

Revisionary Political Historiography in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction

Pakistani literature is a socio-cultural document of an era of hope and hardships. For most of Pakistani fiction writers, act of writing is an act of breaking silences, reinterpreting and reconstructing history, recovering the collective heritage of the nation and thus redefining the role of an author in a society where denial and erasure are primary tools of historiography. This paper will discuss two novels: 'Kartography' by Kamila Shamsie and 'A Seasons for Martyrs' by Bina Shah. Where 'Kartography' deals with war of 1971 which led to a military confrontation between India and Pakistan and ended in creation of Bangladesh as East Pakistan severed from the western wing during the military regime in Pakistan, 'A Season for Martyrs' focuses on turbulent political times in Pakistan of 2007, when former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan from exile and got murdered during the military reign of General Parvez Musharraf. Both these novels blend the personal lives of characters with subtle political flavor as all the characters in these novels undergo emotional trauma and suffer directly or indirectly owing to the situation and circumstances surrounding them. These novels effectively paint picture of collective grief of a disillusioned nation that is caught in the whirlwind of barbarity and violence. As official historiography erases some very significant areas and experiences, both Shamsie and Shah have tried to recuperate the lost narratives of personal lives devastated under the burden of political turmoil. By taking up challenge of putting a chaotic world in order and of recording what official histories erase most often, Shamsie and Shah explore those necessary areas that are usually repressed in traditional historiography and thus contribute to a new conception of Pakistan's political history.