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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**HISTORY AS LITERATURE: A READING OF WHITE'S ESSAY "THE HISTORICAL TEXT AS LITERARY ARTIFACT"**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to examine the ideas and theories of Hayden White, one of the luminaries in the studies of History and Literary theories. To examine the aspects of Philosophy, Psychology, History, and Sociology especially in literary canon is the universal experience at the present time. The paper tries to assist the readers about getting the meaning of historical justification and develop a kind of knowledge that is beneficial in understanding his ideas. History is one of the important ways to scrutinize literature, in the same way literary practices are engaged in producing history. This paper tries to find how Hayden White in his essay, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" provides the evidences of history, is to be constructed of the narrative strategies developed commonly in producing any work of arts. This paper observes how Hayden White effectively institutionalizes history to be containing fictitious elements and how the past events are processed with the contact of imagination to arrange historical dialogue.

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**Introduction:-**

The theoretical concern of Hayden White shares a concern with mingle literary criticism and historiography in order to build up a deeper consideration of historical conversation and cultural point of view. Hayden White's perception of history as narrative, which he developed in his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1973). He declares that all historical justifications are metaphorical and poetic by nature. The notion of history as narrative has extensive implications; it led among other aspects of the post-modernist debate about historiography. Postmodernism is doubtful towards any claims of belief in sciences; in historiography postmodernism is identified with the linguistic turn, which refers to the main concern given to language. White developed an individual disagreement in the course of the cases of four important historians including Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt and four thinkers of history which includes Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce.

He acknowledged four metaphorical styles in the course of which the authors presented their analysis: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, and four dissimilar literary genres by which the historians formed historical practices in their work as narratives of a particular kind: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire. These figures have characteristic way of organizing sections of information into a better whole. He advocates that this poetics of history, and not historical facts alone, determines in advance a historian's point of view and explanation.

Hayden White (1928-2018), a famous historian and philosopher of America, is known for his study of the literary theory. White advocates in most of his books that historical studies are best understood not as truthful and objective

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representations of the past but as imaginative texts structured by narrative and symbolic devices that shape historical understanding. His first important work, *Metahistory*, gives a long note on various narrative and rhetorical strategies. In his essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact", White discusses about the idea of tropes, and figurative modes in a very interesting way that composes the deep formation of historical consideration. White is widely respected for raising very important questions with reference to the hidden statements that notify all sorts of historical understanding.

White's works after the publication of the first book *Metahistory*, have been passed judgment on along with reasonably consistent lines. Historians have harshly criticized him for his alleged epistemological and ethical relativism caused by his conflation of historical and fictional narrative, as well as his rejection of the objective importance of historical evidence. Historians also have claimed to White's use of literary history, and strongly challenge his statements about the hopelessness of creating realistic illustrations of history. Critics have blamed him of adhering to a strict formalism that denies the plurality of forms of historical writing. As well, White has been attacked by historians for his lack of consideration to historical framework in his own works. These and other analyses from associate historians have meant that White's work has limited his influence on the practice of writing the past account.

Usually, historians have not closely followed White's work since the publication of *Metahistory* and have paid little critical attention to his efforts to respond to charges of relativism or developments in other areas of his thought. In the face of encountering opponent within the field of history, White's works have enjoyed a warmer reaction among literary theorists and critics, who find his endeavors to emphasize the literary excellence of historiography undeniable. Literary theorists mention White's concentration to the role of figurative language in historical writings, but some have criticized his motivation to categorize texts into unbending and seemingly self-contained rhetorical or narrative groups.

Further, critics have noted White's deficiency of concentration to feminist or post-colonial theories that, like his own work, try to find to challenge the limits imposed on historical and cultural understanding by central modes of narrative. These critics argue that these and other newly emerging theories may present White with some of the unusual forms of illustration that he has argued for during his profession. Even though these sustained critiques, White continues to be generally respected among scholars in a range of fields and for raising thought-provoking questions that have influenced the route of historical examination in the late twentieth century. White questions that historical text are strongly connected with imaginative writings than sciences not because historical texts have fictitious elements but because historical narratives employ tropes to put together historical happenings in ways that the reader can be in touch. Thus it is a significant contribution to historiography because white's theory provides historians with a means to build up a historical awareness by serving them identify the fictive elements in their historical narratives.

White gives a detailed account of idea of historical texts and simplify that they have its own fictitious elements to make them literary account for instance he says that how they use tropes, historians become aware of when they are making ideological shifts. While White does not declare rhetoric, I would add that in the process, historians would also become aware of the rhetorical elements in their histories. White writes in his essay as: "like literature, history progresses by the production of classics, the nature of which is such that they cannot be disconfirmed or negated...and that it is their non-disconfirm ability that testifies to the essentially literary nature of historical classics" (White 89).

It is known that the early rhetorical canon is strong and narrow. It is difficult to identify the reality of the history of rhetoric even though the rhetorical canon makes a claim that we do. There is possibility to develop a metahistory of rhetoric so one begin to recognize and identify with how and why the discipline's history has been created the way it has, who this historical narrative benefits, and who this historical narrative doesn't. Developing a metahistory is also important because it is essential to be aware that when the the writer rewrite history, he also rewrite the present.

Professor White exercised literature to clarify history when others were trying to make sense of literature through history. He has contributed in detail to develop the understanding of history as a discipline. The two significant contributions that sensitized the construction of historical artifacts are *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe* and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. These have brought about a kind of revolt. His *Metahistory* is an amazing work describing the "literariness of history". He owes greatly to

Northrop Frye for justifying the “deep structures” of history and creating the connection of history with respect to literature and culture. He encourages that historical models cannot take recourse in science; rather they skillfully make exercise of narratives and their fundamental techniques for association and production of the raw past.

He takes on the tools of a literary critic to understand historical texts. His narrative theory is extremely valuable for the scholars of literature who attempt to clutch the meaning of history as a process of formation. He builds up the whole argument by dubbing history as “verbal fictions”. Post Metahistory era brought him somewhere between the ways of history and literature, accountable to both at the same moment. He is one of the most important figures of the revolutionary movement in the field of history identified as “new cultural history”; the others being Lynn Hunt, Thomas Lacquer and France Roger Chartier. As a part of this movement all these writers turned to literature to examine the difficult methods of history.

The essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” emphasizes the thought identified in White’s book *Metahistory*. He declares that metahistory is the method of receiving behind outside of history to enquire in relation to the shades of any historical fact. It tries to recover the arrangements which function in the production of the past. He observes,

One must try to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of enquiry and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. This is what metahistory seeks to do. It addresses itself to questions such as, what is the structure of a peculiarly historical consciousness. (White 81)

He attempts to explain the structures and the composition of historical work can scrutinize to interpret the pretended elements in a historical text. To combine this very statement, he makes the point that the same language formations which structure a literary text, goes into the making of a historical text. The structures can confirm the inapproachability of History. White advocates that since a historian uses language to signify the past as history, historical text can be placed next and in arrangement to a literary piece on account of the innate fictionality that it involves.

White confirms in opposition to the point that history possesses a realistic body flushed out completely the literariness of any type. He advocates that even history makes use of language and thus fictionality is bound to appear and come to front, hiding the purely historical detail. The backgrounds of history are produced too like that of the contexts of the literary texts are assembled. He discusses Erich Auerbach’s point with a twist and continues that on account of its so identified illustration of actuality, history can be made use of to study the narratives of realism.

In the words of White, histories take birth through the method identified as “emplotment” of the details and information available at disposal. By emplotment. White signified the techniques by which plots are featured to a particular past occurrence. It can be summed up as putting information into fictional narratives: “And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures, in precisely the way Frye has suggested is the case with “fictions” in general” (White 83).

When original details are put across as history they are fictional and developed. The historians create fictions beyond the stores of realities. To make essence beyond the past evidences, which are otherwise fragmented and broken, the historian uses the power of thoughts and imaginations, like any other literary author does. The correct technique the scripting has to be completed lies in the consciousness of historian who structures it. This is known as historian’s narrative point of view that is responsible to create history as it comes out. Actually this act of producing histories makes history similar to literature.

He strongly declares that the incidents of the past act as raw narrative components. These components like literature are processed into creative explanations by author’s view point. The historian supplies characters, sets up ideas and motifs, implements differences of attitude, and as a result provides information to turn into literature. The past happenings are not at all horrible. White writes in his essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” that it is the point of view that makes it seem tragic or comic or something as well.

This makes historical documents as objective. And it is solely the mindset of a historian that renders it the way he wants to present events in whichever story form he likes. At the same time White makes note of the vital point that

the facts must be organized in an order while carving them into a story line. He writes: "The "overall coherence" of historical facts is the coherence of a story, but this coherence is achieved only by tailoring of the "facts" to the requirement of the story form" (White 91).

White in his theory has discussed on four types of plots that history can imaginably be presented into. Deriving from Frye, he dubs that history could be plotted as tragic, comedy, romantic or ironic. At the present what exactly concerns the historian the majority is the kind of set-up which he could exercise to change the original threads into narratives. Now it is important to analyze that in which way the occasions have to be plotted? Must it be plotted in a tragic method, or in a comic or humorist one? Or should it be 'emplotted' as ironical or basically as romantic?

If we take an example from the history of Indian freedom struggle movement, and we are to document the events as happened in the life of Bhagat Singh, there are various manners in which his life threads could be woven to construct it a piece of the past account. One historian might present it as tragic while his days finished in capital sentence, further historian might interpret it as heroic, while a number of historians who takes into account the individual threads of life could perhaps dub it as romantic. The purpose is that the various series give various hints to different historians to study and proof them differently.

Hence, a particular historical event can reasonably be emplotted in different of manners. The bigger interrogating focus then turns into how to properly agree with the series of a remote experiencing with that of the existing plot formations. The responsibility of this critical reflection rests on the carefulness and minuteness of the historian. This entire procedure of changing in of the historical accounts surrounded by the plot structures is nothing but the act of creating narrative. This intended and attentive process of assigning plots to innovative descriptions is certainly one of the techniques of civilization to receive sense of both the individual and public pasts. This changes history into an imagination and thus making it gladly available. Very commonly the historical events since they are away from us temporally usually come into view separated to us. The codification of the historical accounts into one of the existing plots presents the purpose of making recognizable which if not would have remained a distanced experience.

The selection of the plot relies on the cultural connections that a historian and his spectators commonly share. Owing to the division of the same cultural backgrounds the reader reading historical events is capable to work out the sense out of a particular occurrence, only because the occurrence is knitted appropriately into a definable plot setting sensibly and carefully by the historian. Therefore, a reader is capable to group historical information or rather event into tragic, comic, romantic or ironic. Thus historical documents that are available to us are in fact the plotted narratives which are produced after suitable thoughtfulness, enchanting fine reminder of the cultural constructs. Professor White writes, "The historian shares with his audience general notions of the forms that significant human situations must take by virtue of his participation in the specific processes of sense- making which identify him as a member of one cultural endowment rather than other" (White 86).

The plotting of past account depends on the consciousness of the historian. When one narrates, one constructs choices. These choices work on the principle of what is given a priority and what is discarded. The choices are liable to determine what is narrated first. This act of making choices, giving preference to one while dispelling off the other is behind the composition of narratives. The choices thus give rise to "verbal artifact". White observes that in making sense of historical events, history is described always in resistance to what science or literature is not. Science presents rules, while literature stores on possibilities. History means what real is. The concentration and accessibility of historical scene is taken into concern with consider to defining history. The fictive and creative power of a historian structures these defining features of history. History, at the same time as literature, is understood and valued in terms of the classics it has constructed, because then the capabilities of opposing it gets reduced, and in related element the ideas of science work out.

Professor White shows the ways on further to subscribe history as a set of complicated signs. What the reader acquires when he examine history is not simply the illustration of the historical fragments, but what he come across in reality is the marsh of signs which points out the manners of examining and recognizing history. They work like extended metaphors, where one object turns into another. History doesn't portray images but rather "calls to mind" the images of the things it implies. This is closely how a metaphor works. History is not to be seen as the set of simply decodable symbols, but rather as a difficult play of figurative collections and extensive metaphors.

White continues on to the notion of depiction of the series of happenings. He challenges that how these incidents are to be created and represented is carefully conceptual. It is the right of the historian himself how he is to confirm the unlike series within a historical account. Unclear sets of understandings are possible within a particular occurrence series. These sets are given existence by the consciousness of the innovative mind of the historian who considers on the incidents in the fragments of historical events. In his essay, White remarks as, "Histories, then, are not only about events but also about the possible sets of relationships that those events can be demonstrated to figure. These sets of relationships are not, however, immanent in the events themselves; they exist only in the mind of the historian reflecting on them" (White 94).

White moves ahead to the position and gives the details about the kind of language that must go into evidencing the earlier action. The mission of the historian is to explain us to what looks unfamiliar. After that he advocates with the reason of creating unfamiliar and separated come out recognizable, the historian must make use of the figurative language and must carry on from the scientific language. History doesn't have anything in general with technical language, and that "the historian's characteristic instrument of encodation, communication and exchange is ordinary educated speech." (White 94). This end could only be attained by the exercise of figurative language. What is strange in the initial place can be made intelligible by hiring figurative application of language. White in that way remarks: "...the kind of emplotment that the historian decides to use to give meaning to a set of historical events is dictated by the dominant figurative mode of the language he has use to describe the elements of his account prior to his composition of the narrative" (White 94).

In his particular well known essay, *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*", White gives focus that the plotting of a historical text is guided by the figurative tropes. The four believable emplotments correspond to four chief tropes- metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Trope means when a figurative difference is able of becoming an observation in itself assuming an self-governing existence. Since plotting and exercise of figurative tropes frame history, then history can be supposed to imagine truth rather than reproducing it. He makes clear in his essay as,

Narrative style, in history as well as in the novel, would then be constructed as the modality of the movement from a representation of some original state of affairs to some subsequent state. ...as thus envisaged, narrative would be a process of decodation and recordation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom. (White 96)

White gives attention in his theory as an existing whole is that, he remains History and Literature on the similar stage on the account of the process of construction and exploitation engaged in its creation. To give good reason for his point he has described in large quantities from the further theorists similar to Levi-Strauss, Collingwood, and Frye right through. In the course what he has attempted doing is that he explains and advocates more than and over again that history takes surrounded by itself the touching of fiction and innovation.

He observes that the previous concepts of taking into account of history as genuine and real and literature as imagined must be done away with it. The reality that history should be studied in contrast to and in equality with what is exactly a creation of mind's eye. As such historical texts have two mechanisms of happening, the "real" and the "revealed". He maintains that the consciousness of the historian in shaping various features of the historical happenings dubs the real and the ideal but which in fact are believed and purposeful productions. White thinks that the historical documents produced by the historians and literary personalities by the innovative writers are both same on the stage of element of thoughts that they both burden in their constructions. White explains in his essay as: "In point of fact, history- the real world as it evolves in time- is made sense of in the same way that the poet or the novelist tries to make sense of it, i.e., by endowing what appears to be problematical and mysterious with the aspect of a recognizable, because it is a familiar form" (White 98).

Hence, literature turns out to be history and history turn out to be literature. Professor White identifies that the element of fictiveness in history is a means to make easy and explain the information of the historical events better while the production of the literary text embraces the understanding of the lived world. The recognition and appreciation of the incidence of imaginary component would only begin and promote the ideas of creation of history at a self-realized level. The whole perceptive of Hayden White's discuss on the historical documenting can be concretized by for sure asserting that history must not be looked at as the product of information and beliefs but rather history must be realized as the creation of language.

In the course of his conversation on the formation of the history, he has attempted to explain the experience of history to be visualized as a narrative, as a text and as language. He talks about the intrusion of literature in texts by history. He writes,

In the interest of appearing scientific and objective, it [history] has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal. By drawing historiography back once more to an intimate connection with its literary basis, we should not be putting ourselves on guard against merely ideological distortions; we should be by way of arriving at that “theory” of history without which it cannot pass for a “discipline” at all. (White 99)

This kind of lookout and approachability that White endorses eases and simplifies the taste of history and its narratives. White with his revolutionizing theory questions the hypothesis of history which is merely based on belief and accepted conceptions. He disproves the coherent and ordinary reception of history as being shaped out of information surprisingly. He constructs questions concerning the nature and methods of history, and then White himself proves answers which are fundamental in nature. He logically and methodically provides evidences and explains about the relationship of imagination and fictiveness, like the ones found in literature, in historical evidences and texts. This has kept under control altogether an innovative technique of looking at and assumptions in histories and historiography with newer perspectives to explore. This applicability has definitely brought in most of the researchers of study in both historical and literary fields.

Thus, the observation of “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” removes the difference between history and story. The authors he examined had other messages that they wanted to put into words, so that the historical past was the medium but not the message of historical work. As he says, comparable to good narratives, historical works carry the reader easily but directly to the conclusion the author has in the compartment of his conscious.

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