

Thematic Concerns of History in Salman Rushdie's *Victory City*

¹**Dr. Raj Bahadur Yadav ***

Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Sahakari P.G. College, Mihrawan,
VBS Purvanchal University, Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, India
&

²**Dr. Awnindra Vishwakarma**

Assistant Professor,
Department of English (Applied Sciences),
Prasad Institute of Technology and Management, Jaunpur,
Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

This study examines how Salman Rushdie's Victory City reimagines and reinterprets historical tales using a combination of myth, fantasy, and political allegory to address the thematic issues of history. The story, which takes place in the made-up Bisnaga kingdom, is told from the perspective of Pampa Kampana, a poet-prophetess who influences a civilization's trajectory over many generations. The study explores how Rushdie challenges the legitimacy and authority of recorded history by fusing magical realism with other historical possibilities in order to undermine linear historiography. The building of empire, gender and historical agency, memory manipulation, and the cyclical nature of power are among the major topics covered. The study shows how Victory City opposes prevailing historical paradigms and promotes diverse and creative approaches to the past through an intertextual and postmodern lens. The study emphasizes the novel's ongoing significance as a tool for historical reclamation and resistance by placing it within Rushdie's larger body of work and current postcolonial debate.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, Victory City, historical narrative, thematic concerns, postcolonial literature, magical realism, historiography, memory and history, empire and power, gender and agency, myth and fantasy, narrative authority, alternative history, cultural identity, storytelling.

Introduction

The present study is based the latest novel of Salman Rushdie i.e. *Victory City* (2023). As an idea and a story, history has long held a prominent place in postcolonial literature as a site of resistance, reinterpretation, and contestation. One of the most important authors of modern postcolonial literature, Salman Rushdie, constantly challenges the distinctions between fact and fiction. By reconstructing the development and collapse of the imaginary empire of Bisnaga

* Corresponding Author: Dr. Raj Bahadur Yadav

Email: drrajbyadav@gmail.com

Received 10 Jan. 2025; Accepted 05 Feb. 2025. Available online: 28 Feb. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



through the lenses of myth, fantasy, and metafiction, his most recent book, *Victory City* (2023), carries on this tradition. Presenting itself as a rediscovered historical document written by the poet and prophetess Pampa Kampana, *Victory City* presents an epic and subversive story that is based on historical references but not bound by the requirements of historical truth. The writer challenges conventional historical perspective by way of creating a vivid and sophisticated portrayal of the bygone days. This research paper primarily takes into consideration the thematic patterns of history in the present novel. Diving deep into the texture of this book, it is clearly witnessed that history is a pliable and widely controversial narrative impacted by description of the past. A thorough analysis of the contents revealed in the present book makes it clear that the writer has kept in mind the major events of Hindu empire of that time. By providing a different perspective on the past that rejects absolute facts and embraces diversity, storytelling turns into a type of historical intervention.

Rushdie emphasizes that all histories are, in part, manufactured and interpretative through the employment of magical realism and metafictional techniques, which further blurs the lines between fact and fiction. *Victory City* questions the legitimacy of "official" history and encourages readers to think about the subjective factors that influence how we perceive the past by incorporating legendary and fantastical elements into a framework that resembles historical chronicles.

Review of Literature

These critical viewpoints provide a theoretical framework for analyzing *Victory City*'s narrative strategies and underlying ideologies. Early scholarly reactions and literary reviews suggest that *Victory City* continues Rushdie's investigation of historical themes, with a heightened focus on gender and the power of storytelling. However, this is because the novel is very new and has not yet garnered a substantial body of critical literature. *Victory City* serves as a "feminist epic," elevating the voice of a female author and ruler in a historically and politically male-dominated field, according to Alexandra Alter's article in *The New York Times* (2023). The recovery of female agency becomes crucial to rewriting history in feminist readings of historical fiction, which is consistent with this interpretation. As noted by scholarly evaluations in publications like *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (2023–2024) and *Postcolonial Text*, *Victory City* continues Rushdie's narrative legacy of reimagining historical events through magical realism. According to critics such as Ananya Sen and David Huddart, the book presents a mythopoetic counter-history that challenges historical determinism and

calls into doubt the accuracy of historical accounts. These interpretations relate Rushdie's writing to more general postcolonial issues regarding the subject and intent of history writing. Furthermore, a comparable framework for comprehending Victory City is offered by critical discourse on Rushdie's depictions of empires and power dynamics, particularly in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008).

‘Full of adventure..... A celebration of the power of storytelling’

Guardian

‘A total pleasure to read’

Sunday Times

Analysis of the Study

A deep dive into the depth of the novel clarifies that the characters Rushdie creates have distinct identities at first, but with time, their relationships, associations, and affiliations with other people make them interdependent. However, they struggle to balance their identities as autonomous and interdependent. The study illustrates how Pampa Kampana's self-perception is impacted by outside factors like as historical events, familial ties, and cultural standards, leading to internal conflicts and the requirement for identity negotiation. We find a sophisticated sense of historical influences.

1. History as A Manufactured Story

Pampa Kampana, who lived for more than 200 years, not only saw the Bisnaga Empire come and go, but she also actively influenced it by writing its epic history and using her magical persuasion skills. The character of Pampa, the name itself has connections with Goddess Parvati has been empowered in this novel to narrate history. It seems plausible to maintain that the writer uses manufactured story to portray history. He doesn't deal with historical themes directly instead he prefers the method of imbibing magic and myth to explore the art of storytelling. To some extent, it is traced that he implies historical perspective to shape our understanding of the past. The manner in which he blends historical events and fantastical elements such as magic, prophecy and divine intervention is not seen anywhere else along the way during review of literature. His genius is widely-known and accepted in the world of literature. It is a traceable fact that the protagonist of the novel, Pampa Kampana is shown not only as a historical figure but also storyteller. His mastery over creating tales becomes unmatched the way he portrays the themes with historical influences.

2. Magic, Myth, and History Rewriting

A deep study of the present novel makes it clear that Rushdie presents a logical and imperialist historiography where he seems to be seen ignoring traditional patterns of knowing by using magical realism. Bisnaga city comes out of a bag of seeds that is a concrete example of notion that history has got its description at several places in the novel. His imagination of reality and proof draws upon historical accounts and scholarly sources to create a strong sense of authenticity. His power of storytelling may be easily assessed as the narrative focuses on essence of stories and memories in shaping historical consciousness. Rushdie himself has admitted that stories even fictional ones can have profound impact on how we witness the past and present. Apart from description of history in the novel, Rushdie' treatment with a female figure (Pampa Kampana) empowers women in a male dominated society. It provides a lens through which he examines gender, power and agency. The term history is often subjective, contested and open to interpretations and prospective research works. This sort of perspective can offer valuable insights to the readers. It is undeniable fact that he has used history as a springboard in order to present a rich and sophisticated exploration of human nature, recognition and an everlasting potential of myth and magic. We find a lot of similarities with history of Vijaynagar Empire. The lifespan of protagonist (247 years) covers the entire history and practices that used to be prevalent in that era.

3. Historical Agency, Power, and Gender

The latest masterpiece creation of Salman Rushdie has been regarded as a compelling and thought-provoking work of fiction. The present paper aims at understanding the interplay of history in the novel, *Victory City*. With a view to dive deep into the pragmatic approach of the present writer, one can easily find the complexities of identity, power and struggle between tradition and change. The sentiments encapsulated in the book weave together historical agency, power and gender. One of the most striking features, we find in this book is its use of magical realism. Most of the time, Rushdie is seen creating a dreamy and surreal world that is both enchanting and unsettling. This novel primarily deals with the themes of rich past of Hindu dynasty. Social evils, fragility and exploitation of women, to a little extent, find place in the novel that shows the writer's consciousness to portray the challenges women have faced over the years. He rejects male supremacy over females entirely by creating the main protagonist like Pampa Kampana in the present novel. It is a digestible fact that only a few research works have been published so far to estimate the historical mastery of Salman Rushdie on this particular book.

4. Imperial Fragility and Power Cycles

To better understand and explain the historical perspectives in Rushdie's works, a researcher has to wade through his magical mix of myth and reality. His writing always provides a deepest sense of imperial fragility and power cycles. *Victory City* has dragged the attention of prominent academicians as no novel of this sort has been attempted to be written up to now. While reading this novel, a reader finds that he/she has entered the world of imagination. It can be said that *Victory City* has been written in a lucid and easy to understand style. Despite being a fantastic novel, the story is based on historical fact that is quite apparent to the reader. He has constructed an imaginary world of Bisnaga in which men and women are equal with women doing unwomanly work. We are introduced with a place where art and culture thrive. Broadly speaking, Rushdie has coined a new myth that traces follies of human nature. He has written this book in a manner that is endearing and will surely endure in literature and in the hearts and minds of its readers.

5. Recollection, Ignorance, and the Storyteller's Function

Rushdie is a sort of writer who always leaves behind a lot of things to figure out and publish unlike others. After a knife attack, it was impossible to survive; he has provided the world of literature yet another memoir (*Knife*) that has descriptions of his viewpoint where he tells his readers how he survived the knife attack. This paper may be only an attempt to understand his art of recollection, ignorance, and storytelling potential. This paper of research finds a lot of things in the novel that have a close connection with history of India. The way he has dealt with history in his earlier novels is relatable to the present book, *Victory City*. To some extent, it would appropriate to say that he makes an attempt to showcase his deepest connection with India and its rich heritage. Thus, this paper comes to a point that Salman Rushdie is admired for many reasons. Above all, he is known for his determination to stand up defiantly vindicating storytelling, imagination, freedom of thought and creation against obscurantism. The author of this book, we are informed, is "neither a scholar nor a poet but merely a spinner of yarns . . . who offers this version for the simple entertainment and possible edification of today's readers."

To sum up, *Victory City* offers a deep thematic investigation of the nature of power, authorship, and history. It is an undeniable fact that the present writer has a deep impact of historical narratives in almost all of his writings. The novel reimagines history as a living, contested narrative created by imagination, voice, and resistance, rather than as a set record, via the lenses of magical realism and postcolonial critique. It is necessary and crucial to mention that the

creative mastery Sir Ahmad Salman Rushdie encompasses the actual events of the Hindu dynasty of that era.

Conclusion

Last of all, it can be observed that the book reframes history as an act of imagination, heavily impacted by the storyteller, what is remembered or forgotten, and the way narrative negotiates truth. The gendered aspects of historical writing are highlighted by the choice of Pampa Kampana as the narrator and founder of the Bisnaga empire. This offers a radical reimagining of historical agency in which a woman not only observes but also influences the development of an entire civilization. Furthermore, *Victory City* is situated in both a historical and a modern setting to portray its thematic examination of cyclical empires, cultural identity, and the fragility of memory. Rushdie considers the inescapability of deterioration, the recurrence of political foolishness, and the vulnerability of idealism when confronted with authority. His book turns into a timeless critique of how societies write, rewrite, and maintain their histories, frequently reflecting current ideals over historical facts. However, this tiny attempt to understand Rushdie's genius leaves behind a clue to prospective research and study.

Last but not the least, it is estimated that *Victory City* is a profound reflection on the dynamics of history, the silences found in historical archives, and the timeless power of storytelling, going beyond a fictitious recreation of a vanished kingdom. Rushdie affirms the transformational power of literature in reclaiming lost voices and rewriting communal memory with this novel, in addition to continuing his postcolonial critique of history. The idea that history is not just passed down but is always being rewritten is thus reinforced by *Victory City's* thematic themes of history, which provide insightful perspectives on the nexus of fiction, memory, and reality.

References:

- Rushdie, Salman. *Victory City*. Random House, 2023.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Verso, 1992.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford UP, 2005.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, U of Chicago P, 2004.

Ghosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*. Vintage, 1993.

Sen, Ananya. "The Mythical and the Historical in Salman Rushdie's Victory City." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2023, pp. 45–60.

Alter, Alexandra. "In Victory City, Salman Rushdie Reclaims History Through Fantasy." *The New York Times*, 6 Feb. 2023. www.nytimes.com.

Jaidka, Manju. "Victory City by Salman Rushdie." *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Diasporic Indian English Writing*. Springer, Singapore, 2025. 525-527.

Mijar, Dhana Bahadur. *Hi/story telling in Salman Rushdie's Victory city*. Diss. 2024.

Dawoor, Yagnishsing. "Victory City by Salman Rushdie." *World Literature Today* 97.3 (2023): 72-73.