

History, Memory and Partition in Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*

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Abstract:

The essay examines Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* as a literary representation of India's struggle for Independence and the Partition of the subcontinent. It situates the novel within the broader tradition of postcolonial historical fiction and considers its engagement with communal politics, national identity, and the consequences of Partition. The discussion focuses particularly on Kesavan's use of magic realism, historical events, fantasy, satire, and photography as narrative devices. The novel's portrayal of religious identity and cultural hybridity is explored through characters such as Haasan, Intezar, Masroor, and the narrator. The essay also considers the representation of major historical figures and political organizations, particularly the Congress, the Muslim League, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Attention is given to the novel's treatment of Partition, including its limited engagement with violence, displacement, and the psychological experiences of those affected by the event. The essay further discusses historical inaccuracies and the influence of Salman Rushdie's narrative techniques, especially those associated with *Midnight's Children*. Overall, it evaluates the ways in which Kesavan's fictional and experimental approach mediates historical experience and raises questions about the relationship between literature, memory, political history, and the representation of the past.

Key words- Representation, realism, satire, hybridity, violence, displacement, evaluates.

In his seminal essay, *Outside the Whale* Salman Rushdie makes a fuss about the recent spate in England of fictions and movies about the British Raj and the zombie-like revival of the defunct empire. 'The recrudescence of imperialist ideology' at a time when Britain is faced with the danger of cultural psychosis, is, according to the midnight's child, a part of a 'revisionist enterprise.' The main objectives of this project are to refurbish the tarnished image of the empire, to exculpate the race of its historic guilt, and to propagate that 'the British weren't as bad as people make out,' that 'British Empire represented something noble or great about Britain,' and that it was, 'in spite of all its flaws and meanness and bigotries, fundamentally glamorous.' The propagation of this revisionist theory and the presentation of a false, exotic orient in these fictions and movies (like 'Gandhi,' 'The Far Pavilions, and 'Jewel in the Crown') have been directed at providing 'moral, cultural and artistic justification for imperialism and for its underpinning ideology, that of the racial superiority of the Caucasian over the Asiatic.' Rejecting the political quietism recommended by George Orwell in *Inside the Whale*, Rushdie who claims to be 'radioactive with history and politics,' proposes to quarrel, 'as loudly and as embarrassingly as possible,' with such false notions of (Indian) history.

Yes, quarrel we must, with English fictions written in India and abroad about India and her colonial past that seek to present a revisionist, even prejudiced, history of the country, if we are not ashamed of our nation and national struggle for Independence. The occasion for such a remark is provided by a detailed reading of Mukul Kesavan's overrated novel, *Looking Through the Glass*, which created quite a stir in 1995. The publication of this high-profile novel was a literary event. It was the British Publishing Industry's 'Novel from India for 1994-95,' and there was much media hype that it would be short-listed for the Booker Prize. The book had soared into firmament even before being published and was acclaimed as the finest first novel ever written by an Indian in English, a stunning novel and a first novel by a brilliant, superlatively talented writer. All these critical cliches together with the much-publicized meeting of Kesavan with Salman Rushdie in London during the former's book-promotion tour, prepare the readers of Indian English fiction for something unprecedented. But this expectation is not fulfilled by the novel itself, by what happens within its pages, thus

confirming one's suspicion that the attention Looking through Glass, much like Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, received had little to do with its literary merits.

What happens in the book that took Kesavan ten years to complete and that was based on his extensive research on the communal politics of U.P. in the last decade of Indian struggle for Independence? Set in the troubled and communally charged 1940s, the novel examines the dilemma of North Indian Muslims who equally distrusted the Congress and the Muslim League and to whom the idea of Partition and of a separate Muslim state was unpalatable because they were culturally and economically rooted in the place they lived in (it is Lucknow in Kesavan's fictional world). The issue of roots, which has no reference to the community, and the tragedy of Partition that made millions of people deracinated and join what Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre call 'the greatest migration in history,' have been superbly dealt with in Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon*, Badiuzzama's *Chaako ki Wapsi*, Kamalleshwar's *Registan*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*. But whereas the indigenous sensibilities of these regional writers dramatize the psychological trauma of Partition and the overwhelming agony of forceful removal of people from their 'watan,' the Western trained imagination of Kesavan totally leaves out the inner lives of the characters. Like Milan Kundera, he seems to have little use for psychological novel in which the motives of the characters are central. Depriving characters, set in a political tragedy, of an interior landscape and interweaving private lives and public events into one comic framework are something one frequently came across in the novels of the Czech writer. *Looking Through Glass* is a unique novel that deals with the historical perspective of the country's vivisection on the communal basis without attempting to capture the psychological landscape of the times. It is a comic epic that focuses through magic realist techniques how the immense possibilities in the country's past were squandered by petti-fogging and communally-biased politicians of the Congress and the Muslim League. There is no reference in the book to the imperialistic designs of the British, their satanic mischief and abominable complicity in the communal politics that throttled the nationalist aspirations for a secular, united and democratic India. In Kesavan's version of history, the Congress under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi had side-stepped the secular Muslims in favour of the (Hindu) masses: the idiom of Congress politics was borrowed from the Hindu religious ethos; the Quit India Movement was only an abortive expression of Hindu nationalism and cultural rhetoric to which Indian Muslims remained by and large indifferent. Here Nehru is projected as an 'usurper,' (Kesavan,369) Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as a 'showboy' (Kesavan,314) of the Congress, and Jinnah, the author of the Two-Nation Theory, as 'avuncular, grave, aloof and kind.' (Kesavan,117) The horror of Partition are stripped of their tragic edge in the fictional narration and the novel seems completely inoculated against violence and atrocity. The reason of this pious attempt to mitigate the violent awfulness of Partition is the author's belief that there is some sense in which we'll never take in the real horror of Partition. One only feels a little sad for those countless writers on both sides of the international border, the likes of Yash Pal, Saadat Hasan Manto, Kartar Singh Duggal, Bhisham Sahni, and Samresh Basu—who have fictionalize 'the single most traumatic experience'³ in the recent history of the subcontinent, and the unprecedented violence it unleashed in an impartial, balanced manner, although few of them have succeeded in avoiding sentimentalism and maintaining—like Manto, for example—a cool, ironic distance.

In the very opening chapter of *Looking Through Glass* the style is firmly set. It is that of magic realism, of which Rushdie is now regarded as the best exponent from the Third World. It is being held out by many postcolonial writers as the only proper form for the Third World novel, and recent history is assumed in them to be its only legitimate subject. The recipe is very familiar: linking personal history with public events and presenting the experience of an individual or a family or a group as the experience of a country; stressing the historical centrality of the narrator. The forms of narrativization in these novels are basically non-mimetic and occasionally marked, as in Rushdie, by digressive self-reflexivity. Timothy Brennan has categorized these writers as 'Third World Cosmopolitans,' 'those writers western reviewers seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World.'

For a long time in western literary criticism the term 'mirror' and 'glass' were used in a special sense in any discussion of mimetic narration. From Plato to the eighteenth century the generally accepted concept of literature was that it was a 'mirror' or imitation of life. The term 'mimesis'—Plato's word for imitation—was also used by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, although in a slightly different sense. Like other literary genres, the novel also reflected a no-nonsense kind of mimetic realism, a quasi-scientific explanation of the way the world worked and a firm sense of moral and social responsibility. But things changed with the publication

of two books in the late 19th century by Oxford Professor, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-98), under the penname Lewis Carroll: *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). The term 'glass' is used in an altogether different sense in Carroll's works. The glass reflects persons and things standing before it more or less faithfully. But if one enters inside the glass and looks through it? Curious things will happen. One will find oneself, like Alice, in a wonderland which is absurd, grotesque and fantastic. Kesavan's novel looks at an important part of Indian history through the looking glass and lands his readers in a world that has elements of fantasy in it and that constantly challenges our notion of the real world. It is a world where the narrator meets his own grandmother whom he had cremated only a short while ago, where Muslims periodically disappear and Hindus go through the process of mutation, thus assuming multiple, ambiguous identities.

In the novel, the camera serves a metaphorical function. The narrator tells the story of his life in terms of photography and sees everything—the decaying British Raj, the Quit India Movement, and the historical perspective of Partition—through the zoom lens of his camera:

But there was a price I paid for those pictures; an hour of every visit was spent listening patiently to Dadi's first person account of the struggle for Independence. In the early days it was an epic tale; she gave me a wide-angle picture of the Gandhian decades, but after the first few visits she zoomed in on the great Salt Satyagraha led by the Mahatma in 1930. (Kesavan,2)

The narrator, an ambitious Hindu photographer, is at the beginning unconcerned with history. But with the progress of the narrative history claims him for its own and he finds himself translated, borne across time, in the troubled forties. It is difficult to separate the narrator from the author in this book. Consequently, it seems to be an autobiographical novel. Kesavan's fictional narrative may be fabricated but the world his characters inhabit is certainly not. The names of the places, through which the narrator makes his odyssey in an alien time and the principal characters of the drama of Partition, are historical. The author has consciously left no scope for fictionalization, as Rushdie has done in *Shame*.

The period of external history that the narrative covers is the last six years of the Indian struggle for freedom. It begins with the historic Quit India rebellion and ends with Partition. There are also references to the Khilafat movement, the Mappila rebellion in Malabar in 1920s, and the Salt Satyagraha in early 1930s.

The novel begins with the narrator's train journey to Banaras to tip the ashes of his illustrious grandmother into the Ganga. A self-reliant woman of exceptional integrity, Dadi had answered Gandhiji's call for civil disobedience by picketing liquor shops and spent six months in the colonial jail with her unwearied son at her breast. But this grand woman, who 'had grown used to paying her tithe to the Nation in the coin of social work,' (Kesavan,4) was later consumed by guilt for her failure to participate in the Quit India Movement due to familial constraints: "The August rebellion became a black hole in her memory that sucked in everything that ever happened to her afterwards, that collapsed her entire life into a single non-event." (Kesavan,6)

At some point in his journey, the narrator steps down from the train to look through his camera's magic eye at 'the world close-up from an invulnerable distance.' (Kesavan,8) He tumbles through the glass into the river and lands in another world at another time. It is Lucknow of August 1942, and the Quit India rebellion is sweeping through the Gangetic plains. Stuck in a world not of his own choosing, he feigns amnesia and decides to remain perfectly insulated from everything around him till he returns to his mislaid present, to his own time with its black and white simplicity. But in the course of his 'promiscuous drifting through this alien time, infecting more and more of it with [his] presence and being lathered by its dust in return,' (Kesavan 39-40) he discovers that his displacement in time is irreversible. A 'homeless waif (Kesavan,14) without a name, he improvises a life and assembles a world around him. In the course of his involuntary peregrination during the last years of the crumbling Raj, he acquires a strange foster family, makes some uncommon friends and witnesses some momentous events that defined the last phase of the Indian struggle for Independence. His life becomes inextricably linked with the fates of these idiosyncratic people who populate Kesavan's fictional world. The members of his foster family, like some of his acquaintances in this fabulous world, are endowed with multiple, ambiguous religious identities at a time when the entire subcontinent is divided along communal lines. They are Muslims but Hindus, Hindus mutated into Islam. They are secular, hospitable, affectionate, and totally untouched by communal prejudice or bigotry. Ammi, sceptical about change and filled

with Old World certitudes; Masroor, desperate to stall Hindu-Muslim riots, 'deaf to large ideas and blind to crusading visions,' (Kesavan,255) a seeker of a free, united and secular India, who feels himself let down by the Congress which has alienated the nationalist Muslims by its failure to address their insecurities, and finally goes over to the Muslim League; Asharfi, whose undefined, unfocussed yearnings find consummation in lesbian love and erotic painting. They are forever waiting for their patriarch, Intezar, who had vanished during his pilgrimage to Mecca, to return. A Kashmiri Brahmin domiciled in Lucknow, Intezar (Charandas Ganjoo was his real name) convened to Islamic spiritualism by his passion for Urdu poetry and his love for Kulsum, the daughter of an eminent Urdu poet. The family's well-wisher is Haasan, presumed to be a Muslim by many but who is actually a middle aged Iyengar Hindu (Haasan being his ancestral place name), who reached Lucknow in 1921 as a coffee house manager after a series of fantastic adventures that had developed in him a strong distaste for the brahminical notion of purity and consistency. He was branded like a cow with the logo of Hindu faith— Swastika—by a group of Hindu fanatics who had mistaken him for a Muslim. The horrible experience had effected a transformation in Haasan and generated in him 'a love for essential humanity, unclassified, unclothed.' (Kesavan,85) Among the narrator's acquaintances are Chaubey, a revolutionary leader turned sexual gymnast ending his life as a human cannonball; Gyanendra, a lecher-ous scoundrel masquerading as religious professional who harbours a senile fantasy of filming 'Kamasutra'; and Parwana, a girl of obscure origins whose life took off from a Bombay orphanage to be ravaged in the name of realism (she nearly lost her life in a make-believe pyre as an ersatz sati in a film studio) and ravished in the name of fantasy (raped by Gyanendra's repertory star Chaubey) and who ultimately finds refuge in a home for fallen women run by the narrator's grandmother. The story woven around these characters is a fantastic one—a mixture of comedy and farce, friendship and repulsion, hope and despair. The novelist has 'treated these characters like flesh and blood equals, as free, self-willed individuals carving out their destinies.' (Kesavan,52) But, in actuality, they are no better than 'cardboard figures playing bit roles in a tightly scripted play [with] a happy ending.' (Kesavan,52) He takes them through Lucknow, Banaras, Delhi and Simla—the exact area of Kesavan's research on pre-Partition communal politics—until the narrative culminates in the climactic moment of Partition. In the course of his picaresque wanderings, the narrator participates in the Quit India rebellion as 'Dadi's proxy,' (Kesavan,101) witnesses the violence perpetrated by 'Gandhi's rabble' (Kesavan,66) the faceless, faithless, uncontrolled masses and the Muslim indifference to the Congress politics, and waits on Jinnah and the Muslim League Delegation to the Simla Conference as a waiter in a British hotel. Meanwhile, the 'gigantic surge of history' (Kesavan,16) propels him and his improvised world inexorably to the foredoomed finale in August 1947. This is the key to the fictional tension in *Looking Through Glass*, the tragic scope of Kesavan's protagonist living through a period of history that has already been written. It is the tragedy of hindsight:

I was warmed by pity, not only because they had lost Masroor but because the end of the world they knew was due. In less than five years there would be murder, arson, rape, flight, migration, butchered trains, refugees, dispossession, enemy aliens ... in short, Partition. And here they were Asharfi, Ammi and Haasan, living in the lull and thinking it the storm. It made me feel omniscient; I felt like a historian brought up face to face with some lost cause, some extinct line that he had chronicled. (Kesavan,51-52)

Having lost his world once, he desperately tries to protect his foster family, which has given him an identity and a refuge in this alien time from the impending catastrophe. Like a 'maverick hero,' (Kesavan,332) he tries to 'play matador to a fury' (Kesavan,284) that will split a million families in the wake of Partition, and makes some Quixotic plans to disable the known course of events, not for the whole nation, because he is not concerned about the fates of others, but for his Muslim friends:

I wasn't worried for myself. I had been born a Hindu and in Delhi from all accounts it was mainly Muslims who died. Nor was I concerned about India because it was difficult to feel for a subcontinent. I was just worried for my friends in Lucknow. Not for Haasan since he was a Hindu too, but for Ammi and Asharfi, and Masroor. (Kesavan,174-75)

He is not worried for his grandmother because 'she was a Hindu'; Parwana is none of his business. In the wake of a 'pogrom of Muslims in Delhi' (Kesavan,352) during the Partition, the authorities round up the Muslims for their safety and keep them in the Old Fort, away from the wrath of Hindu zealots:

Within the Fort ... a single species, Homo islamicus, had been corralled for its own safety and well-being. A superior zoo, progressive and opposed to cages, because its charges were being held only till they could be released into their natural habitat, which was then being fenced a few hundred miles away. (Kesavan,216)

The refugees are given the choice to decide their nationality and most of them decide in favour of Pakistan. The Ganjoo family remains undecided because of division of opinion among its members. While Ammi, who is averse to the large ideas of change and wants to preserve the world as it is, rejects Pakistan because it won't be Lucknow, (Kesavan,330) Masroor, disillusioned by the Congress betrayal, prefers the Muslim Homeland. The novel ends on an up-beat note with the return of Intezar, like the Mahdi figure (Redeemer) in Islam, from hiding at the crucial moment and his presence solves the problem of choice for his family, because 'Intezar was home.' (Kesavan,373)

Beneath all the magic-realist pyro-techniques, spoof and sexual gymnastics that the novel encompasses, there is an attempt at a metaphorical examination of Indian identity which is based on the notion of multiplicity, hybridity and religious tolerance and immune from bigotry, communal prejudice and invocations of purity and consistency which were at the root of the communal division of the country which ultimately led to the Partition. This ideological function is served in the novel by Haasan, Intezar and, to some extent, the narrator himself. At one point in the narrative, the protagonist, reflecting on the Muslim League's call for a separate Muslim state, says:

Like other secular people in independent India I had been brought up to believe that religion was a private matter confined to the inner space between brains and bowels, so it couldn't possibly make a difference to arse-washing techniques which fell outside its scope in the secular realm. I was also taught that differences were unimportant since we were all identical in our essential humanity. (Kesavan,175)

This commendable intent notwithstanding, the book reveals a clear bias in its presentation of the history of Indian struggle for freedom. By fabricating a set of characters whose social contract has everything to do with contingency, Kesavan makes an unambiguous statement, an unmistakable political choice. His bias is reflected in the preferential treatment of the people of a particular faith with that of Bihari Halvai's reverential attitude to Jamal Mian's Islamic faith; the juxtaposition of Ramlila and Kamasutra; the lop-sided portrayal of the Muslim problem before the Partition; the presentation of the Quit India rebellion, which shook the nation as nothing else did and in which, for all we know, Muslims also participated, as an expression of Hindu cultural nationalism (of which the Congress was the exponent); the denigration of Mahatma's clarion call: 'Do or die,' and the caricature of Congress workers, who appear no better than figures in a meagrely animated cartoon. (Kesavan, 234) Certain parts of the book, which attempt to create fictional equivalents of the literal facts of history, tend too much to parody (note, for example, the siege of Madhuban in the chapter entitled '2000 A.V.'). One is astonished by the historical accuracy of the setting in some places (see, for instance, the Simla Conference which seems to have been lifted from textbook history). But even more surprising are a number of factual errors that one comes across in Kesavan's narrative. About the pre-Partition riots in Bengal, the narrator, who is deeply worried about the fates of his Muslim friends, says:

At the end of July Jinnah called upon Muslims to celebrate 16 August as Direct Action Day. Nobody knew what that meant till the day rolled round and the killings began in Calcutta. Even that didn't disturb me much because Calcutta was a thousand miles away. Then some more were killed in Noakhali, but for me that was Bangladesh and someone else's country. (Kesavan, 351-52)

Noakhali in August 1946 was in Bangladesh! And Gandhiji, Mountbatten's One Man Boundary Force, risked his own life to dissolve communal tension and preach Hindu-Muslim amity in someone else's country! Most of the peasants dying in Bengal during the famine of 1942 were, a British Clerk informs the readers, Muslims (Kesavan,294). After his return from 'limbo' into which Masroor, like thousands of 'Congress Muslims' had gone during the Quit India rebellion due to the apathy of the party to their anxiety and insecurity, he joins the Muslim League paper, Dawn, as a sports reporter and he starts 'with a series of profiles: Great Pakistani

Cricketers: Past and Present.' (Kesavan, 254) Pakistani cricketers in 1942! Rushdie, it is well known, also commits factual inaccuracy in dating the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in *Midnight's Children*. But then, that is Saleem Sinai's version of history and he deliberately flouts the conventions of historical writing to place himself in a central position.

Indeed, the shadow of Rushdie looks very large in *Looking Through Glass*. There are a number of unambiguous echoes of *Midnight's Children* in it: the interpenetration of the individual or familial history with the history of the nation, the unstable and shifting identities of characters, the disappearance of the Muslims during the Quit India movement, the narrator's amnesia and his voluntary circumcision towards the end, Masroor's doubt-planting machine and jigsaw designed 'to teach Congressmen that they were dropping their Muslim pieces,' (Kesavan, 230) and the dinner table conclave of the Muslim League in Simla (remember the pepper-pot episode?). Not to mention the Rushdie-like penchant for vulgarity and crudity, frottage and voyeurism, and infantile attempt at parody:

Long years ago, according to Nehru, he and some others had made a tryst with Destiny, but Masroor didn't have an appointment with anyone quite as grand. All he had were the date palms. Some weeks ago I made a date with date palms ... he could have said. (Kesavan, 362)

Apart from these magic realist techniques, Kesavan's novel reminds one of Rushdie in another significant way. *Looking through Glass* is a stringent critique of Congress policies in 1942. Various characters voice their—and also their creator's—disapproval of the national leaders' fetish about change and progress and their grand visions which proved disastrous for the uncommitted masses. This distrust of grand public events which jeopardize individual lives is also voiced by Rushdie's protagonist:

Politics, children: at the best of times a bad dirty business. We should have avoided it, I should never have dreamed of purpose. I am coming to the conclusion that privacy, the small individual lives of men, is preferable to all this inflated macrocosmic activity.

(Rushdie, 435)

One only wonders whether the struggle against colonialism, and the independence of the country—however moth-nibbled it might be—would have been possible if some persons had not possessed grand visions and inspired a prostrate people with self-respect, self-reliance, and dreams of a bright future. There is no serious attempt, in *Looking through Glass*, at an objective examination of the reasons why the nation's dream had gone sour, as there is no reference to the British collusion with Jinnah's two-nation theory which accelerated the communal division of the subcontinent and in which, if we are to believe Maulana Azad's testimony in *India Wins Freedom*, Nehru and Sardar Patel had acquiesced. It is a Partition novel written on an epic scale that remains silent about what happened during those fateful days and months after the country's 'tryst with Destiny' on the other side of Radcliffe's boundary, one in which Gandhi is presented as a leader of the Hindu masses who was blind to the Muslim problem in the country ('Suddenly the Muslim mind became close to him, suddenly the masses became irresistibly urgent.' [Kesavan 247]), the same Gandhi who was assassinated by Hindu fanatics for his supposed love for Muslims. Even Rushdie would have hesitated to project the father of the nation as communally biased. For, despite his slips and peccadilloes, his hymns to chutney and chutneyfication, Salim Sinai is able to establish himself as an unprejudiced observer of the politics of India and Pakistan. His views of politics and of the relentless march of history that tramples individual lives, are neither Hindu nor Muslim, neither Indian nor Pakistani. He reacts to historical events from a purely human point of view that transcends nationality, political creed and cultural upbringing. It is this quintessential humanism that makes him feel responsible for whatever happens in the political arena. But Kesavan, by making his political choice very clear, abdicates his role as an impartial chronicler and commentator of Indian history.

One wonders what this much-flaunted book realizes after all. What emerges from it in terms of history and literature? What does it mediate in terms of experience? The Indian struggle for Independence was not just a political struggle but an all-encompassing experience which touched all sensitive individuals irrespective of their religious faiths and cultural upbringing. The tragedy of Partition has few parallels in human history. But Kesavan's book fails to let us enter into the magic of the period and reconstruct the prevailing psychology of the people who witnessed and were affected by those momentous events.

Psychologists tell us that a traumatized mind, a wounded civilization, needs to come to terms with its grief. It attempts to catharize itself with the sublimating works of art and the liberating flights of imagination. The Jewish imagination is still trying to grapple with the Holocaust; the British still looks back to the Raj as much for nostalgia as for exculpation. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is born of a sense of guilt that weighs heavily on the conscience of individuals as well as of the community. But no such guilt weighs on the conscience of Kesavan's protagonist. In the face of the worst famine in the recorded history of India, he says: "Guilt was presumptuous. When I hadn't been able to take one troublesome girl off Haasan's hands, it was silly of me to fret about the live million famine dead of history books." (Kesavan, 184) This explains his lack of concern about the victims of Calcutta riots or those who died in Noakhali and West Punjab. The Partition carnage merits only a few sentences in the whole book:

I dreamt in large cliches: acres of coffins, forests of pyres, rivers of blood skulls. None of this bothered me still a night in June, when one of a heap of skulls showed Masroor's likeness. I pissed in my bed that night. (Kesavan, 350)

In *Shame*, Rushdie admits that he is writing a fairy tale about a fictional country which may or may not have similarities with Pakistan. 'Realism, can break a writer's heart. Similarly, the characters of *Looking through Glass* were 'sceptical about the relevance of real life' and they 'wanted no dealings with reality.' (Kesavan, 18) Hence the fantasy, the cock and bull story which Kesavan weaves around history, not to illuminate it. He offers a version of history which is prejudiced, revisionist and even, in its critique of the ideas of change, reactionary. He looks at a hard-earned epoch through a tainted glass. It is not surprising, therefore, that this novel aspired for the Booker. It is the only prize that this book deserves. The British will really appreciate this revisionist project.

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