



## **A New Historicist Perspective of Staples' Novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of The Wind***

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines Suzanne Fisher Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, through the lens of New Historicism founded by Stephen Greenblatt. This novel narrates the intellectual history of the people of Cholistan. The fictitious characters introduced and the fictional environment developed effectively depict the historical perspective of the people of Southern Punjab and Cholistan. When the novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* is analyzed through this theoretical lens, it becomes evident that the historical context of the period in which it was written is vividly portrayed. As the new historicists emphasize that literary works are the windows to delve deep into the historical and ideological conditions of a specific time. Therefore, study of the novel in light of the New historicism provides "little histories" of Cholistan and its people suggesting that history is rooted in literature books. The novel endorses the concept of "the refusal of universal aesthetic norms" (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000, pp. 6-7) and challenges the generalized narratives about Cholistan, often overlooked and incorporated within broader portrayals of Punjabi society. This study reveals that if a reader seeks insight into the political history of Cholistan, he or she can find glimpses of it in Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* that encapsulates historical perspectives of the time.

Keywords: New Historicism, historicity of the text, anecdote

### **Introduction**

New Historicism emerged in the late 1970s and early 80s in America distinguishing itself from conventional biographical historicism, which viewed literature as a reflection of the historical world in which it was produced. New Historicists moved beyond the narrowly text-centered and formalistic approaches to literature. The New Historicists like Greenblatt claim that literature must be understood in its historical context and consider literary texts as cultural products rooted in their time and place (Greenblatt, 1982, Parvini, 2017).

As a critic, theorist and the leading practitioner of new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt made groundbreaking contributions, leaving a lasting impact on his fields of expertise. He suggests the four basic tenets of New Historicism: firstly, literary works are history-oriented; secondly, literary works offer an alternative vision of history; thirdly, literary and historical works are constituted by social



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and political forces of the period and, in return, constitute them and finally, literature should be interpreted and explained in terms of its historical contexts (Greenblatt, 1982, pp. 1-2). After Greenblatt coined the term New Historicism in 1982, he along with Louis Montrose improved the theory and applied it in different studies, such as the analysis of William Shakespeare's plays in their historical context, thus contributing to the expansion of the theory. Catherine Gallagher and Greenblatt jointly edited *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) as a guidebook to New Historicists, and through their studies, various critics and scholars contributed to the embodiment of this theory in the field of criticism. Contrary to Historicism, New Historicism as a theory provides unusual and unconventional ways to analyze historical processes from different perspectives. New Historicism allows multiple perspectives in historiography, thus exploring the experiences, struggles and contributions of the minorities, marginalized voices and invisible social groups in history. According to Peter Barry (1995), New Historicism is considered "a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period" (Barry, 1995, p.171). New Historicism has no connection to history as a discipline. Old historicism and new historicism may share part of a name, but the identities of these two theories are quite different. This theory of New Historicism may have even less in common with old historicism. With this difference of "old" versus "new" comes the idea that New Historicism may not be correctly named and identified. Some alternate names for New Historicism that have been considered in the literature are "the new history," "historical-materialist criticism," "cultural materialism," and "critical historicism" (Hens-Piazza, 2002, p. 5). New historicists claim that literature is textual in nature. Unlike traditional historians, who consider that history is more important than the literary text, the new historians stress that the text is the compressed history from which one can access the past. Therefore, all texts must be analyzed in their cultural context and it need not to be analyzed in isolation (Bressler, 2003). Likewise, New Historicists also believe that the themes and meaning of literature are not universal and cannot be derived from the text alone. Reasonably, they are the product of the writer's time and cultural situation.

New Historicism became prominent, reaching beyond the Renaissance period. In this connection, *Practicing New Historicism* by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (2000) is a practical guide on how to apply New Historicism to the texts. New Historicism challenges the old, generalized, stereotypical ideas and notions about history and culture. They penetrate deep into the veins of a text and reveal the hidden narratives for greater understanding of the readers.

### **Depiction of Cholistan in the novel**

The word Cholistan is derived from 'choli', which means desert in Turkish, which is why it is known as Cholistan. It is locally known as Rohi, a well-known desert in southwest Pakistan that extends into Thar Desert. It covers 2/3 of the land area of Bahawalpur region. (Hussain *et al.*, 2016). Located 30 km from the city of Bahawalpur, this desert stretches eastward into the Thar Desert and borders the Bikaner and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan, India, to the south. (Shoukat, 2015; Jafar *et al.*, 2022). The desert of Cholistan is ignored due to its hard access and harsh weather conditions. People lead their lives in the barren desert of Cholistan and they have uniqueness in spending their lives. Despite bareness, life exists



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which shows that the people of Cholistan have evolved unique adaptations to survive under harsh conditions.

The current study focuses on the neglected society of Cholistan depicted in Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. Historically, the novel offers readers a fascinating glimpse of the nomadic family of Cholistan, Southern Punjab, Pakistan. The novelist opens the world of Cholistan to her Western readers to revisit their pre-perceived ideas about the people in Asia in general and South Asia in particular and gain from it a renewed sense of self and respect for the marginalized and suppressed societies of the developing world.<sup>1</sup>In the novel, she challenges the commonly held stereotypes about the people of Punjab in general and Cholistan in particular. Staples gives an "insider's" view of Asian culture without imposing judgment or injecting American values into the novel.

### **Suzanne Fisher Staples (1945-2022)**

Suzanne Fisher Staples is an American novelist, best known for her award-winning novels for young adults that focus on the lives of adolescents from diverse cultures facing challenges. Born in 1945 in northeastern Pennsylvania, USA, Staples lived as vigorous and lively as many fictional heroines in her novels. She grew up a tomboy, playing with animals in the fields of Pennsylvania and reading novels such as *The Hardy Boys*, *Treasure Island*, and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Staples tweets, "I am a novelist, animal lover, singer, reader, and planner of the Gathering, which celebrates imagination" (Staples, 2010). She was a news reporter for United Press International in Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. She also served as an editor at The Washington Post. Though, she initially began her career as a news reporter, drawing from her own experiences, she wrote numerous novels focusing on diverse cultures of South Asia and America. Staples wrote several novels, including *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (1989), *Haveli* (1993), *The House of Djinn* (2008) *Dangerous Skies* (1996), *Storm* (1998), *Shiva's Fire* (2000), *The Green Dog* (2003), *Under the Persimmon Tree* (2005) and *The House of Djinn* (2008).

Suzanne Fisher Staples has written many novels, but this study is delimited to *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. It specifically explores the political and historical, backgrounds of voiceless societies of Southern Punjab, particularly the Cholistani people as depicted in the novel. The novel is discussed from the perspective of New Historicism using anecdotes, and historicity of text. The study focuses more on the silent narrative embedded in the text.

### **Literature Review**

#### **New Historicism.**

New Historicism was developed by American literary historian Stephen Greenblatt and his colleagues at the University of California in the 1980s (Cantor, 1993). New Historicism is believed to be a 'turn of history' in literary criticism. It is considered a reaction to the hostile reception of other schools of thought, such as post-structuralism and deconstruction. (Nicholls, 2009). It aims to derive

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<sup>1</sup> "I was mistaken about the veil, as I was in most of my other preconceived ideas about Islam. The chadr, when tied between the branches of a tree, makes a fine cradle. It is a backpack for carrying fodder and kindling, a screen to dress and bathe behind, a sheet, protection from the sun, a bandage, a towel" (Staples, 1989).



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meaning from a text by examining it within the context of the prevalent ideas and assumptions of its historical period. New Historicism is not really “new” but it is considered “new” for being a “historical turn” as a response to the dissatisfaction brought about by other critical approaches such as New Criticism and Formalism (Greenblatt, 1982). It is an advanced movement that studies literary texts in a cultural context. According to Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000), New Historicism is a school of literary criticism—and a “new interpretive practice” (p. 1).

According to Barry (2009), this interpretative practice is “based on parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period” (Barry, 1999, p. 116). Non-literary texts “are not subordinated as contexts” for the interpretation of the literary text, Barry (2009) proposes that they should instead be called “co-texts” which are “expressions of the same historical ‘moments’ as literary texts (Barry, 1999, p. 167). For this reason, Greenblatt prefers to term his critical interpretative practice ‘Cultural Poetics’ rather than ‘New Historicism’ (Greenblatt, 2013). Greenblatt (1982) conducted a groundbreaking critical study on New Historicism. He coined the term “new historicism” in 1982. He considers new historicism as a practice, not a doctrine. New historicism is a progressive approach that searches the real and the raw, offering a new perspective on history. In the introduction to his work, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982), he challenges the notion of a unified vision in literary interpretation and historical background. Porter (1990) argues that New Historicism frees us from world views in criticism and allows us to “approach literary texts as agents as well as effects of cultural changes, as participating in a cultural conversation rather than merely representing the conclusion reached in that conversation, as if it could have reached no other...” (Porter, 1990, p.782).

Montrose (1989) finds the connection between text and history by employing the lens of his principle of historicity and textuality,

By the historicity of texts, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing—not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them. By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question — traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and sub the social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the ‘documents’ upon which historians ground their own texts, called ‘histories’ (Montrose, 1989, p. 20).

### Application of New Historicism on literary works

Xu and Huang (2018) study the novel *Frankenstein through* the lens of New Historicism and mention that it seems to be a harbinger of the Industrial Revolution. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, people have begun to develop their texts of science. In the novel *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein creates a humanly figure who is a great challenge to traditional religious approaches. Frankenstein creates his creature and wants to be God. As he challenges the authority of God, he is punished by God for taking His power into





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his own hands.

Ali and Otoluwa (2021) study Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility* from the perspective of Stephen Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism. The researchers find several contexts of New Historicism in the novel, namely historical context, social context, cultural context and biographical context. Historical elements contained in the novel are then compared to non-literary texts in that period. They also determine if the novel reflects Jane's real life by comparing the events in the novel with the novelist's biography. They do not provide enough details about Jane Austen's life and only note that Mr. Dashwood, the father of Elinor and Marianne, and Jane Austen's father, died in the same period, 1807.

Duan (2020) applies New Historicism to William Faulkner's novel, *Absalom, Absalom!*. Duan says how the novel reflects and engages with the historical context of the Southern part of America, predominantly the issues of slavery, racism and the Civil War. Faulkner's storytelling methods reveal that history is not a fixed set of facts but a complex web of interpretations. Duan finds that through its complex narrative structure, the novel *Absalom, Absalom* challenges readers to consider the multifaceted nature of history, encouraging them to question singular, authoritative versions and recognize the diversity of perspectives that contribute to the historical understanding of the novel.

Öztürk (2003) studies Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in the light of New Historicism. New Historicism declares that all history is subjective written by people whose personal biases and prejudices affect their interpretation of the past. According to New Historicists, historical narratives are shaped by the dominant powers of the time, reflecting their interests. These narratives are not absolute truths but are constructed to serve specific ideologies and agendas. The study reveals how Conrad's depiction of Africa and Africans simultaneously reinforces and challenges the racist stereotypes and colonial narratives that were prevalent during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **Reviews on *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind***

Bradford (2007) states that Staples' protagonist in the novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, challenges the patriarchal society of Cholistan. She unlike her sister Phulan prefers activities normally associated with masculinity, such as tending the camels of her family. She accompanies her father on trips to the Sibi festival to sell camels and buy clothes and other items in Rahimyar Khan. Additionally, she tries to escape the marriage her parents have arranged for her, fully aware of the potential repercussions.

Little (2011) analyzes Staples' trilogy – *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, *Haveli*, and *The House of Djinn*, a tale that follows the life of a young girl from the desert who becomes part of a political family, leaving her nomadic life behind. In the first novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, readers are introduced to the characters, their personal and material conflicts, and the natural forces and cultural patterns that shape their lives. It also focuses on the limitations of desires humans fulfill for different reasons.

Jan and Rahman (2022) mention that Staples' trilogy is aptly called the Cholistan trilogy because it tells the story of a young Cholistani girl, Shabanu, in the patriarchal context of Pakistan. *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, narrates the story of Shabanu's life at the home of her father, Dadi, where she is forcibly betrothed to Rahim *Sahib* to settle an old enmity with Nazir Khan. She



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constantly tries to challenge the patriarchal authority, but at the end, she has to obey the gender norms of the patriarchal traditions and norms of her society.

Watson (1999) in her article, *Individual Choice and Family Loyalty: Suzanne Fisher Staples' Protagonists' Come of Age* mentions Staples' protagonists, Shabanu and Buck Smith, who struggle with developing themselves while resilient to the culture that fills them with the whisper of inescapability. She created Shabanu in *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (1989) and in *Haveli* (1993) and developed Buck Smith in *Dangerous Skies* (1996). Watson says that when the protagonists Shabanu and Buck enter their teenage years, they find themselves thinking quite differently from their families and societies. While struggling to understand their traditional values, these characters develop their consciences and opinions in contrast with those of their parents. Each protagonist moves along a temperate range of resistance to the family culture; each struggles with levels of frustration before reaching peace of mind. However, Shabanu and Buck cannot reject their norms and customs.

Isaac (2009) says that most of the characters in Staples' novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* are based on real people whom Staples met when she was working for USAID in Southern Punjab, Cholistan desert. The relationship between Phulan and Shabanu in the novel is drawn from the author's relationship with her sister Karen. She creates a story that is different from that of American fiction writers. Staples thinks that differences make life fascinating.

Donovan (2007) illuminates the novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* through the lenses of defamiliarization and disorientation, a counterintuitive approach to orientation. He highlights that defamiliarization is one of the most effective means of destabilizing a reader's perspective. In her novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, Staples demonstrates a masterful use of this strategy.

Kermode (1967) stresses realism and argues that rigid expectations must be overturned for readers to experience the unfamiliar. He further says that Staples uses the disorienting strategy in her novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. For instance, in the novel, Dadi beats Shabanu because she has run away from her forced marriage. For American readers, the ending of the novel will be problematic for many reasons: children in America are urged to escape from forced marriages and seek help for abuse; Secondly, Shabanu's return to a forced marriage to Rahim Khan, who is 42 years older than her. This violates American ideals about the partnership and marriage of mutual understanding.

### Research Methodology/ Theoretical Framework

This study is qualitative in nature. The primary sources are Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, the secondary sources comprise history books, journals, magazines, research papers and online data. The secondary data sources involve both fictional and non-fictional material about the novelist and selected novels. This study attempts to analyze the novel through a New Historicist perspective, highlighting the interaction between history and literature. It also attempts to provide a fresh reading of the novel, shattering the barrier between literature and history through the framed narratives, the employment of diverse techniques and the parallelism between fictional and historical characters depicted in the selected novel.

This study is organized and is carried out systematically through divisions, i.e. introduction, literature review, textual analysis of the text, findings and



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conclusion. The literary theory of New Historicism is used to guide the analysis. This theory, which emerged in the late 20th century, focuses on the intersection of literature and history, allowing literature to be analyzed in the culture of both the writer and the critic (Brizee et al., 2015).

This study uses textual analysis as a research method, suggested by Catherine Belsey (2013). Textual analysis is a fundamental method in literary studies, as it involves a detailed examination of texts, typically, novels, stories, plays or poems. Textual analysis aims to understand the underlying themes, patterns and cultural or social contexts within the text. Furthermore, textual analysis is usually used in disciplines such as literary studies, communication, media studies and cultural studies to examine how texts convey information, ideas and influence audience. It means that the textual analysis method effectively interprets and analyzes the content, structure and meaning of a text.

To sum up, the study attempts to reveal the relationship between the texts and its historical contexts by applying the apparatuses of New Historicism such as Anecdotes, historicity of text and textuality of history (Greenblatt, 1982; Montrose, 1989; Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Greenblatt & Gunn, 2007). These apparatuses, with their relevance and applicability, significantly contribute to our understanding of the texts and their historical contexts. According to Montrose, the historicity of texts means to “suggest the historical specificity, the social and material embedding, of all modes of writing—not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them” (Greenblatt & Gunn, 2007, p. 209). It means that history could not be objective since it was narrated by human beings, who could not be objective in their narration all the time. Since history was often recorded in the form of narration, historians could also access history in the form of textuality.

## Discussion and Findings

### Historicity of text

This section focuses on the historical interpretations of the novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. The main strategy employed is the historicization of texts by documenting historical facts that echo the textual incidents **thereby highlighting the connection between the selected text and its historical context**. The historicity of texts emphasizes that literary text reflects the social, historical, cultural and political aspects of a society. In addition, the concept of “history” should be plural history which is composed of countless lower-case histories (little histories) (Yang, 2021). According to Greenblatt (2005), one can “gain a more comprehensive understanding of literature by considering it in historical context while treating history itself as historically contingent on the present in which it is constructed” (Greenblatt, 2005, p. 2).

The novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* has been considered one of the masterpieces of American novelist Suzanne Fisher Staples, who depicts the customs and historical events of the Cholistani people in true spirit. The multiple points of view and the dialogic nature of the novel endorses the concepts of New Historicism which talks about histories rather than history.<sup>2</sup> The novel is set in

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<sup>2</sup> Greenblatt reveals that in New Historicism, “[a]ctions that appear to be single are disclosed as multiple; the isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound with collective social energy” (Greenblatt, 1990 p. 221).



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Cholistan, Southern Punjab. The name Cholistan 'is derived from the Turkish word chol, meaning sand, and istan, a Persian suffix meaning land. This desert is extremely hot and receives little rainfall. Nomadic and gypsy tribes have lived for a long time, looking after their cattle and camels (Mughal, 1994). Living a nomadic way of life, primary source of income of Cholistanis comes from their cattle, which are sold, milked, or fleeced.

The novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, gives a vivid description of the history of Cholistan and Bahawalpur. Most of the Cholistani are indigenous people who inhabit both sides of the border. (Auj, 1991; Nadiem, 2009; Shahid et al., 2016). In the novel, readers are told that Shabanu's grandfather acknowledges that they were converted to Islam in the period of Mughal emperor Akbar. Grandfather said, "We converted to Islam when Akbar came four hundred years ago" (*Shabanu*, p. 93). Though, Staples does not give enough space to these historical events yet it seems she has read these events before writing the novel as she is not indifferent to these historical events while narrating the story of Shabanu. It is interesting to note that Staples links Shabanu's lineage with Abbasi deliberately or out of ignorance. In the novel, Shabanu's grandfather is mentioned as Jindwadda Ali Abbasi, descended from the Abbasi family. However, history reveals that most of the Cholistani are Jats, Rajputs and Aryans. These tribes were the powerful tribes that broke up the Gupta Empire and consolidated their position in the 5th century (Auj, 1991).

An officer of the British East India Company and a pioneer historian on Jats, James Tod, in his book *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India* (1914), mentions that the present Cholistan was the birthplace of Jat race. Apart from Rajputs, Jats, and Arians, the presence of Syed was felt after the advent of Islam. However, the rulers of Bahawalpur State were not the indigenous people. They came from Arabia to Sindh and later settled in Southern Punjab and some areas of interior Sindh. Here, the novelist does not differentiate between Abbasids and Cholistani. These Abbasids were descendants of Abbasi Caliphs of Baghdad. After the caliphate in Baghdad ended as a result of Mongol Invasion, they joined the Mumelukes in Egypt, where they enjoyed influential positions.

History reveals that the Abbasi rulers reached the Bikaner Gate and gained strength despite various conspiracies. They were great warriors and founders of the Ex-Bahawalpur State (Shoukat, 2015; Shahid & Tabbasum, 2016). They fought bravely against their enemies. They snatched the areas from the Rajputs and encouraged many Balochi clans like Khosas, Rinds, Derajats, Jatois of Cholistan, and Sindh to move and settled here. During Ranjeet Singh's period, Syed and Qureshi families sought refuge in Bahawalpur. In the novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, Shabanu narrates the story of her grandfather. The grandfather's anecdote reveals the hidden history of marginalized class. Shabanu's grandfather fought for the Nawab of Bahawalpur: Grandfather has "spilled his blood for them[Nawab]" (*Shabanu*, p. 172). The grandfather's story has its unique historical implications.

New Historicism involves a parallel reading of the literary and the non-literary texts of the same historical period. Literary and non-literary texts are given equal importance and allowed to work as sources of information or interrogation with each other. The historical events can be traced in the novel. The novelist Staples refers to Bahawalpur. Bahawalpur Division once was the State of





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Bahawalpur that was ruled by Abbasi Nawabs (1727-1955). Established in 1727, the state ceased to exist in 1955, and the entire state was incorporated into Punjab Province as a division. History reveals that in 1785, Durrani commander Sardar Khan attacked Bahawalpur state and devastated many of its buildings on behalf of Mian Abdul Nabi Kalhora of Sindh. The ruling family of Bahawalpur was forced to take refuge in the Derawar Fort, where they successfully repulsed attacks. The attacking Durrani force accepted 60,000 rupees as *nazrana*<sup>3</sup> tribute through Nawab Bahawal Khan. Later, he had to seek refuge in the Rajput states as Durrani occupied Derawar Fort. Bahawal Khan returned to conquer the fort through Uch and re-established his power in Bahawalpur state (Gilmartin, 1979; Malik & Malik, 2017).

Similarly, the narrator in the novel refers to the war between Pakistan and India over Kutch after independence. In 1965, Pak-Indian war began at Bikaner and Jaisal Nawab. Bahawalpur Army joined the Pak Army and defeated the Indian army. Nawab Sadiq's duration was revolutionary as political awareness strongly prevailed. It was the period when literary freedom was given to the ordinary people of the state (Gillani, 2014). Staples mentions that the people of Cholistan strongly adhere to Nawab and are still nostalgic about them. Grandfather proudly tells Shabanu how the people of Cholistan fought against the Hindu Raja of Bikaner: "The Hind Raja of Bikaner had seized all of Cholistan from Qutb-ud-din, the Abbasi general. Nevertheless, Grandfather says, "we [the people of Cholistan along the forces of state forces] fought valiantly... We drove the raja back to India" (*Shabanu*, p.94). In the novel, readers find another brief excursion to the past history of Bahawalpur state. History reveals that Nawab Muhammad Sadiq Khan got possession of Fort Derawar from Rawal Augnee Singh, the ruler of Bikaner State. This Raja of Bikaner State has been mentioned in the novel.

A careful study of the grandfather's anecdote highlights how history often overlooks the contributions of marginalized societies, such as the Cholistani, who valiantly and courageously fought on the side of the Nawab but were ignored in historical accounts. As Greenblatt (2005) comments, "A typical new historicist procedure is to begin with a striking event or anecdote, which has the effect of arousing skepticism about grand historical narratives or essentializing descriptions of a historical period such as the Renaissance" (p.3). Staples, in her novels, questions the grand narrative about the elite class of Southern Punjab. She employs short narratives that serve as anecdotes for readers and critics who meticulously study them, uncovering new histories. Through this use of anecdotes, she challenges and questions the grand narratives that often present an oversimplified and generalized view of history. This approach highlights how the marginalized class is usually neglected when historians and writers focus primarily on Syeds and Nawabs.

The study finds the silent or little narratives in the novel: the grandfather of Shabanu insists on preparing Kalu (camel) for Derawar Fort. He thought Nawab will bury him, "in a martyr's grave, with turquoise tiles and lapis carvings" (*Shabanu*, p.119). However, his family was not even allowed to enter Derawar Fort. The personal guard, wearing red fez, met Dadi coldly. On request to bury grandfather's dead body at Derawar Fort, he refuses and directs them to the

<sup>3</sup> In Urdu language, '*nazrana*' means Bestowment



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‘village of tomb maker’ (*Shabanu*, p.135). Grandfather’s heirs are not allowed to bury him in the fort even though Dadi’s grandfather, Jindwadda Ali Abbasi, was “the old nawab’s camel corps” (*Shabanu*, p. 132).

The novelist shows that Cholistani are treated as marginalized people. The indifferent tone of the fort’s gatekeeper reveals Nawab’s family’s attitude. He says only ‘VIPS’ are allowed to see the fort and tombs. Indeed, VIPs can be interpreted as belonging to noble classes such as Syeds, Abbasis, government servants, army officers and politicians. Dadi tells Shabanu, “Your grandfather is too good man to lie in such company. He would have given his life for them, yet they deny him a decent grave” (*Shabanu*, p. 85). Her grandfather was buried away from Derawar “under a bush in a solitary grave” (*Shabanu*, p. 136). The dead body of Shabanu’s grandfather was not permitted to be buried inside the graveyard even though Shabanu’s father said his father fought on the side of Nawab against foreign aggressors. From the New Historicist perspective, it is evident that Staples gives attention to these little narratives that are ignored in the works of historians. The study, therefore, focuses on these little narratives that serve as undercurrents in the bigger thematic formations of the selected novels. As a point of departure, the study examines the other narrative strategies in the selected texts by focusing on the little narratives of the stereotyped, the undermined, the stigmatized, and the discursively categorized as out-groups.

### **Derawar Fort, a symbol of authority**

Staples, in her novel, mentions the historical places, shrines, cities and castles to give a real touch to her imaginary story about Southern Punjab. In the novel, she mentions Yazmin, Dingarh, Channan Pir, Bahawalpur, Rahimyar Khan, Daredevil, Derawar Fort, Islamgarh Fort, Mirgarh Fort and Mojgarh Fort, Uch Sharif and Fort Abbas. Derawar Fort, a symbol of authority in desert, is mentioned time and again which give a genuine and realistic touch to this imaginative story of Shabanu. A complete chapter has been dedicated to the description of Derawar in the novel. Derawar Fort serves as the symbol of power for the people of Cholistan. In the novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, the Shabanu’s grandfather wishes to die at Derawar, and he says, “I want to die at Derawar” (*Shabanu*, p. 74).

New Historicism not only believes in historicity of text but also in the textuality of history (Montrose, 1989). A New Historicist reading of the novel reveals that different historians and scholars such as Auj, Shoukat and Balneaves mention forts, used for various purposes. Auj (1991) notes, “At no other place in Pakistan except Cholistan, there exists a chain of about thirty-five forts in a line providing a panoramic view in the very heart of the desert” (Auj, 1991, p.94). The Derawar Fort stands prominently among the forts and the Cholistan residents revered Derawar and the Nawab of Bahawalpur. It demonstrates the deep respect of Cholistanis for the Derawar fort. Historian Auj (1991), in his book *Cholistan: Land and People*, also mentions this important fort, Derawar.

The village Derawar (also known as Dera Rawal, Deogarh, Dilawer and Derawat) is situated in the dry bed of river Hakra. Although a place of great antiquity, it is now famous because of its largest and most imposing of the Cholistani forts with its lofty and rolling battlements rising in the desert like giant waves or a wide mountain range (Auj, 1991, p.107).



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Geographically, politically and historically, Derawar Fort is a place of great significance and antiquity. This place is known to the people because of its fort. Derawar was named after his founder, Dera Rawal Deograh, a prince of Jaisalmer (Shoukat, 2015). The entire areas of Cholistan and Rajasthan are littered with such strongholds. History reveals that Derawar is a pre-historic settlement that Deoraj, a prince of Jaisalmer, built. Once, it was the most important strategic place within the desert of Cholistan and a symbol of power. This legendary fort was center stage amid the Rajput and Daudputras rivalries during the 18th century. The strategic position of Derawar at the center of the Cholistan desert made it a sanctuary for various rulers and their treasure hoards. Thus, the rulers of Jaisalmer and Bahawalpur States acquired it and turned it into a state capital. However, it has lost its strategic position due to the arrival of the British, and it has also gradually lost its significance due to the dramatic political changes brought about by the local politics of this state.

Lyu states (2021), "New historicists pay more attention to the historical and cultural context of the literary text" (p. 1075). In the novel *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, one can see that the people of Cholistan show deference to Derawar Fort and its inhabitants. "Everyone is calm, and in the morning, it seems we all had known Grandfather's soul would take flight once it reached Derawar" (*Shabanu*, p.83). Derawar was a site of power in the old days when nawabs of Bahawalpur would defend their state from this strategic location. Balneaves (1955) tells her readers about Derawar fort,

Suddenly through the haze I saw the fort. Raising straight out of the sand dunes, it swept upwards a pinnacles of the rounded towers like gigantic kilns. Delta of small bricks about one inch in depth, and girt below its crenellated heights with a mosaic of triangle and squares, it lay like some fantastic sand castle, already unfiltered by the tide of years. Beyond rise, the cupolas and domes of the Jamia Masjid, a copy of the mosque at Delhi, and built with exquisite marble brought somehow with infinite labour thousands of miles (Balneaves, 1955, p.66-68).

This passage reveals that it was one of the oldest caravan routes along the river Hakra. It was also the center of Aryan culture. Nobody knows how the area around Derawar became a desert, later known as 'Marusathli,' the region of death (Auj, 1991). Likewise, the brave warriors who built and occupied this fort from time to time are also the figures of the past. It is still a part of the splendid history of Cholistan. The novel tells readers that the grandfather is nostalgic about Derawar and Bahawalpur State when Dadi seeks permission to see the tombs and the fort. Sulaiman, the gatekeeper, refuses to allow him inside the fort on the pretext that "permission to enter [the fort] can be given by the Commissioner in Bahawalpur" (*Shabanu*, p. 84). This anecdote reflects the mindset of the new rulers of the Government of Pakistan, who treat these gypsies in the same way as British colonizers treated them. The princely state of Bahawalpur acceded to Pakistan on October 07, 1947, under Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan Abbasi V (Khan & Malik, 2020). It indicates that nawabs have lost their control over these forts, and they are no longer in power to rule over the area. Likewise, this incident also tells us that Cholistanis were deprived of their basic rights. They are not allowed to enter even the fort because they are not considered to be people of importance. The new master, the officials of the government of Pakistan, treated



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them in the same way Nawabs had treated them before independence of Pakistan. The study reveals that the novel is historical, and the history of Bahawalpur is embedded in the text. Staples endorses the words of Warner (1989), who observes that “a text will always be historical and history would be enclosed in texts” (p. 5).

### Findings

New Historicism can be applied across various disciplines to grasp contemporary culture and the current trends in society as it examines history and culture and their impact on the author. This study of the selected novel through the lens of New Historicism explores how Staples wrote about the neglected and marginalized people of Cholistan to bring them into the spotlight and allow her readers to see them from her perspective.

The study found that Suzanne Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* provides historical and political descriptions of the people of Southern Punjab, particularly the people of Cholistan. This study found that literary texts like Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*, provide “little histories” rather than history in the form of narrative covering the history of Bahawalpur, Cholistan, Derawar Fort, and political and social activities in the area. This groundbreaking interdisciplinary study paves a new path in literary Historicism, where history is not just mentioned but intricately traced within the literary text. Through the use of anecdotes in the novel, Staples uncovers the hidden histories of marginalized people in society, highlighting the plurality of voices. These narratives present Cholistan as a land of successful, innovative people and fierce warriors. As a New Historicist, the researcher found that traditional historians have provided limited attention to these stories and histories. The novelist, therefore, amplified the diverse voices within Cholistan to reflect their culture and tradition. Thus, she discovers the silent narratives about the people of Cholistan.

A meticulous study of the novel revealed that Staples opposes the conventional understanding of generalizability. The novel endorses the concept of “the refusal of universal aesthetic norms” (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000, pp. 6-7) and challenges the generalized narratives about Cholistan, often overlooked and incorporated within broader portrayals of Punjabi society. Generalization of history kills the spirit of diversities. For instance, Staples explores multilayered meanings of the veil and the complexities of its use within Southern Punjab cultural and social contexts: A veil is not the symbol of oppression or restriction. The veil serves various purposes: It is used for ornamentation, covering the body, protecting the eyes, and shielding against sand. The study suggested a subjective rather than objective approach to literature.

To wind it up, Staples' unique writing skills and her use of specific historical events make a deep impression on readers and make readers realize the existence of people neglected by other writers and historians in their narratives and history books. The historical description in the novel gives a new idea that history can be studied in narrative form, and this narrative form is more convincing as it dramatizes the history before the eyes of the readers. Therefore, the historicity of a text further adds a new dimension to the available literature. The selected text is aligned with the tenets of New Historicism proposed by Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher (2000), which state that history is embedded in the text





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and is not a *static amalgamation of facts*. Likewise, Staples' novel also endorses Stephen Greenblatt's principle that literary works are history-oriented.

### Conclusion

A New Historicist perspective study of the novel reveals the peculiar history of Southern Punjab and Cholistan during the 1990s covering Abbasi Nawabs, Syeds and political stakeholders of Cholistan. According to Greenblatt (2005), one can "gain a more comprehensive understanding of literature by considering it in historical context while treating history itself as historically contingent on the present in which it is constructed" (Greenblatt, 2005, p. 2). This study found that if a reader seeks insight into the political history of Cholistan, he can discover glimpses of it in Staples' novel, *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* which embodies historical perspectives within the text. By studying the novel according to context, the research concluded that a literary text has historicity and is embedded in the social and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is inevitable to carry out a parallel study of text and non-literary texts, as historicity is crucial to understand historical accounts that have been fictionalized. Staples give enough space to marginalized voices in her novels, and she acknowledges their contributions, recognizing their importance in society by confirming their rightful place in history. The anecdotes in the novel offer readers a vivid portrayal of historical events, cultural practices and social norms. Suzanne Fisher Staples successfully constructs a broader understanding of the historical context, allowing the readers to immerse themselves in the complexities of the history being depicted in the novel. Thus, these anecdotes serve as the foundation for the historicity of the text, bridging the gap between history and literary texts, a concept acknowledged by New Historicists such as Greenblatt, Montrose and Geertz mention that literary texts and non-literary texts are inseparable. Thus, Staples blurs the limit between history and literature and provides materials for readers to better understand the history of marginalized people of Cholistan.

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