Revisiting Sanctuary, Sovereignty, and Patronage: A Critical Study of K. M. Munshi's Somanatha- The Shrine Eternal

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Abstract:

The present paper explores K. M. Munshi's Somanatha- The Shrine Eternal as a literary-historical narrative that intertwines mythologies, collective memory, and postcolonial identity. The study examines how Munshi reimagines the Somnath temple not just as a religious structure but as a dynamic symbol of cultural continuity and sovereignty. Drawing on historical, archaeological, and mythological references, this paper places Somnath as a living testament to the resilience of the Sanatani Hindu culture. It examines how Munshi connects ancient legends, such as those of the Moon God and Lord Krishna, with modern nationalist sentiments, transforming the site into a locus of spiritual endurance and political self-affirmation. The argument also contrasts scholarly interpretations, such as Romila Thapar's historical approach with Sitaram Goel's civilisational critique, illustrating how the meaning of Somnath has evolved over the ages, from a sacred temple to a symbol of sovereignty and cultural resistance. Finally, the paper argues that Somanatha- The Shrine Eternal embodies the Munshi's vision of India's eternal legacy, where faith, history, and nationhood merge into a collective cultural consciousness.

Introduction:

Somnath Jyotirlinga, located on the sea coast of Prabhasa in the region of Saurashtra (Gujarat, India), has been a centre of spirituality for centuries. It is generally known to the world for its centuries-old folklore about the Moon god which sounds, Moon's discrimination between his twenty-seven wives, the curse of his father-in-law, King Daksha to the Moon, the harsh reparation of the Moon and Daksh's suggestive solution of the curse as "Soma should behave well with all his wives and take bath in the sea at the Prabhasa Tirth where the river Sarasvati joins it and worship Mahadev there; if he did so, he would, during one half of the month, wane every day but during the other half, wax every day" (Sorensen, 1904). Therefore, it is known as Somanath, the Lord of the Moon, and becomes "the foremost of all Tirthas" (Munshi, 1965).

Unfortunately, for the last several generations, Somnath has been identified for its religious significance, attacks by Islamic invaders, and the restoration of the temple under the leadership of Sardar Patel. A well-known Indian historian, Romila Thapar, also cited the same incident for her keen interest in studying the Somnath, and noted, "The intention of this study is to explore the interrelationship between an event and the historiography that grows around it by placing the narratives in a historical context. An event occurs, and it slowly becomes encrusted with narratives about what happened. Sometimes the claim is made that such narratives have been constructed on the basis of initial memories, or that they encapsulate what

once was a memory, or that the historiography reflects what are believed to be facets of memory" (Thapar, 2005).

Historically, Somnath has been a symbol of culture, art, commerce, and bravery. It is a living historical timepiece that contains memories of ancient trade routes, the Sanatani Hindu principles of society and religion, sacrifices to protect the temple, and the stories of resurgence despite constant attacks. It becomes the asset of the Sanatan Hindu culture and a leading example of the collective memory that temples may be destroyed, but faith and culture never perish, such as a German cultural theorist, Jan Assmann's thought "a cultural phenomenon is always social conditioning. Memory, as the basis of human history and culture, can never be only individual, but must be collective" (Zhdanov, 2021). Therefore, Somnatha is not just a religious pilgrimage, but a symbol of the indestructible identity, pride and unity, which has been a subject of attention for thinkers, researchers, writers, and historians. Therefore, several Indian and non-Indian writers, such as Romila Thapar, R. C. Majumdar, R. C. Dutt, Tapati Guha, Ashish Nandy, Claude Markovits, Richard Eaton, and many more have made tremendous attempts to evaluate the glorious history of Somnatha from different perspectives. Among all of them, Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munsi's Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal is the finest literary work that narrates a treatise on the historical, literary, religious, and mythological aspects of Somnatha, spanning from ancient to postcolonial India.

Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munsi was one of the most significant personalities who contributed to pre- and post-independent India as an activist, lawyer, writer, and politician. He is most famous as a member of the Indian Constituent Assembly and the writer of several Gujarati historical novels, such as Patan ni Prabhuta (1916), Gujaratno Nath (1917), Rajadhiraj (1918), Prithivivallabh (1921), Svapnadishta (1924), Lopamudra (1930), Jay Somanth (1940), and so on. His many works have been translated into English, including Patan ni Prabhuta as The Glory of Patan, Gujaratno Nath as The Master of Gujarat, Rajadhiraj as The Emperor, and Jay Somanth as Somanatha- The Shrine Eternal.

K. M. Munshi's historical novel Somnatha - The Shrine Eternal focuses on the Somnatha Temple, which is not only a religious site but also a symbol of political, social, and economic power. In addition, the present structure of the Somnatha Temple was reconstructed under his leadership in 1951, which became one of the most notable feats of Munshi. Therefore, it is natural to have an emotional attachment to its background, which he attempted to document in the novel, not emotionally but historically. Romila Thapar noted about Munshi's involvement and dedication for the reconstruction of the Somnatha temple that "it was at Munshi's initiative that the temple was rebuilt soon after Indian independence, and for some

this became a symbol of what was projected as liberation from the past. But the past is an immutable inheritance, and we can neither liberate ourselves from it nor change it" (Thapar, 2005). However, Munshi has narrated the glory of Somnathanot only as his personal memory but as a symbol of the collective national consciousness because "identity as the result of a person's self-consciousness, his previously unconscious, but at some point in time, became a necessary idea of himself and his place in the world. Just like the memory of the past, this self-consciousness can be both individual and collective" (Zhdanov, 2021).

The temple of Somnathaprotects the imperishable memory of the pilgrimage, which is presented by linking the historical tradition and myths in Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal. The novel emerges as a symbol of indestructible cultural pride rather than just a history-based narration because K. M. Munshi artistically presented the collective memory of Somnath that the society has continuously preserved alive. Munshi demonstrates how the personal devotion of a pilgrim, the sense of security of a king, and the abandonment of ordinary people all come together to form a collective identity.

In this way, Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal is not just a story of a temple, but a living resilient where memory and self-consciousness come together to maintain the social identity because "cultural memory is formed by symbolic heritage embodied in texts, rites, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred scriptures and other media that serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated with what has happened. Also, it brings back the time of the mythical origins, crystallises collective experiences of the past and can last for millennia. Therefore, it presupposes a knowledge restricted to initiates" (Meckien, 2013). The present paper examines K. M. Munshi's Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal as a site where cultural memory, myth, and postcolonial identity interconnect with a literary-historiographical perspective.

Somanatha: A Sacred Eternal Sanctuary

Any cultural heritage has a story behind its existence, which forms the foundational pillars of a collective societal memory for any culture. Zhdanov suggests that "the most important element of collective cultural memory in any ancient society is the myth. A myth is always a narrative or a story with a pronounced ideological orientation" (Zhdanov, 2021). Munshi presents Somnath as a renowned ancient pilgrimage site, drawing on ancient religious texts, folk beliefs, and spiritual perspectives. He describes Somnath as a centre of eternal tradition and holiness, based on mythological events associated with the Moon god, Shri Krishna, Pandavas, and other sages. He describes Somnatha as situated in a pilgrimage complex called Prabhasa Patan, a centre of sacred traditions since ancient times. He identifies

it as ancient "Devapattana" (Munshi, 1965), where the holy river Saraswati meets the ocean and where ancient sage traditions, pilgrimage greats, and folk memories have been continuously pulsating in religious activities.

However, Munshi claims that Prabhasa, which is situated in the present Saurashtra region of Gujarat, India, is originally "Kushavrata and the place where the Yadavas founded Dwarka was originally called Kushasthali" (Munshi, 1965). Munshi associates the Somnatha and Prabhasa region with the Phoenicians and the Greeks, as well as the centre of international trade. He claims that "long before their settlement in Greece, the Phoenicians were mariners. Their original home was on the Erythraean Sea, which is identified with the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Sea" (Munshi, 1965). However, Wadden's wording in *The Makers of Civilisation in Race and History* also supports it, who stated "the Phoenicians also called themselves the sons of Kusha" (Waddell, 1929). On that basis, Munshi states that "in very early times, the shores of Saurashtra were studded with places where maritime races lived or came to trade and Prabhasa, as an ancient port, was a centre of international contact" (Munshi, 1965). However, the thoughts and methods of Wadden are highly criticised by modern scholars, such as "These works … did not win the approval of experts" (Moshenska, 2010) or "The reader does not need to peruse this work very far to become aware of its distinct bias and unscientific method. Mr. Waddell believes that the beginning of all civilisation dates from the Nordic (Aryan) Sumerians, who were blond Nordics with blue eyes" (Moshenska, 2010).

Although some scholars opposed Wadden's theory of civilisation, the ancient scriptures of Hinduism proclaim the eternity of Prabhasha and the Shrine of Somnatha as the most sacred and ancient. Munshi has drawn upon the references made in the most ancient and sacred religious texts of Hinduism, such as the Mahabharata, the Shiva Purana, and the Skanda Purana and referred to it as "the most sacred of all places in the days of the Bharata war. Even the rishis-the sages-collected there" (Munshi, 1965). Munshi has also narrated various incidents related to the life of Lord Krishna and other important figures of the Mahabharata that are directly linked to the Somnatha and Prabhas pilgrimage sites. He refers to the various slokas of the Mahabharata with the conclusion that "Prabhasa was a traditionally sacred place even in the days of Dharmaraj, the son of Pandu. The Mahabharata refers to it again and again" (Munshi, 1965). It is the place where "the Pandavas came and performed austerities. So did Shri Krishna and Balarama; Arjuna also came here from Gokarna on his way to Dwaraka. Janamejaya Parikshita, the emperor, also visited it" (Munshi, 1965).

It is a well-known fact that Lord Krishna and his Yadava clan resided in Dwarka. In this glorious narrative, Munshi claimed that the location of ancient Dwarka was near

Somnathain Prabhasa Tirth, not one located near Jamnagar in the present day. In addition, Munshi also said that the internal strife between the Yadu clan, known as the Yadavasthali, and the annihilation of the Yadavas happened in Prabhasa. He narrates that "when the Yadavas went to Prabhasa for a holiday, they drank wine freely and indulged in a bitter internecine fight. As a result, the entire Yadava race was destroyed; only Shri Krishna, his brother Balarama and two others, Daruka and Babhru, survived" (Munshi, 1965). In the Mahabharata, this incident took place in the 'Mausal Parva'. Kesari Mohan Ganguly also narrates a similar tale in his transalation work of the Mahabharata, which sounds "The Yadavas, then, with their wives, proceeded to Prabhasa and took up their residence there, each in the (temporary) habitation that was assigned to him, and all having an abundance of provisions consisting of edible and drink" (Ganguli, 2002).

Additionally, Bhalakatirtha, the spot where Shri Krishna left his body, is located near Somnatha. However, Munshi is not sure about the exact location of this incident because "the Mahabharata and the Puranas are silent as to the location of the spot where Shri Krishna was struck by the hunter" (Munshi, 1965). Therefore, he mentioned it as "traditionally the spot of Krishna's death" (Munshi, 1965), but the ancient Hindu scriptures have a specific location of Lord Krishna's last rituals, which was "the confluence of the Hiranya, Sarasvati and Kapila-castern Triveni- at Somanatha, where it was ceremonially cremated" (Munshi, 1965).

Based on the above-mentioned evidence and incidents, Munshi claims that the Dwarka of Lord Krishna described in the Mahabharata and the Dwarka known today are different. He noted that "the old Dwarka, which was near Prabhasa, was submerged in the sea. There is no doubt whatever that modern Dwarka has nothing to do with Shri Krishna's Dwarka, which was very near the Gir Hills and Prabhasa" (Munshi, 1965). However, other scriptures, such as Vishnu Purana, Bhagavata Purana, or Harivamsa Purana, do not support Munshi's claim about the location of Shri Krishna's Dwarka. They identify Prabhasa as the place of Lord Krishna's death rites, not his capital. In addition, various archaeological surveys are also not in favour of Munshi's idea, which point out about that "as regards the identification of one of the three Dwarkas in Saurashtra as the most probable site of Sri Krishna's Dwarka, the onshore archaeological evidence is clear at Dwarka in Jamnagar District where underwater explorations have also been conducted" (Rao, 1991). In addition, a well-known historian who has conducted in-depth research on Dwarka, Pusalkar, argued that "I am inclined to look for the old capital of Shri Krsnja at the site of modern Dwarka" (Pusalkar, 1945). For the past several years, a constant debate has been ongoing among archaeologists and historians regarding the location of Dwarka, with conflicting arguments being made about the original location of Dwarka

during the Mahabharata period. Therefore, when the Prime Minister of India took a dip in the sea and paid homage to the idol of Lord Krishna, an article in the Hindustan newspaper wrote about the rarity of Dwarka that, "But unlike Ayodhya, Varanasi or even Mathura (believed to be Krishna's birthplace), Dwarka's history is all the more inaccessible and shrouded in obscurity, because it is believed much of this ancient city may be buried under the sea" (Singh, 2024).

However, just as there are differences of opinion regarding the location of Dawarika, there are also discrepancies regarding the construction of the Mahadev temple in Somanatha. In the novel, Munshi has claimed that "There was a shrine of Shiva where the devout worshipped after bathing in the Tirtha located on the spot where the Sarasvati joined the sea" (Munshi, 1965). According to Sanatani Hinduism, Somnatha is the first of the twelve Jyotirlingas, and there is no disagreement among religious texts, historians, and researchers regarding the antiquity of the Somnatha Jyotirlinga. In the Prabhasa Khanda of the Skanda Purana, it is stated, "This linga is eternal, without beginning or end" (Tagare, 1994). Romila Thapar, an Indian Historian, also agreed on the antiquity of Somanatha, but emphasises the need for further research into the construction of the temple, stating that "The temple at Somnatha became the symbol of sovereignty and its violation, a contested past" (Thapar, 2005). Even archaeology suggests that the site was very ancient and continuously inhabited, but direct evidence of it being a Mahabharata-era temple has not been found yet.

In this sense, there is a difference of opinion regarding the location of Dwarka or the construction of the Somnath shrine, but there is no disagreement regarding the importance of Somnath and its eternity, which Munshi recognised "as a holy place of all India importance" (Munshi, 1965). It is a place of remembrance for the Sanatan Hindu community, where historical and mythological events are repeatedly recalled. As Mircea Eliade points out in The Sacred and the Profane, "I am at the Centre of the World! at once reveals one of the deepest meanings of sacred space" (Eliade, 1963). The Somnathais one such divine centre, becoming the centre of the universe for Indian society. Therefore, it can be concluded that, though the historical and archaeological evidence are weighed separately with caution, Munshi's description of the Somnath shrine is based on the richness of scriptural tradition and folk memory.

Somnatha- The Promising Patronage of Shaivism:

The Sanatana Hindu tradition is mainly divided into two sects: Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The followers of the Shaivism tradition worship Shiva, while those of the Vaishnavism tradition consider Vishnu as their deity. Essentially, it is not a religious sect but

a philosophical path in which the realisation of God involves uniting with nature and attaining the divine essence. In this novel, Munshi has successfully presented Somnath as the patronage of Shaivism, which "remained a major centre for Pashupata Shaivism" (Thapar, 2005). The novel also resonates with the fundamental spirit of Shaivism, particularly in its emphasis on the balance between destruction and creation.

Additionally, Somnath is the place where Vishnu's incarnation, Krishna himself, became one with the complex nature of life. It is a place where the River Saraswati merges with the ocean, bearing witness to the infinity of natural elements, such as water and the Moon. However, Munshi references the Puranic legend, which refers to "the river Sarasvati having brought Vadavanala, Aurvanala or Kalangi, submarine fire, to be merged in the sea near Prabhasa" (Munshi, 1965). Although there is no reference to this story except in the Prabhasa Khanda of the Skanda Purana, it can be symbolically interpreted to suggest that just as Shiva summoned even the destructive poison, similarly, the terrible elements of nature can be balanced through knowledge and divine power. Moreover, despite the constant attacks on the temple, the divine faith has always remained intact. It conveys a philosophical message of merging into the indestructible Supreme Consciousness because Shaivism believes the Shivling is indestructible. The temple may collapse, but the Shivling remains indestructible. Munshi repeatedly refers to this sentiment in the novel and depicts it as a living symbol of Shaivism.

Munshi also presents the geographical and spiritual connection between Somnath or Prabhasa with Nagaloka or Patalloka. According to Hindu belief, Patala is located beneath the earth (symbolically, the lower part of the earth), where snakes are said to reside. Additionally, the well-known story of the charitable king Baliraja is also associated with Pataloka. However, Munshi here refers to "Patal as the land of the Nagas, as also the place where Vadavanala found heaven on earth. This sheath (Virava) was, according to the Skanda Purana, located in Prabhasa" (Munshi, 1965). To establish this connection and prove the antiquity of Somnath, Munshi mentions Kalagni, the fierce form of Somanatha, "the famous Linga of Shiva, known as Hatkeshavara, in Saurashtra also came from Patala" (Munshi, 1965), and concludes that "Shiva, as the Lord of Destruction, was at one time, identified with the God of Fire in Prabhasa, a tradition clearly indicative of some geological action. In Prabhasa, Shiva was fire" (Munshi, 1965).

Munshi also notes that "the linga of Somanatha, before the earliest period of Aryan tradition, was a divinity connected with Patala and Nagas. With the dawn of history, the Shiva-worshipping Nagas emerged as a confederacy of powerful tribes" (Munshi, 1965). Thus, Shiva,

the God of destruction, emerged as the guardian of national consciousness, especially when there was a need to protect Indian culture against foreign rulers, such as the Shakas and Kushans. The sect helped to unite the nation and strengthen its spiritual identity, such as "when the Shugna empire was broken, the Seythians, the Bactrian Greeks and the Kushanas entered India and imposed their rule on the people. They were 'irascible, contemptible and irreligious', then arose the great Naga power to fight the foreigners" (Munshi, 1965). It is described how Shiva has been worshipped since ancient times and was associated with powerful dynasties, such as "the rise of the Bharashivas represented a national upsurge to deliver the country from the foreign rule of the Shakas and the Kushanas" (Munshi, 1965). It shows Somnath as the triune embodiment of faith, culture and self-government.

In addition, Munshi referred to K. P. Jayaswal, an Indian Historian, who narrated the Nagas' rules as the period of great cultural revival when "the great literary movement in favour of Sanskrit began in this period and was carried forward by the Vakatakas and Guptas. Sanskrit became the language, not only of religion but also of refinement and the courts" (Munshi, 1965). Munshi also gives the example of the Bhoja king, who linked the worship of Shiva with national sentiment by building temples dedicated to Shiva. Thus, Shiva was not only a religious symbol but also a powerful motivator of national revival.

Munshi also asserts that the relationship between Shiva and Shakti is deeply intertwined with India's national identity. According to Munshi, the worship of Shiva and Shakti has been prevalent in India since pre-historic times, and Prabhas was the main centre of Shaiva yogis. However, he also clarifies that Shaivism was not initially associated with yoga and magic, but over time, it came into contact with Tantric literature and expanded its scope. The sect has various layers, ranging from mystical rituals to noble ideas of universal welfare, which "having its origin in the pre-historic period; its relics can still be found in rituals of a repulsive character, with some obscure sections of the cult followed in far away places" (Munshi, 1965). Munshi also mentions Shaivism sects, such as the Aghoris, who performed rituals in places like morgues and worshipped Shiva as Bhairava. The sect follows "the tradition long forgotten tribes to whom Shiva, wearing the garlands of skulls and the ornaments of serpants and the body besmeared with ashes, was the tutelary deity" (Munshi, 1965).

However, Shiva is not only a destroyer, but also paves the way for new creation. Thus, from a religious point of view, Moon worshipped Shiva and established a Jyotirlinga in Somnath, which is a reflection of spiritual consciousness. Shiva-Shakti, Vedic Somayaga, and Vaishnava elements converged here, giving rise to the development of an ancient centre of Shaivism. Despite constant fragmentation, it remained a symbol of reconstruction, representing

Shiva's indestructible power. Therefore, Munshi has declared Somnath as a promising domain of Shaivism for centuries.

From a national viewpoint, Somnatha- The Shrine Eternal represents cultural independence against colonial rule. Munshi narrates Somnath as a centre where religious memory is transformed into national resistance, such as Edward Said's concept of cultural resistance, which states " cultural resistance to imperialism has often taken the form of what we can call nativism used as a private refuge" (Said, 1994). From this perspective, Munshi presents Somnath as a cultural centre where religious faith is transformed into a national consciousness, and the restoration of the temple, despite continuous foreign invasions, becomes a matter of national pride. It lends support to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which states that "cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 2004), where subordinate cultures reconfigure their identities.

Nevertheless, scholars have been divided on Munshi's version of Somnatha- The Shrine Eternal. They claimed that the description of such monuments often maintains a "selective memory" (Guha-Thakurta, 2004), thereby limiting the description of other substances. Munshi's narration also emphasises the Shaivism, while other folk traditions fall into the circumstantial. However, in Munshi's account, the shrine of Somnath becomes a place where devotion, mythology, and national pride can be experienced together. In this way, Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal establishes the Shaivism not only as a spiritual symbol, but as a symbol of cultural resistance. Thus, Somnath emerges as the promising patronage of Shaivism, an eternal symbol of spirituality and cultural pride.

Somnatha- A Symbol of Sovereignty:

Temples have always been "symbols of much more than religious devotion alone and encapsulated a range of other assertions and activities - political, economic and social" (Thapar, 2005) for the Sanatan Hindu society. However, during the Mughal era, the important and renowned temples of the country were continuously attacked and destroyed by pagan invaders. These attacks were not only to protest against religious hegemony or idolatry, but also a well-planned conspiracy to destroy the entire Sanatani social system. It is particularly worth understanding Richard Eaton's view on the demolition, who believes "with respect to religious policy, we can identify two principal components to this project: (a) state patronage of an India-based Sufi order, and (b) a policy of selective temple desecration that aimed not, as earlier, to finance distant military operations on the Iranian Plateau, but to delegitimise and extirpate defeated Indian ruling houses. Let us consider these in turn" (Eaton, 2000). Thus, the invaders

targeted the conventional temples of the nation as a means of conveying a message of political hegemony.

The Somnath has also been the centre of religious, wealth, and political influence in India for centuries, and it "was said to be symbolic of Hindu subjugation and the ensuing trauma over Muslim rule" (Thapar, 2005). However, Munshi writes about the importance of Somnath during the reigns of various rulers in medieval India that "the shrine of Somnathathus enjoyed great importance in about the first quarter of the eighth century. The red stone Third Temple, a large structure for the age, cannot be placed much later than A.D. 800 and may be taken to have been constructed during this period" (Munshi, 1965). He also added, referring to the Skanda Purana, that "Somnatha was then the biggest shrine in the country, and looking to the contacts of the imperial Pratiharas of Kanauj with Saurashtra, it would not be unreasonable to infer that under the Pratiharas, Prabhasa became a holy city, as important as, if not more than, Kashi" (Munshi, 1965). Somnath has always held a place of respect for all the powerful dynasties of India. Noting this, Munshi writes that, "Prabhasa was a great port. Somnathanaturally was their guardian deity" (Munshi, 1965).

At that time, the offence to Somnath was a sign of social injustice. Moreover, it was not only a concern of the Hindus but also for Jain sages like Hemchandracharya, who were concerned about its respect. Munshi writes about one such incident in history, "Graharipu is unjust. He harasses the pilgrims and kills the Brahmanas. How can I make friends with such a wicked man? No one can even move freely in Saurashtra. He has destroyed the sacred Prabhasa" (Munshi, 1965). Following the orders of Hemchandracharya, Mularaja, the king from Patan, defeats Graharipu in battle and "the temple of Somanatha, which he retrieved from Graharipu, was the Third temple" (Munshi, 1965).

However, Munsi has mentioned several similar historical incidents that took place in respect of Somnath, but the destruction of Somnath by the Mughal invaders was the height of religious fanaticism. Munshi noted it as "a sacred city like that of Somnatha, armed principally by the devotion and reverence of the whole country, fell a prey to an army pledged to the fanatic destruction of alien shrines" (Munshi, 1965). The destruction of Somnath, which began with the intention of plunder by Muhammad Ghaznavi in the 10th century, continued until the rule of Alauddin Khilji, Aurangzeb, and finally the Nawab of Junagadh. In this regard, Sitaram Goyal noted in Hindu Temples - What Happened to Them, "Mahmûd of Ghazni had led twelve to seventeen expeditions to India, according to different accounts. He destroyed many temples and smashed or burnt numerous idols wherever he was victorious over Hindu resistance. But what made him into a myth was his expedition to Somnath. The destruction of the temple of

Somnath, observes Muhammad Nãzim, was looked upon as the crowning glory of Islam over idolatry, and Sultãn Mahmûd, as the champion of the Faith, received the applause of all the Muslim world" (Goel, 1993).

According to historians, all the pagan invaders, including Muhammad Ghazni, looted Somnath and acquired immense wealth. However, Munshi notes that not a single attack on Somnath was without resistance. The heroic stories of many warriors, from ordinary people to kings, such as Raja Bhimdev, Mandalik, and Hamirsinh Gohil, among others, remain popular. Munshi writes about one such attack of Muhammad Ghazni that "on the 8th, a terrible battle ensued. Fifty thousand Indian warriors laid down their lives in defence of their beloved shrine" (Munshi, 1965). Therefore, Munshi presents the attacks on Somnath not as mere looting or religious destruction, but as a symbol of national resistance. The martyrs sacrifice themselves for the protection of faith, culture and the integrity of the nation.

However, despite the continuous attacks of the heretical invaders, Somnath continued to be restored. The repeated process of reconstruction bears witness to the spiritual vitality of the Sanatan Hindu community. The destruction of Somnath is not an end, but the beginning of a new beginning, for which Munshi writes that "As a temple, it had done its work to remind later ages of what India's faith had been; it was left only as a symbol of her to-be-forgotten misfortunes. With the dawn of a new era, the new temple has risen like the phoenix, from its own ashes" (Munshi, 1965). Although the destruction of Somnath is a symbol of misfortune, its reconstruction is a testament to the indestructible spirit of self-respect and the restoration of national pride.

Moreover, the importance of Somnath is not only centred on power, but has also been strengthened by the donations and patronage of the people. Since ancient times, kings, traders and the local community have earned social prestige by donating to the temple with devotion. This tradition continued even after independence, when "temples became centres of not only religious but also cultural-national identity" (Ludden, 2002). During the renovation of the present Somnath temple immediately after independence, Sardar Patel and K. M. Munshi appealed for public cooperation and achieved successful results. Explaining this, Munshi writes, "centuries of vandalism had left nothing but traces of this great temple to testify to its ancient grandeur" (Munshi, 1965). Ashish Nandy identifies it as "nationalist myth-making" (Nandy, 1983) in which historical facts are reorganised to suit contemporary cultural desires. Therefore, the historical description of Somnath's re-emergence in Somnatha- The Shrine Eternal confirms it as a symbol of sovereignty.

Conclusion:

K. M. Munshi's Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal is not just a historical narration, but a literary symbol of the collective memory of Indian culture and national pride. It can be interpreted on three levels: Sanctuary, where spirituality and mythological memory unite; Sovereignty, where its symbolic place is created amidst spirituality and political aggression; and Patronage, where it becomes a centre of national pride through the contributions of kings, donors, and post-independence leaders. Munshi weaves all these perspectives into his narrative in a way that establishes Somnath as a complex memory, where religious, political, and national perspectives are constantly being reconstructed. It establishes the novel as a cultural manifesto that transcends the boundaries of historical fiction, emerging as a testament to the indestructible culture of India. In addition, Munshi intertwines the repeated cycles of destruction and reconstruction with a renewal of national consciousness and self-respect, not defeat. Thus, Somanatha - The Shrine Eternal emerges not just as a history of a temple, but as an embodiment of sovereignty, memory, and moral resilience. It is a reminder of eternity that temples are destroyed, but the faith and culture remain invincible.

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