Krishna's year of birth was around 2448-2449 B.C.E. He reached his conclusion through his deep study of various positions of different stars and clusters in the sky. In a way, his study was based on his knowledge of astronomy and planetary.
- Other astrologers present the year of 3200 B.C.E. in their conclusion. They calculated and analyzed various texts of astrology, different positions of stars and planets and astro-mathematical calculations.
- *The Vayupurana* (about 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.), one of the authentic inscriptions of Indian historical-mythological domain as it was mentioned in the great epic *the Mahabharata*; and the *Mahavamsa*, which presents a complete and authentic chronicles of different dynasties of India and Sri Lanka; indicate altogether different conclusion regarding Lord Krishna's year of birth. As per the abstract of both the inscriptions, the great king of Mauryan dynasty, King Chadragupta's phase was between 321 to 297 B.C.E. which was also mentioned by



various Greek historical scripts including *Indika* by Megasthenes. If we consider the history in descending order, we can see the following chronology.

- Mauryan Dynasty: established in 321 B.C.E. by Chandragupta Maurya under the guidance and mentorship of Acharya Vishnugupta (Kautilya).
- Nanda Dynasty: 22 years before the Mauryan Dynasty
- Shishunaga Dynasty: 68 years before the Nanda Dynasty
- Haryanaka Dynasty: 130 years before the Shishunaga Dynasty
- Pradyot Dynasty: 148 years before the Hariyanaka Dynasty
- Brihadrath Dynasty: 995 years before the Pradyot Dynasty

The phase of Brihadrath Dynasty is calculated from the third king, King Somadhi. His father King Sahadeva fought from the side of Pandava and was killed by Gandhar King Shakuni in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, which is evident in *the Mahabharata*. His father Jarasandh was killed by Bhima under the guidance of Lord Krishna himself. If the descent chronology of the dynasties is considered, the phase of Lord Krishna can be considered as the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

Here, one thing should be kept in mind that the above illustration can not shake the communal faith on Lord Krishna. It simply presents that how history presents the different timings/age/period for the same incident or character of by-gone period.

K.M. Munshi could reach at the finding through his sound historical vision that the historical objects are always remained lame because of the limited capacity of man to see and remember the things. A fact cannot be remained as the 'fact' in the oral tradition. It is a matter of consideration that sometimes the documentation of fact remains just as a practice of pleasure for a historical documenter. So, the documented fact may not be able to stand as a sound evidence of any particular historical event; the same is evident in the above illustration of Lord Krishna. He presented one more illustration, which is of King Harishchandra, one of the famous emperors of Ayodhya from Ikshvaku dynasty. Munshiji noted that King Harishchandra is





mentioned as the son of Trishanku in Puranas; and in the Vedic literature, the same Harishchandra is mentioned as the son of Vedhasa; and Trishanku is mentioned as a sage.

Generally, the documented facts are considered as the foundation of the history. K.M. Munshi also raised the question of authenticity of the documented facts. He firmly believed that the historical facts should be sound and unbiased enough and at the same time, he also knew that it would not be possible practically. He mentioned in the essay, “જાણ્યાં ને અજાણ્યાં અર્ધસત્યો ને અસત્યો પર ઇતિહાસ રચાયો છે; અને બીજી રીતે એને રચવો શક્ય પણ નથી.”<sup>2</sup> (The history is created on the known and unknown half- truths and untruths; and is not even possible to create it in the other way.) (K.M. Munshi 156)

Munshi threw the light on one more fact that none of the incidents repeats itself as it is again. Here, he seems to reject the belief, ‘the history always repeats itself’ indirectly. According to him, the history captures the select moments of the human life and the life is very uncertain. It includes the number of sudden, unplanned and unnoticed incidents and among them, some can create the history. He put the illustration of Mahatma Gandhi’s role in the freedom struggle. Barrister Gandhi did not have such an intense dream of the independent India as Mahatma Gandhi had. When Gandhiji felt the humiliation of the non-white (and Indians) during his journey by train in South Africa, he decided to root out the British Empire from India. It was mere a spark which creates the history.

He further said that different historians may have different perspectives. They present the different arguments on the different incidents and thus, the readers or the learners cannot consider any one view as the authentic one. It is a fact that the analysis or the examination of the different ancient coins, inscriptions, copper inscriptions, eulogies, sculptures, architectural structures etc. can lead us to certain point of past, as it is a part of the science; but it would be under the archaeology and not under the history. Here, he indirectly presented his view that the history does not have the sound evidences at the same time, it is based on some ‘sparks’ and some uncertain incidents; so it cannot be considered as the science.



According to Munshi, the history can be considered as a creative piece of literature. If the historical facts are collected without the artistic vision, it would be remained only as a barren collection; a body without soul. *Hunar Khan ni Chadhai* (Hunar Khan's Incursion) by a well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century Gujarati poet- Dalpatram serves the same thing in front of the readers. Dalpatram wanted to save the native skills from the attack of the foreign or non-native skills. He wrote *Hunar Khan ni Chadhai* (Hunar Khan's Incursion) with a patriotic aim. He did not write it with the aim of simply to give pure aesthetic pleasure and according to the set credence, a literary piece which is emerged for the beauty of the narration is the elite literature. So, *Hunar Khan ni Chadhai* (Hunar Khan's Incursion) can be considered as an elite literary piece only to such an extent that as an artistic piece, it little bit satisfies the readers' sentiments. Thus, the historical pieces which have been read for the sake of the simplicity and beauty of the narration are saved and sustained and others have been vanished with the passage of time.

K.M. Munshi also spoke about the artistic history. The literary masterpiece, which is written without any aim of achieving something creates its place in the readers' hearts. The writer's involvement and his experience in the domain of artistic beauty are the reasons behind it. Here, Munshiji intelligently answered his critics that he could feel as well as conceive the historical incidents and the characters through the deep study and that is why, he could incarnate the characters of his historical novels. He could create the sentimental relations with them through his involvement and he depicted all of them on the paper with the same artistic perspective, so that the readers can also feel the same. In a way, it can be said that the historical characters are portrayed on the basis of historian's involvement. The historian develops the age-old characters on the papers by making them soulful and animate through the various sentiments.

Munshi presented his perspective that “ઇતિહાસ એટલે લોકો એકતાનતા પ્રાપ્ત કરવા માટે જે સામુદાયિક ઈચ્છાશક્તિ વ્યક્ત કરે તેનો, અને તે શક્તિને સર્જનાર મૂલ્યોનો (સમૂહ).” (K.M. Munshi 305) (History means (the collection) of the collective will-power of the people which is meant to achieve the unity; and of values, which create the power.) He departed history into four divisions. (1) Folk story (Folklore) (2) Story (3) Novel and (4) History. These four are the prime efforts to make the historical characters animate. One thing should be kept in mind that the





genre of folk stories was used to teach and preach the mass in the earlier phase. The mythological and historical characters were depicted as the moralistic figures, so that the mass can keep them as their ideals and try to walk on the path of morality and ethics. In the earlier phase, it was very common to depict the historical and mythological characters stereotypically. Savitri, Sita, Ahalya are some of the examples of women stereo-typicality.

The stories contain the historical characters with the flesh and blood. A story writer tries to weave the characters in the narration and highlights the specific phases of them chronologically. Such characters are seen in the Puranas and in the Akhyana (saga) tradition mostly. The literary form novel is one of the platforms to depict the historical incidents and the characters artistically and easily. A historical novelist gets more scopes and space to re-shape the historical characters and incidents in compare to a short story writer. It is a known fact that K.M. Munshi himself cultivated a lot in this field. According to Mr. Munshi, a novelist is free to add the element of imagination in his novel as per his wishes. He can reframe or modulate the historical incidents by using various literary objects and makes his reader enjoy. It is not the case with the historians on the other side. A historian cannot use the element of imagination and the creativity; and cannot even document anything without a deep study of the historical incidents. A historical novel includes the imagination and the artistic creativity along with the plot, whereas a historian must create the strong foundation of the examination and analysis. A historical novelist can view the incidents and characters systematically and artistically, so he can animate the age-old characters in his novel; but the same is not the case with the historian.

After all, the aim of both, literature and history is to depict the contemporary human nature and their activities. Both of the forms stick with their time-spans. One of the primary elements of the creative literature is the artist's involvement; however both of the forms contain the creators' involvement. The historical characters become soulful, only because of their creator's sentiments. Here, Munshi again counter argued on the criticism that he knew the creators involvement in well manner as he himself try to involve in the plot completely. Obviously, he never tried to frame his characters without flesh and blood. He had always seen a historical novel as an experiment of the human- behaviour. He firmly believed that he could control his impulses to create the carcass of the characters in his novels. The beauty of the characterization



is mostly lays on the author's intention and the artistic quality. The creator must include the self-perspective in the process of the characterization. The character should be in the author's thinking process and should make him feel that he is also a part of the group of characters. The author must be able to colour his spirit with the various sentiments of the characters and should also be able to make his readers know about it.

There are several historical incidents and characters which are remembered even today. The animate and artistic documentation of them is one of the reasons behind their long-lasting effect. On the other hand, there are number of characters and incidents of history which are vanished out from the present scenario. K.M. Munshi also believed that the visual word-portrayals are more effective than the narrative word-portrayals. In the Gujarati Akhyan (saga) tradition, only narrative word-portrayals were used. The literary form 'play' includes both the auditory and visual function of the plot, and as per Munshi, the characterization of the play is one of the most intellectual processes for the play-wright.

K.M. Munshi criticized the literary taste of the Gujaratis. As per him, Gujarat does not have much dramatic sense. Jain scholar and saint Hemchandra and his disciple Ramchandra tried a lot to increase the dramatic perspective among the Gujaratis but with the passage of time, the historical literary artists started believing that the narrative word-portrayals are more convenient to frame than the visual word-portrayals. They wanted the literary artist of Gujarat to bring the soul (life) back to the characters. Only then, the historical legacy would be preserved in the domain of the Gujarati literature.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, it can be said that it is one of the duties of the historical-literary creators to keep the history alive in the literary sphere. The depiction of historical characters should be more soulful and animate, so that the common mass of the readers can develop their interests in this domain and finally the history can become a subject of interest for the learners and the readers.



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## **Conflict of Interest:**

Here, the author wants to state that there is no conflict of interest related to K.M. Munshi's Historical Perception in the Essay "Aitihāsik Patro ane Tenu Nirupan" (Historical Characters and their Depiction).



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