

Abstract

The relationship between the study of history and the study of historical fiction has, by and large, been the relationship of fluidity and flux, fracture and rupture, constantly crisscrossing the domains of each other. Scholars in different historical periods have continuously attempted to redefine and reconfigure the contours that appear to exist between these two fields of study without reaching any definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, despite several reflexive (and mostly postmodernist) historiographic [or “metahistorical” (a la Hayden White)] interventions, there still exists a prominent borderline that demarcates fact from fiction, story from history, strictly depending on archival data. While one may still justify the presence of such a demarcating line when operating within the domain of ‘national’ history with seemingly adequate archival data, the same line becomes extremely problematic and unproductive when one delves deep into the mostly “unhistoricised” (a la Ashis Nandy) / under-historicised ‘local’ pasts of a ‘nation’, especially postcolonial nation-states in the Global South such as India. In such a context, it becomes necessary not only to interrogate the sacrosanct image of the “National History” but also to usher in more inclusive paradigms of historiography that desire to listen to the “unhistoricised” local pasts more sensitively than academic/professional historiography generally permits. While non-fictional works, mostly produced by the so-called “amateurish” local historians, have sought to foreground such marginalized pasts, there also appears to be an increasing trend of writing a specific type of historical fiction, directed towards the same purpose, which the present dissertation identifies as local historical fiction. Such unique works not only assimilate the force of historically informed poesis that is indispensable for historical fiction as well as the creative energy of “sociological imagination” (a la C. Wright Mills) that propels the creation of local fiction, but also consciously operate in the “unhistoricised” local contexts where the borderline between fact and fiction remain always already blurred due to the chronic lack of archival data. The present dissertation aims to capture the poetics and politics involved in this emerging literary genre while also analysing how such works, mostly operating in the absence of concrete archival data, can function as complementary historiographic projects. To this end, I have chosen four contemporary works of ‘local historical fiction’ emerging from the socio-historical ethos of the two peripheral districts of West Bengal, Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram – *Chandrarekhagarh er Kahini* (2017) [The Tale of Chandrarekhagarh] written by Madhup De, Nalini Bera’s *Subarnarenu Subarnarekha* (2018) [Golden Sand, Golden River], *Pratham Drohini: Rani Shiromani Ebang Chuar-Jagriti* (2019) [The First Revolutionary: Rani Shiromani and the Chuar Revolution] written by Suman Mahanti and *Dinesh Gupter Revolver* (2021) [Dinesh Gupta’s Revolver] authored by Sanmatrananda. In the process of analysing these texts, the present dissertation also illustrates how a symbiotic collaboration between local historical fiction and non-fiction can not only facilitate identity formation for numerous spatially subalternized regions but also discursively preserve their endangered vernacular/local heritages.

Keywords: local historical fiction, local history, unhistoricised, local heritage, identity formation, subalternized, amateurism, archive.