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REFIGURING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN SHAMS UR RAHMAN FARUQI'S THE MIRROR OF BEAUTY

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on Shamas Ur Rahman Faruqi's quest of 'refiguring history' in *The Mirror of Beauty*. Faruqi fictionalizes history in an attempt to hear those voices thus far silenced in the conventional historiography. By rewriting the stories of pre-independence India in the novel, Faruqi intends to celebrate the unsung heroes of history. This paper is an attempt to analyze how Faruqi subverts the Eurocentric narratives which often depict a distorted image of Indo-Muslim culture and Nawabi civilization. Such grand narratives often portray a stereotypical image of Indians and Faruqi refutes this historical version in *The Mirror of Beauty*. He questions the notion of 'Real History' that is considered as a coherent and authoritative form of knowledge about the past and explores those spaces which have never been touched upon by the professional historians. So, the objective of this article is to showcase an alternate history of Indian culture by applying the postmodern technique of meta-narration that challenges the notion of 'absolute truth' about the historical narratives.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how historical narratives in Shamsur Rhaman Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* retrieve the stories of those who have been blanked out in official accounts of history. Questioning the professional historiography that is based on the idea of Eurocentric ideology, this study refigures historical narratives about Indo-Muslim culture. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, a renowned

Indian writer, has made a valuable contribution in Urdu literature. He is recognized as T.S. Eliot of Urdu criticism. His famous novel, *Kai Chand Thay Sar-e-Aasman*, is his magnum opus. *The Mirror of Beauty* is the translated version of *Kai Chand Thay Sar-e-Aasman*. This historical fiction is a remembrance in which fragments of memory are assembled to revive the glorious past of India. Moreover this article aims to address few questions; how does Faruqi's fiction reconstruct the immortal beauty of Indo-Muslim culture? How does Faruqi's novel transform what has been a significant absence in the meta-narratives of Indian history into a powerful presence? How does Faruqi rewrite the misinterpret history from a native's point of view?

Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty*, a critical history, highlights the neglected events and silenced voices by revising those mini narratives which are frequently overlooked by the universal historiography. To review the past, Keith Jenkins' concept of 'refiguring history' is taken into consideration. According to Jenkins, history needs to be relooked. He argues that there is no certain knowledge, so new ways must be applied on an old discipline. Therefore this re-figuration is an alternate approach to history which Faruqi also applies in *The Mirror of Beauty*, a big challenge to the Eurocentric narratives. The novel takes aim to breathe new life into professional historiography by peeping into the past and restoring the distorted narratives of Indo-Muslim culture and Nawabi civilization.

Previously, Indian past has always been dehistoricized. The professional historians practice universal narratives in which Indians are marginalized or portrayed as inferior creature. However, major concern of this research work is to rehistoricize the narratives about pre-independence India. To see the past as it really was, this paper uses Dipesh Chakrabarty's unconventional theoretical approach to reformulate Indian history. Chakrabarty argues that the absolute notions about 'India' and 'Europe' are mythical and inadequate to understand the cultural and historical differences. According to him, there is a dire need to subvert the traditional Eurocentric narratives by researching the minor pasts. So, in order to fill the gaps or historic distortions, Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* refigures the historicized past of India.

RESEARCH GAP

This work points out the deep-seated problems within the discipline of history in which the narratives, particularly about the third world countries, are misrepresented by the professional historiographers. So as to cope with this situation, the writers from the third world countries have developed a resistance strategy by rewriting their own history and adopt a new methodology of interrogating the existing historical narratives. Likewise Faruqi employs an alternate approach of historiography to find out certain unexplored spaces and undermine the Eurocentric assumptions about Indo-Muslim culture.

'Refiguring history' is an unconventional way to visit the past events. In an interview, Faruqi claims that traditional history lacks continuity. He asserts that we are unable to see things clearly as we use western lens to observe our past. "Our sense and understanding of our classical tradition is fractured.

There are discontinuities . . . we have to reconstruct our classical heritage, and redevelop lost insights and protocols of discourse” (Nazar 111). This statement sums up the objectives of this research as; restoration of the lost narratives, focus on re-historicization rather than de-historicization; and emphasis on deconstruction of the past as opposed to destruction of the past.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper responds to the following questions;

- How does the postmodern idea of multiplicity of truth challenge the notions of ‘Absolutism’, ‘Universalism’, ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘Propriety’?
- How the forms of professional historiography and myth of universal narratives about the sub-continent are being subverted?
- How does the popular conception of the Nawabi culture, as a degraded or morally degenerated society, stand up to scrutiny?
- Lastly, how can the mini-narratives regarding the Indian Muslim women, being submissive and insignificant things, be refigured?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A systematically constructed and qualitative research methodology is adopted. Firstly, it discusses the reason behind refiguring history. Then in a logical structural way, it puts emphasis on the practice of alternate historiography. For this purpose, this paper deconstructs the grand narratives about Indo-Islamic culture and recalls the stories of Nawabs, Begams and Courtesan Institution. To summarize the entire study, it concludes with a logical implication of Keith Jenkins’ theory of Refiguring History and Chakrabarty’s concept of Provincializing Europe as the ultimate reaction of postmodern mind. Moreover, this study achieves its target by following five steps i.e. introduction, literature review, applied methodology, data analysis, and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History is always subjective and fabricated. Hitherto unbiased knowledge is not possible. However postmodernism offers a chance to push these traditional boundaries of writing history and lays emphasis on the deconstruction of all preset constructs as real historical knowledge is just an impossible myth in the postmodern world. Jenkins, a British historiographer, asserts that nothing is stable. Everything is at the risk of being refigured or transformed. In his book, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an old Discipline*, Jenkins argues that historical closure is unachievable. He reckons new ways of thinking as “we ought not to waste this chance of otherness, of newness, in deference to the dead weight of professional, academic orthodoxy, even when most generously constructed” (5). Jenkins also agrees with Jacques Derrida’s idea of “endless openness” which discourages any full stop and replaces it with ellipsis (Jenkins 19; Ch. 1). Accordingly, the meanings are fluid or instable and all the texts are open for interminable interpretation. Hence postmodern narrative strategy puts emphasis on rereading the historical narratives. Postmodernists

believe in the historical-consciousness that refuses to accept the previous assumptions. In *Refiguring History*, Jenkins sees history as shapeless but historians mold it to make a “proper history” (37; Ch. 2). The practice of propriety set certain boundaries while narrating the earlier period. Such creative distortions in the plot aim to discontinue the tradition. In order to trace the gaps created by proper historiography, chronological record must be figured out.

Postmodernism has not only dissolved the fixed terms like coherence, authenticity, meaning and originality, but also created doubt in everything by introducing different terms like uncertainty, indeterminacy, non-absolutism, and instability of language. This theory opens new doors for interpretation of history. Jenkins also notifies in *Refiguring History* that “stability” is an unnatural phenomenon (22; Ch. 1). Being a postmodern thinker, he reasons out that the subject ‘History’ must be re-examined otherwise “we can never know what history really is” (28; Ch. 1).

Jenkins’s theory of ‘refiguring history’ is a postmodern approach to see the past anew. It shows infidelity with the existing ideologies and puts emphasis on “beginning again”, a new fashion to mirror the past (59; Ch. 3). In another book *Rethinking History*, Jenkins demonstrates the fact that historiographical practices have to be refreshed to make the voices audible to the world. An alternative way of writing belittles the old frameworks as they have no longer legitimacy. All the great stories, Meta narratives of the past, have lost their vitality now in the postmodern era. Jean-Francois Lyotard states that ‘Meta narratives’ is an abstract idea. He asks to review the historicized past to liberate it from the hegemonic ordering and make space for the mini narratives that create difference, plurality, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Lyotard expresses incredulity towards meta/master/grand-narratives and demonstrates the need for little narratives. In his book, *A Postmodern Condition: The Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard says “let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the difference” (82).

Hayden White explains in an article, “Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality,” that “what we postmodernists are against is a professional historiography” (152). White criticizes the monolithic writing style and marks its shift to postmodern narrative technique. Another postmodern critic Mehdi Ghasemi seems to accept the White’s beliefs relating to historiography. In an article “Revisiting History in Hayden White’s Philosophy”, Ghasemi allows for retrospection and calls for amendment of the destructed past using postmodern lens. To fix the historical structure, Ghasemi says, “the past . . . must be revisited, but with irony, not innocently” (qtd. in “Revisiting History in Hayden White’s Philosophy” 6).

Thus far the third world countries like India always experienced a profound sense of marginality. But now they have resisted strongly and started to reclaim their position; e.g. postmodern India is fighting against the center to make the world realize that center cannot be hold without its margins. For this purpose they are writing back to reveal those narratives which were omitted or changed in the mainstream histories. This postmodern wave of refiguring

history is the best opportunity for the marginalized groups to be listened all over the world. Therefore Shamsur Rhaman Faruqi, Indian writer, adopts a new historical methodology to recall those who have been excluded and remained largely anonymous in historical accounts.

Postmodernism negates all the socially constructed terms and presents the fact that most of the narratives are unhistorical, one-sided and blinkered. The professional historians have introduced few terms in order to make difference between the civilized Europeans and the uncivilized Indians. For example it is considered that Indians have the minor pasts—the pasts of lesser importance and should move out of the professional Indian historiography. However, the modern Indian historiography is dissatisfied with all the European narratives which depict Indians' past as they had no history. So as to restore the glory of Indian past, rethink Indian historiography as a voice against the silence.

There are many mythical stories about Indian society. In professional historical narratives, Indian society is presented as stagnant, backward and under developed before the British arrived in the Subcontinent. According to these British rulers, Indians have no culture so they came there with the 'civilizing mission' to enlighten the uncultured natives. Thus the British historiography, so far, has given false descriptions on the subject of Indian society, culture and civilization. But now the postmodern stage retunes the yardstick to measure the supremacy of any culture or nation. In order to challenge the universal historical structure regarding India past and to reclaim their position from margins to center, Faruqi views 18th century India as the most productive phase in the literary field. In "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century", Faruqi rethinks 18th century Indian society, that was usually depicted as the period of disintegration and decay by the white man, but in fact, this time was the age of discovery and innovation in the field of literary production (1). Another novelist William Dalrymple also refigures Indian past. He defies all the mythical narratives on Indo-Muslim culture in his novel *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*. He pictures Indian society as "a world that far more hybrid, and with far less clearly defined ethnic, national, and religious borders, than history books written in Britain" ("Introduction" xiv).

Narratives about Nawabs of Lucknow and Indo-Islamic culture are always tarnished. So to have a second look at these fabricated narratives, Ravi Bhatt's *The Life and Times of the Nawabs of Lucknow* re-evaluates the past and brings to life the vibrant, idiosyncratic way of life of the Nawabs who played a vital role in weaving a refined, matchless and sophisticated culture of Lucknow. Bhatt criticizes the British version of history that defamed the Indian people and culture. He exposes the fact that "to tarnish the reputation of the Nawabs to annex Awadh was the part of the British campaign" (N. p). For that reason the Nawabs were always portrayed as womanizer, extravagance and drunk in the Eurocentric narratives. For instance, a British author draws a picture of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah as a symbol of "decadence" and "complete failure" whereas Bhatt describes him as a "complete teetotaler, maestro of art, culture and literature who was defamed" (197). Moreover Bhatt celebrates the

past and sings the unsung heroes. He sketches a splendid culture of Nawabi society with refined etiquettes, graceful manners, poetic talent, aesthetic sense, literary taste and intellectual values. Besides Nawabs, the iconic women of the bygone period were also ahead of their times. The Begams, the dynamic ladies, were cultured, candid and political leaders. They made a great contribution in shaping the glorious culture. That's why; Bhatt disapproves all the supposed tales about Indian women by rewriting. Similarly Faruqi refigures the historical narrations about Indian women through poetry and prose.

Ahmed Mehfooz's book Shamsur Rehman Faruqi is a collection of Faruqi's interviews. Accordingly, Faruqi is a literary legend who dares to break down all the grand-narratives or fixed norms by writing untraditionally. In an interview, Faruqi tells that we [Indian_Hindus and Muslims] have ignored our ancient ways or past traditions and, instead, borrowed them from foreign language and western civilization (54). While interviewing, he further says that there is a dire need to refashion Eurocentric doctrines about the historicized past. As we have obscure ideas and vague details about our past so Faruqi's fiction, *The Mirror of Beauty*, visualizes everything remarkably and gives birth to the historical characters which were misinterpreted in the professional record.

Syed Irshad Haider praises Faruqi's skillful narration of envisioning the invisible islands where Indo-Muslim culture is shining immaculately. In his book *Khuda Lagti*, Haider acknowledges that professional historians never bothered to write about Indo-Islamic civilization rather they consider it a heavy stone (Haq 39). Thus to make history familiar, Faruqi enlivens the frozen moments of the bygone era. In *Khuda Lagti*, Jamil illustrates that Faruqi remaps the past using the "effect of real" or "truth and factuality" (90). He doesn't make history heroic, rather he makes it realistic. Qadir Zaman argues in the same book, *Khuda Lagti*, that Faruqi's novel symbolizes the 'subaltern history' in order to hear the voices of the marginalized people (190). By writing the people's history, Faruqi explores the lost moons and seeks to make them shine again. For instance Indian history is silent for Dagh Dehlvi's mother Wazir Khanam but Faruqi rewrites her story, demonstrates her sublime beauty, lofty manners, poetic taste and proves that the women like her make their own history (Hussain 48).

The western representation of the Indians is mere a fabrication. Many derogatory terms like primitive, ignorant, uncultured, inferior and exotic are largely used to portray Indo-Muslims people. They are bent upon thinking that the "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (qtd. in *Orientalism* xxv). Hence this paper aims at re-interpreting the Indian history to challenge the western modes of representation of Indians on stereotypical patterns.

DATA ANALYSIS

This part discusses the significance of 'refiguring history'— an alternate approach to read the past. The word 'history' means to research, investigate or explore something about the past. Similarly the term 'refiguring' means to re-

evaluate the narratives about the people and events of the bygone era. So as to refigure the Indian history, this paper describes the historical tales in a different way. Because professional history is insufficient to understand Indo-Muslim culture as many facts are washed off from its pages. In these biased narratives, Indian history has lost its aesthetic appreciation and calls for amendment. So Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty*, a new version of Indian history, explains the fact that historical thought needs to renew to see the past more clearly. To make the ideas more cleared, this paper applies Chakrabarty's perspective concerning the historical writings.

Chakrabarty, an Indian theorist, has brought revolution in the historical thinking. Reformulation of history is the need of an hour, Chakrabarty asserts in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. He challenges the Eurocentric hegemonic policy of historicism and vows to apply an alternate historiography. According to Chakrabarty, the term 'Europe' is a "silent referent" to evaluate the 'non-European' histories (28). In such historical frames, non-Westerners are portrayed as outdated or obsolete. Therefore, Chakrabarty asks non-Western scholars to "critique historicism" in order to "find strategies for thinking historical difference" (46). Thus by following this technique, Faruqi's recalls the historicized past yet echo in the Indian streets waiting to be found. In order to represent the neglected narratives of the past, Faruqi rewrites about his people as well as culture in *The Mirror of Beauty*. The purpose of his quest for indigenous roots is actually to make modern generation aware of their glorious past. He says that "the people of today are developing the habit of forgetting. The dust and smoke of modern life are busy obliterating, or at least dimming, many such events hidden in the mazes of family stories and even the histories of the nations" (103). To bridge the gap in the historical context, this paper adopts new pattern of postmodern reading of history. This methodology welcomes plurality of narratives or endless interpretation of historical discourse as Chakrabarty suggests. Likewise Faruqi being a postmodern writer also believes in the circular structure of history without any closure. He puts the stress on renewing the historical texts in *The Mirror of Beauty* as "old words can be re-narrated in new words" (17). This re-narration of the fragmented past is an alternate approach to history taken by the writer to make people aware of their sublime past and lofty culture.

The historical narratives of India although shattered by professional historians yet wait to be refigured. In the beginning of *The Mirror of Beauty*, we see a mysterious book as a nostalgic clue. The book conveys a message in Indian language to explore mysteries of the past else "it will remain shut forever" (42). This historic book is not in proper shape as it's been eaten by termites. The holes in this book actually symbolize those parts which have been omitted by the termites or professional historians. Such professional writings depict Indians as uncultured, "backward", "non-rational", "minor", "inferior", and "subordinate" (Chakrabarty 101). So Faruqi's fiction is an attempt to refigure the stereotypical description of people and culture of pre-independence India. Faruqi sees his endeavor to refigure history as; "For many years he had been researching some of the Indian families of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: families that had been extremely notable in their times but had now been

buried in the dunghill of unread pages. Their names, if known at all, were known only to some specialist historians.... he aspired to write their story someday” (16). Thus, by looking back into the past, the writer attempts to illuminate several eclipsed moons in the historical sky. He recovers countless rare gems of bygone era which are now lost and succeeds to explore few great poets, Begams and Navabs of India which were never recognized on the historic stage. The sole purpose of this artistic masterpiece *The Mirror of Beauty* makes the crystal clear that India had rich culture and literary past thus turning down all the Eurocentric narratives about Indo-Muslim culture.

Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* throws light on certain historic women that were torn off bitterly from the pages of history. Wazir Khanam was a lady of such grace, dignity and elegance. She was a great poet of that time but never got recognition. However Faruqi makes her live again through this novel. By defying all the stereotypical description of Indian women, the author redefines their identity and attempts to get back their lost position. Moreover Faruqi reveals the real face of British historians by giving example of Wazir Khanam's picture that is kept in the British library. The image is torn brutally, “so that nearly third part of the painting was lost” (36). This damaged portrait symbolizes how non-Europeans histories have always been de-historicized or destructed by the British historiography.

Hitherto grand narratives have marked Indians as ‘ahistorical’__ without history. Through these narratives, Indians are made to believe that they don't have any story, culture or glorious past enough to write about. All such constructed narratives have distorted and stereotypical representation of the Indians. “Such representation constructed a structural opposition between the male, rational, superior West and the female, imaginative and inferior East. Hinduism was hence represented as an irrational religion, often compared to a jungle, in contrast to the rational and ordered idea of Christianity (Inden, 86-87). Since historical reality is changed by European historians, so Indians are urged to admit it as the absolute truth. Now, in the postmodern era, non-Europeans writers are subverting the power structures and refiguring their history in order to reinstate their self-worth, redefine their identity and refurbish their cultured past. Faruqi's unconventional approach to history in *The Mirror of Beauty* provides a new shape to the existing narratives. This fiction is actually the people's history or ‘minority history’ because it studies the past that always stay immature, minor or of lesser importance in the professional historiography. Chakrabarty explains that “such ‘minor’ pasts are those experiences of the past that always have to be assigned to an ‘inferior’ or ‘marginal’ position as they are translated into the academic historian's language” (101).

Contrary to heroic histories, Faruqi celebrates the marginalized people of Indian Subcontinent to make them recognized universally. In *The Mirror of Beauty*, Faruqi re-imagines the historic past and explores genealogical records to re-describe the stories of the common people of 19th century Indo-Islamic world. The objective to talk about poets, Nawabs, artisan, courtesans and Begams and of Indian society is to appreciate their artistic work and historic contribution in the formation of wonderful culture. By recalling the forgotten

poets of Lucknow and Delhi, the author revives the classical poetry of that literary age. Many great poets of bygone era like Navab Mirza Dagh, Sayyid Dildar Ali Mazaq, Ustad Ibrahim Zauq, Hakim Momin Khan Momin, Mir Baqir Ali Jafari, Mir Nizamuddin Mamnun, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Khvajah Haidar Ali Atash and Wazir Khanam have been made alive in *The Mirror of Beauty*.

The purpose to narrate the story of Wazir Khanam is to refigure the conventional narratives about Indian women. The woman of the past was not mediocre, irrational or ignorant lady as depicted in the Eurocentric narratives rather she was a witty politician and great poet. A woman of literary and aesthetic taste was expert in the art of ghazl. Her poetic skill is “nothing more than a pastime to claim equality with the men folk” (193). Moreover Wazir Khanam’s daughter named Sophia and Sister Manjhli Begam were also the literary stars of the past. They were multi-talented women. Tutors were arranged to train them different skills like poetry, painting, calligraphy and embroidery etc. It mirrors the fact that Faruqi reverses the historical representation of Indian women in *The Mirror of Beauty*.

The process of historical research connects people to their past. They attempt to rewrite their own story rather than interiorizing the European version of non-western history. Likewise the historical fiction *The Mirror of Beauty*, a revision of the past, critically examines and refigures the meta-narrative about the 19th century Indian society when ‘British Raj’ was at peak. Till now we have been told that the British came to civilize the uncultured Indians under the umbrella of ‘white man’s burden’. However the facts are different, Faruqi explains in *The Mirror of Beauty*. He refigures the historical narratives and reveals the fact that the “Firangi” or British’s mission was not only to westernize the natives but they also seemed to be interested in Indian treasures. Many artworks as well as cultural assets, such as paintings, sculpture and artifacts were stolen at that time and can be seen in British libraries and museums today. E.g. Koh-e-Noor was taken away by the British in the past. Furthermore Faruqi criticizes the behavior of British with the natives and questions their civility ironically. In *The Mirror of Beauty* he illustrates white man’s hatred for Indians e.g. Aby’s views about Wazir Khanam were;

She missed no opportunity to assert or declare that Indians were black not only from the outside, but also that there was no difference between blackness of skin and the absolute colour of blackness; and as blackness meant depravity and poverty in reasoning power, there could be no salvation for Indians. Wazir’s colour, which Indians regarded as light brown and desirably salty, was nothing but ‘dark brown’ in her eyes. She plotted and planned in her heart to liberate her cousin from the clutches of this dark Indian woman and marry him off to some suitable, white, soft-spoken, good Christian girl” (227).

To refigure the fabricated narratives about Indo-Muslim culture, this paper aims to destabilize the constructed identities of inferior East and superior West. Although the European explorers were alien to Indian culture and had no access to many parts like ‘harem’ and ‘women’ residing there, yet it’s

surprising to see their narratives on 'harems', 'women' and 'nawabs' of India. Generally, these historians misinterpret 'royal harem' and portray 'Begams' as subjugated and 'Nawabs' as womanizers. Accordingly, 'harem' is a place of eroticism, male sexuality, and confinement of women. Europeans see it as a jail house where women condition is worse than the nuns in France. However Huddleston, a critic, challenges these mythical descriptions; "the harem was a blank which European men could not investigate firsthand, so they filled in that blank with what they imagined. Their erroneous assumptions became common 'knowledge' to the Western world" (Huddleston, 1). In the same way, Faruqi elucidates that all the historical material about Indo-Muslim culture is one-sided so it needs to be refreshed. In his fiction *The Mirror of Beauty*, he rejects the European version of 'harem' and presents an alternative narrative.

The term 'harem' has Arabic origin that means a place of sanctuary. Indians describe this place as 'mahal' (palace) or 'zenanah' (women's place) where a great number of women lived and men's entry is banned. A true image of 'harem' is exposed by Faruqi in *The Mirror of Beauty* according to which 'harem' is a safe place where women lead a happy life and make choices freely. All the women of 'harem' are not for sensual purposes rather they are the ruler's, queen, princess, female relatives, concubines, female slaves, sisters, step sisters, foster mother, mother, step mother, artisans, servants, guardswomen and transgender. For instance; in the novel, Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan's 'harem' is pictured. This 'harem' includes two wives, two courtesans, daughters, little son, a large number of 'kaneez' (female servants) and female bodyguards. These women are from different religions or creed but they live simultaneously with harmony. Similarly, in Navab Mirza Fakhru's harem, Wazir Begam arrives after the death of his previous wife. Navab Fakhru's harem has no any prostitute in his 'harem'. Another ruler Bhadur Shah Zafar has many 'kaneez' but Zeenat Mahal is the only Queen in his 'harem'. Thus Faruqi restructures the mistreated historical narratives about Indian harems and interrogates the Eurocentric assumptions about Indian women and rulers. He shows his cultural values and traditional beauty which the foreigners are unable to understand. His objective to reread the past is to show the world that Indian women are respected by their men. E.g. Majhali Begam lives in harem, "doubtless, Navab Yusuf Ali Khan treated her with full solicitude and provided every possible comfort for her" (428).

Faruqi clarifies in *The Mirror of Beauty* that women practice veil but it doesn't mean that they are oppressed rather they feel more comfortable. They go outside in "dolli" or "palanquin" whenever they want and in this way they keep themselves safe from the strangers' eyes. Wazir Khanam travels through a "royal nalki" in which she sits "fully covered in her chador...She could see, but was invisible in effect" (717). As veil doesn't keep women apart from life activities so they adopt this cultural obligation whole heartedly. Thus veil is used to protect women not to suppress them; this is how Faruqi alters the grand narrative about veil that Indian women put into practice. Even today, European brides and catholic nuns practice veil. Are they devalued or subdued?

Frequently, professional historiographers showcase the hegemonic perception of backwardness of the East and superiority of the West. Their poor understanding of the Indo-Muslim culture makes them incapable to appreciate its glory, so they fabricate tales accordingly. Therefore the western historians always misinterpret the courtesan institution and cultural tradition of India. Such grand narratives, usually, represent courtesan as minor, lower class, sensual and irrational feeling guilty over her fallen past. However this research attempts to redefine the courtesan tradition and shows that Indian courtesan is not characterless instead she is an archetype of dignity and liberty. Therefore, in *The Mirror of Beauty*, Faruqi traces again the stories of Lucknivi courtesans in order to celebrate the neglected women and reclaim their exalted position. He admires the accomplished women like Wazir, Akbari Bai and Mehak Pari or great artisan of that time. Their sophisticated manners, refined etiquettes, civilized conduct and proficiency in basic skills like poetry, music or dance reflect the glorious culture of the Nawabi era. Thus acknowledging the significant contribution of courtesans in the cultural development, Faruqi appreciates Manjhali Begam in *The Mirror of Beauty* as;

She spoke in refined accents and was adept at repartee and the exchange of lively and light-hearted dialogue, and knew hundreds of Urdu and Persian verses, which she often used in her conversation intelligently and appropriately. She was poetically inclined with a good ear for the rhythm of poetry and composed an occasional a verse or two. She was also well acquainted with a new style of singing . . . the musical arts not as a profession, but merely in order to indulge her taste for such things (189).

Abdul Haleem Sharar claims in his book *The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* that “some courtesans within this environment gained sufficient social status and respect that the wealthy of the city sent their sons to them in order for them to learn manners, grooming and etiquette” (139).

Typically, Indian past is subordinated while making history. To fulfill the universal goals, historians smother many voices and present negative image of numerous people. “Within this narrative shared by imperialist and nationalist imaginations, the ‘Indian’ was always a figure of lack” (Chakrabarty 32). Image of Indian Nawabs has been distorted so far. Subsequently to see the past as it really was, this study gets into the marginalized past to modify it and makes us hear the voices of the subjugated groups. To accomplish the task, Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* revitalizes the existing tales about Nawabs of Awadh as well as the Nawabi culture. This historical fiction examines the historical narratives and celebrates the unsung heroes of Indo-Muslim civilization. It reveals the fact that all the Nawabs are highly educated and master of art, poetry, calligraphy, music, and dance. They know many languages and have a good collection of books in their libraries. Faruqi narrates the story of Nawab Ziauddin Ahmed Khan who can talk in Persian, Turkish, Hindi, Rekhta, Urdu, Arabic and English as well. Besides having a large library, he is “fully learned in Literature, Court Correspondence, History, Family Trees, Quranic Exegesis, Hadith, Astrology and Astronomy” (779). His unique dressing style or Nawabi costume signals his cultured upbringing as Faruqi narrates in *The Mirror of Beauty*. In contrast if we study Eurocentric

portrayals of Nawabs, the picture is totally different. The foreigners have employed their prejudices against Indian rulers and represented them negatively in history books. Therefore Faruqi, an Indian writer, exposes their plots designed to destroy navabs' repute in *The Mirror of Beauty* and shows the biased nature of white man for Indian rulers through the character of Fraser. Fraser tries his best to tarnish the reputation of Navab Shamsuddin and considers him as misfit for state affairs. Due to his personal grudges, he writes an official letter to Charles Metcalfe to deprive Navab of Loharu state because "of the weak grasp of the Navab on his territories" (415). Also East India Company officers accused Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of debauchery and incompetence in the administrative matters and compel him to exile his native soil. Owing to several allegations, the king of Avadh has to leave against his will. "The Firangee issued a Blue Book containing the English account of what was described as the misgovernment, incompetence and heartlessness of the King, thus justifying their patently unwarranted military intervention and deposition of him" (934).

Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* assembles the formal glory of Nawabi culture and subverts the historical myths about Indian cities. By nostalgic vision, *The Mirror of Beauty* slightly reveals the fact that 19th century India was awfully developed and it is the British who made India underdeveloped and backward to this day. Through this fiction we come to know that Nawabi period is a phase when different artworks and literary assets are at apex. Lucknow and Delhi also start growing vigorously under the Nawabi patronage. So the objective to remap these historical cities, their lost grandeur as well as refined manners even from dress to dining is to show the world that how much culturally advanced and prosperous India was in the past. Thus Faruqi turns down the typical narratives in which Delhi is always connected with death, disintegration or decay and refigures it as an ideal state; "Delhi of Bahadur Shah II had everything that was difficult to find in one city at that time, great as a city might have been. Above all, the city was teeming with people; its subjects were happy; the rich, drunk on their prosperity, the beggar, happy in his rough animal skin. Delhi was, in the truest sense, the heart that is full of Divine Illuminations (738). He further describes Delhi as;

DELHI AS AN ENVY OF BAGHDAD: Years of English peace__the lights of beauty and love, learning and spiritual grace, astronomy and engineering, logic and mathematics, astrology and geomancy, poetry and literature, piety and Sufism, glittered in every street and neighbourhood, making Delhi the envy of Baghdad and Cordoba. Experts in martial and recreational sports, masters of music and dance, culinary arts, pharmacology, leaders in every trade, every craft that needed manual skill and dexterity, designers and makers of jewelled or plain silver and gold ornaments: the Heavenly City of Delhi, Hazrat-e-Delhi ('Delhi', the presence), teemed with these all kinds of people of sophistication (735).

To reclaim India's true position in the historical platform, Faruqi throws light on vibrant period of Indian past which bragged of its art, romance, literature, architecture, and, in particular, a classy culture of refinement. This meticulous attempt of refiguring the historicized past is a cultural revival. Faruqi refigures

another notorious narrative about Indians that men are lustful, uncivilized, careless, savage and unkind towards their women. But this research work contradicts the professional historiography and sees Indian man incredibly different. Faruqi tells that Indians are very kind, loving and responsible. They neither beat their wives nor go against them. Rather they love and respect them. In *The Mirror of Beauty*, all the men are very polite with their women. Mirza Taurab is an ideal husband as “there was no question of his regarding Chhoti Begam as his inferior in birth. His temperament was truly poetic and lovely. He treated Wazir with a tenderness that was coloured with a light hue of respect” (Faruqi 655). Nawab Fakhru is also very good, dutiful and faithful husband who loves with his wife Wazir. He expresses his love in this way, Wazir “you may or may not remain seated on the bed but I have seated you firmly in my heart” (889). As compared to Indians, the British who assert to be civilized are very lustful and irresponsible towards their mistress thus leaving them forever. The Firangi, who claims to be the rescuer of brown woman from the brown man, builds relations with Indian mistress, produces offspring and then leaves the ‘bibi’ and takes his children to Europe to baptize them and make them stranger to the maternal roots. This is the harsh reality that has always been kept secret in the meta-narratives. However Faruqi’s fiction reveals the fact how a white man Blake Sahib destroys Wazir’s life. There is no record of their marriage in the company officials so Wazir is disowned; “Thus she could inherit nothing from the cash and other properties left by Marston Blake. Nor was she given a pension or subsistence grant by the company” (11). It is highly ironic that Wazir is not registered as Blake’s bibi but her kids names are registered with their father’s name. Her children are taken away. Soon she gets information that “they [children] have been baptized as Christians . . . Don’t even dream of making Mussulmans of them” (251). Similarly another Indian woman Khair-un Nisa Begam becomes pregnant with the white man’s child. But her child is sent to “The Country . . . leaving the poor mother high and dry. Boy and girl became strangers to everything, their origins, their religion, their culture” (744).

This paper seems to advocate Chakarbarty’s views on historiography according to that all the representations of superior White Man and backward Indian are not factual. Till now, Indians have always been represented as polygamous or womanizer whereas, in fact, the civilized “Firangi” were actively involved in all the unlawful activities as shown in *The Mirror of Beauty*. In the Subcontinent, Faruqi states that “every Englishman invariably kept Indian bibis: not just one, in fact four or even more. Temporary dalliance with prostitutes or nautch girls, and an occasional visit to doss house were an extra treat” (204). In the novel, a white man William Fraser has four mistresses and still desires for more women. Similarly General Ochterlony has eleven or thirteen mistresses in number. *The Mirror of Beauty* ironically criticizes the Englishmen who “marry only one woman, but can have as many permanent or temporary connections as they please” (328).

To challenge the biased description of non-western female, Faruqi retells the untold stories of the past and speaks about those things that remained unsaid. By refiguring the past, he attempts to redefine feminine history of India in which, till now, woman is shown as commodity or the vulnerable victim of

society where she can't take decision. However *The Mirror of Beauty* traces the glorious past where women have all the rights and enjoy influential status in the socio-political affairs as well. Moreover the women of the past are greatly loved by their husbands and their demands are filled immediately. Many Indian monuments like 'Taj Mahal' etc echo the love stories of the past. While examining history, we see women making choices en route for love, marry or remarry. In the novel, Wazir Begam makes her own destiny. Firstly, she loves Mr. Blake and lives with him then after Blake's death, she lives with Navab Shamsuddin. After Shamsuddin's death, she decides to remarry with Mirza Agha Turab and after his death, Wazir marries to Mirza Fakhru. That's why Faruqi writes back to the empire in order to rectify the historical narratives in which Indian women have been belittled. He recalls few historical figures "who had their own history, their own past. The world always looked at such women with suspicion and fear" (785). He talks about Zinat Mahal, an Empress, who supervises all the affairs of court due to her intellect, wisdom and witticism. Thus the goal to reframe the historical image of woman is not only to defy the foreign narratives but also to prove that the past women were free in making choices.

This research paper shows the European history's inadequacy in portraying the non-western culture and deconstructs the traditional historical structure that fails to mirror the significant facets of 19th century Indo-Muslim society. As the European writings don't give importance to any other religion except Christianity so Indian religions, Islam and Hinduism, are often get misinterpreted and Indo-Muslim society is generally depicted as conservative, intolerant, conventional, patriarchal and rigid. Moreover Islamophobia is growing rapidly by such narratives. Therefore Faruqi rejects the Eurocentric representations of Indo-Muslim society and paints its alternative narrative in the form of *The Mirror of Beauty*. According to this historic fiction, Indo-Muslim society was very flexible and secular where indigenous people used to live according to their will. Faruqi negates the idea of patriarchal society. He states that women are not suppressed rather they have knowledge about their rights. E.g. Wazir challenges the patriarchal institution when she argues with her son that "Baba Farid was asked by someone why he venerated Bibi Fatimah Sam so much, was she not a mere woman? Baba sahib said, 'when a tiger appears in the jungle, no one asks if it's a male or female. I ask you, was not the great Sufi Rabia Basri a mere woman?'" (726). Furthermore, women of the past repeatedly do un-conventional things but are tolerated rather than penalized. When Wazir Khanam starts living with Mr. Blake then she makes clear that "she would adhere to her religion and her cultural practices; Marston Blake would follow his own creed" (211). It seems as people believe in co-existence and cultural diversity in this benign society. Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Shias and Christians, all live in the same country. They respect each other's religion and cordially participate in all the cultural festivals. This multiculturalism showcases the humanity of the past when people used to love pushing aside the boundaries. That's why Faruqi challenges the concept of 'Indophobia' — a technique applied by the European writers to construct a negative image of Indian civilization. By rewriting indigenous history, he visualizes Indian society as multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-racial, multi-regional, heterogeneous and non-monolithic in *The Mirror of*

Beauty. This meticulous effort of revisiting the past demonstrates the cultural revival.

European writers always practice 'Indophobia' and represent Indians as 'ahistorical' __ people without history. They also create binaries of superior west and backward India under the umbrella of 'white man's burden'. In view of that they claim to be civilized nation of the world so they came in the Subcontinent only to enlighten the natives. However the facts are different as Faruqi explains in *The Mirror of Beauty*. In the novel the British, instead of civilizing, are observed to adopt the Indian culture. The Europeans tendency towards adopting Indian lifestyle proves that Indians are not 'ahistorical' rather they have their own cultural values. For that matter William Fraser seems to be interested in Indian language, literature and customs. His house is also fully decorated according to Indian style. His dressing is "fully Indian: narrow trousers . . . and a long tunic, or kurta . . . he had expensive rings on eight of the ten fingers of his hands and a long necklace of white pearls hung from his well-formed neck . . . on his head was a short turban . . . Fraser looked every inch a wealthy nobleman of Delhi (270). While riding on elephant, Fraser follows Indian manners as "the mace-bearer sitting behind him on the elephant, carefully holding the hookah and its long pipe: each had its own novelty for the audience" (436). Similarly Marston Blake "when he talked to Wazir, Marston Blake always pronounced those and other Hindi Words with reasonable correctness" (223). This shows that Indians have splendid culture as well as glorious past and the foreigners also seem to be attracted towards this magnificent civilization. Hence the historical narratives in which Indian past has intentionally been mythicized need to be refigured.

To marginalize the third world countries, gaps are produced deliberately in the historical milieu. Chakrabarty asserts that European historians always keep the 'third world' in the "waiting room"__ a derogatory term introduced by the Europe, exactly, for those who are going to be there for some time (65). Chakrabarty argues in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* that this fanciful 'waiting room' of history demonstrates the idea that the third world can never be modern and can't represent themselves so the West only has the privilege to represent such 'ahistorical' people or underdeveloped nations. However Chakrabarty suggests the non-modern ways of writing history in order to abolish "the imaginary waiting room in which Indians had been placed by European historicist thought" (10). Subsequently this paper employs the modern technique of refiguring history and attempts to discover those historical narratives in the 'waiting-room' which are waiting to be found. For this purpose Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* finds out the past narratives of lofty culture, graceful civilization and immortal beauty of the Nawabi period that had previously been misjudged by the foreigners.

Hence, besides refiguring the historical narratives of pre-independence India, this study also revives the immortal beauty of Nawabi culture. Nawabi era is remembered as a potent historical period of sublime creativity and flurry of innovations in the artworks. The distinctive features of Nawabi culture are still recognized due to its civic sense, classy etiquettes, refined manners and

charismatic traditions. Additionally Faruqi also explores the architectural history that reflects the Nawabi taste. His description of magical sky kissing edifice with elegance and style presents the sight of a worldly paradise fashioned during the 19th century. The depiction of Nawabi palace in *The Mirror of Beauty* is as follows; “Actually, the door leaves were of Indian rosewood and sandalwood, and their decorations consisted of pieces of ivory painted or relief-carved to resemble tiles...It was difficult to decide whose art and workmanship were greater...the work was so marvelously neat that when closed, the door seemed part of the wall (357). Next striking construction of artistic palace of Nawab Shamsuddin is the wonder of the highly developed age.

In the first place, the arched main door opened on to an inner door, also arched, except that it was designed like a half-dome, was thus true to its technical name __tajdar darwazah, or crowned door . . . on both sides it was a seat for the doorkeeper, made of s rare turquoise-colored stone, similar to marble. Its walls and door leaves were covered with dense relief and inlay work in the Mughal style . . . the inlay had such abundance of colors __green, azure, gold, white __that it seemed as if it was not the walls and leaves of a doorway; rather, it was a huge stone in one piece into which the colours had permeated through some miraculous process of nature (357).

The nations which forget their past have no future as well. Therefore it's the historian's job to be a record keeper of the dead past by painting a historical scenery for future generations. So as a historical landscaper, Faruqi not only presents the past before us but also takes us into the earlier period giving a glimpse of Indian culture, civilization, and architectural history in *The Mirror of Beauty*. This fiction is a research on the golden age, in the history of India, and refigures the historical narratives about Nawabs' architectural genius to showcase the greatness of the Nawabi era. Muslim Nawabs were fond of religious architecture and used to pass orders for the construction of numerous mosques, karbalas, Imambaras, churches, Sufi shrines or mausoleums and temples having the high minarets. In the fiction, Wazir regularly goes to see religious places in order to pray or pay her offerings. “One by one, she visited the shrines of the twenty-two leading Sufi saints of history buried in Delhi __ and prayed for their intercession with Allah that she may give birth to a healthy and defect-free son” (464).

In the historical narratives, about Indian history, there's always a sense of 'lack' or 'incompleteness'. So in order to bridge these gaps, this study reviews history objectively as well as liberates it from the western principles of historiography. By mirroring his indigenous history just before the world, Faruqi attempts to make the eclipsed moon sparkle or the blurred star shine again in the macrocosm of history. This celebration of the past brings to life many historical poets, artists, mentors, nawabs, begams and performers who had made countless efforts in shaping the indigenous literature but these people have never been recognized in the literary circles of Indian national history. As the cultural songs and poetry of the past age seem to be lost forever, therefore Faruqi rewrites the past narratives about the classical Indian

music in *The Mirror of Beauty* and gives a new birth to the great artists' works which have never been acknowledged by the national historiography

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research article is to challenge the dominant discourse of history. By subverting the myth of Universal Historiography, this paper concludes that the historical narratives about non-Europeans must be refigured. Generally, Europeans believe that Indians cannot represent themselves because they lack historical sense, so Indians must be represented. Accordingly Europe is considered as a yardstick to evaluate the past and to define the superior and inferior. Such historians commonly lay emphasis on the backwardness of the East and portray India as an exotic place. On the contrary, Faruqi resists the mainstream historiography and refigures the Indian past via alternate approach to history rather than internalizing the European norms historiography. Faruqi's negotiation with the past is a quest to catch things which have fallen apart in order to get the flavor of the lost culture, to bridge the discontinuity in the Indian historical tradition and to reinstate the historic bond between the past and the present. For this purpose, he questions the Eurocentric assumptions and refigures the historical narratives about the mythical past of 19th century pre-independence India. The objective behind rethinking Indian history is to disclose the fact that the third world people can also raise their voice by writing their own history. Thus Faruqi's novel *The Mirror of Beauty* demonstrates that Indians have their own religion, culture, civilization, traditional values, language, literature, laws, customs, moral codes, calendar, history and a distinct outlook on life and of life. This fiction reveals the fact that Indians are a civilized nation and very well aware of their refined past. Moreover Faruqi's journey into the past times throws light on the mini narratives about the Indo-Muslim culture as well as Nawabi civilization which have been ignored so far.

Being a postmodern historiographer, Faruqi points out the need to revise Indian history. To rethink the past, Faruqi adopts Jenkins's concept of 'refiguring history'. Jenkins regards history as the invention of historian's mind that alters the historical truth. Therefore this theorist recommends rethinking of the historical narratives to find out the past as it really was. Furthermore Chakrabarty's ideas about reformulating the minor pasts of non-westerns people attempt to transform marginality into the center and open new doors for historical truth. As a result, postmodern India is no more marginalized rather it's fighting back to the empire to display the idea that center can't sustain without its margins. That's why Faruqi re-narrates the past stories in *The Mirror of Beauty* and attempts to make us familiarize with the past glory. Also *The Mirror of Beauty* connects the modern generation with their roots by presenting the original picture of Indo-Muslim culture and Nawabi civilization of the bygone era. Hence this research work shows resistance to the meta-narrative of Indian history by presenting an alternate history that bears witness to the forgotten narratives of the past.

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