



## PERSPECTIVES IN THE SELECT WORKS OF SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH- A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT :

A war novel (military fiction) is a novel in which the primary action takes place on a battlefield, or in a civilian setting, where the characters are either preoccupied with the preparations for, suffering the effects of, or recovering from war. Many war novels are historical novels.

The writing of Svetlana Alexievich provides a strange kind of solace. In psychological terms, we can say that her attitude is opposite to escapism. Instead of avoiding, forgetting or being ignorant, the approach of Alexievich is to directly confront reality as it is. She goes into every possible detail, the full length and depth of a tragedy and comes out of it. This is the voyage for an Alexievich reader. It is as though she has vowed to keep pain alive. She has fought collective amnesia. There are no easy routes in the verbal labyrinths created by Alexievich. The writer as well as the reader comes out strong after the literary exercise. This is literature which gives the reader the tools to live.

The paper highlights the need and importance of research problem, elucidate the objectives and gives a synopsis of the two select novels of Alexievich namely Chernobyl Prayer and Secondhand Time.

**KEYWORDS :** war novel , civilian setting , topical profundity .

### INTRODUCTION:

After World War II, the war that has pulled in the best number of authors is the Vietnam War. Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* was the primary novel to investigate the beginnings of the Vietnam war in the French frontier environment of the 1950s. Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a cycle of Vietnam vignettes that peruses like a novel. In the wake of postmodernism and the nonattendance of wars measuring up to the greatness of the two world wars, the lion's share of war authors have focused on how memory and the ambiguities of time influence the significance and experience of war. In her *Regeneration Trilogy*, British writer Pat Barker rethinks World War I from a contemporary viewpoint. Ian McEwan's books *Black Dogs* and *Atonement* adopt an also review strategy to World War II, including such occasions as the British withdraw from Dunkirk in 1940 and the Nazi intrusion of France. Crafted by W. G. Sebald, most quite Austerlitz, is a postmodern investigation into Germany's battle to grapple with its agitated past.



Some contemporary books underline activity and interest above topical profundity. Tom Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October* is an in fact itemized record of submarine undercover work amid the Cold War, and a large number of John le Carré's covert agent books are fundamentally war books for an age in which administration regularly replaces open battle. Another adjustment is the prophetically catastrophic Christian tale, which centers around the last

standoff between general powers of good and fiendishness. Tim LaHaye is the writer most promptly connected with this sort. Many dream books, as well, utilize the customary war novel as a takeoff point for delineations of anecdotal wars in nonexistent domains.

In 1985 Svetlana Alexievich published *U vojny ne zhenskoe litso* (*War's Unwomanly Face*; also translated as *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*), an investigative study that chronicled the lives of Soviet women during World War II, followed that same year by *Poslednie svideteli* ('The Last Witnesses'), a collection of reminiscences of war as seen through the eyes of children. Based on detailed research and interviews with hundreds of women, *U vojny ne zhenskoe litso* earned widespread critical recognition and established her reputation as an 'oral historian' of collective identity. Alexievich designated the publication as the first volume of a literary cycle, *Voices of Utopia*, which was designed to depict life in the Soviet Union through what people 'thought, understood, and remembered.'

Published in 1990, *Tsinkovye malchiki* (*Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War*; also translated as *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War*) exposed the hidden, undocumented futility of the Soviet intervention (1979–89) in the Afghan War (1978–92) and served to demystify the role of nationalism and Soviet autonomy. The title referred to the zinc coffins used by the military to return the Soviet dead. In 1997 she published *Chernobyl'skaya molitva: khronika budushchego* (*Voices from Chernobyl: Chronicle of the Future*; also translated as *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*), which confronted the devastating consequences of the Chernobyl disaster as told by witnesses and victims of the catastrophic nuclear power station accident. Labeled as a dissident journalist with anti-Soviet sentiments, she experienced intimidation as well as harassment: her writing was subjected to censorship or banned from publication, she was publicly denounced for 'defamation' and 'slander,' and her opposition to the political regime in Belarus forced her into an extended period of self-imposed exile. Yet she persisted on her chosen path. She enlarged the scope of her creative vision with the publication in 2013 of *Vremya sekond chend* (*Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*), which examined the legacy of communism in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union.

The writing of Alexievich provides a strange kind of solace. In psychological terms, we can say that her attitude is opposite to escapism. Instead of avoiding, forgetting or being ignorant, the approach of Alexievich is to directly confront reality as it is. She goes into every possible detail, the full length and depth of a tragedy and comes out of it. This is the voyage for an Alexievich reader. It is as though she has vowed to keep pain alive. She has fought collective amnesia. There are no easy routes in the verbal labyrinths created by Alexievich. The writer as well as the reader comes out strong after the literary exercise. This is literature which gives the reader the tools to live.

As a writer, Alexievich achieved international stature and garnered numerous literary awards, notably the Kurt Tucholsky Prize (1996), the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding (1998), the Herder Prize (1999), the Sandro Onofri Prize (2002), the National Book Critics Circle Award (2005), the Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression (2007), and the Prix Médicis Essai (2013). Determined to capture and preserve the essence of humanity from the stories of those who lived through the events that shaped the history of the former Soviet Union and modern-day Belarus, Alexievich perceived her craft as a literary art that reflected the struggle for truth, dignity, and self-worth.

#### **Need and Importance of Research Problem:**

In *War's Unwomanly Face* (1985) and *Boys In Zinc* (1990), Alexievich recorded the memories of former soldiers – respectively women who as young girls enlisted to fight in the Second World War, and men who as young boys endured the horrors of the war in Afghanistan. In the epic, wide-ranging *Second-Hand Time* (2013) Alexievich documented the demise of the USSR, while in an earlier book, *Enchanted With Death* (1993), she narrowed her gaze to focus on Soviet citizens who were driven to suicide by their country's disintegration. In each book, Alexievich strives to capture an accurate version of events – not history as written by the victors or corrupted into party-line propaganda but history as it happened, as told by those who witnessed it and were buffeted by it.

Hence there is a need to reconstruct the history of the missing stories in historical, political and at cultural level in her works.

#### OBJECTIVES:

The research work is planned to focus on the following perspectives of Alexievich's select works.

1. Historical perspectives
2. Political perspectives
3. Cultural perspectives.

#### METHODOLOGY:

The research has been methodically classified into five chapters.

#### Synopsis:

In this paper two novels have been selected. For the majority of Russians, over the greater part of recorded history, to have been born in that country has not been to draw one of the winning tickets in the lottery of life. A true history of its people need be no more than the howls of despair of millions of voices, punctuated by moments of incredible tenderness, courage and grim humour.

Alexievich was a journalist living in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, in 1986 at the time of the Chernobyl disaster. Alexievich interviewed more than 500 eyewitnesses, including firefighters, liquidators (members of the cleanup team), politicians, physicians, physicists and ordinary citizens over a period of 10 years. The book relates the psychological and personal tragedy of the Chernobyl accident, and explores the experiences of individuals and how the disaster affected their lives.

*Chernobyl Prayer* was first published in Russian in 1997 as *Чернобыльская молитва* and a revised, updated edition came out in 2013. The American translation was awarded the 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award for general non-fiction. On 26 April 1986, reactor number four at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, exploded and released 50m curies of radiation into the atmosphere, 70% of it falling on Belarus, but with plenty to spare for other countries not even vaguely adjacent. The scale of the devastation and its insidious nature are perhaps beyond the power of the individual mind to imagine, which is one good reason why the polyphonic form Alexievich has made her own is so appropriate.

Alexievich's collection of monologues, encompassing villagers, soldiers, scientists, teachers, mothers, families – in short, humans of all sets, sub-sets and classifications – brings to the surface the continuum of suffering, and the lives that can only be lived with an abiding sense of before and after. Hundreds of thousands were sent to the 'Zone' not knowing the dangers, and hundreds of thousands more evacuated and resettled. Deaths were shrouded in Soviet secrecy, and nobody was exempt from radioactive contamination, from officials to bees and worms.

As Alexievich points out, art has rehearsed the apocalypse many times, and it's true that every apocalypse is endured by humanity. In these monologues, there is no hiding behind slabs of facts. Each and every testimony, each and every human loss, universalizes what to some still seems a geo-specific event. After all, there now exists Chernobyl tourism: 'Visit the atomic Mecca', writes Alexievich. So it's easy to forget that radioactivity travelled the world within days of the accident. It's also convenient to forget that the effects of radioactivity can last tens of thousands of years. 'Universal' and 'eternal' are thus entirely rational adjectives, both at the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels.

The book starts and finishes with the declaration of two widows; one the youthful spouse of a Pripjat firefighter who went around evening time to battle the blast in his shirtsleeves, the other the wife of a 'vendor', one of the 600,000 men drafted in to cover the topsoil and shoot each creature in the zone. He is the rearward in his company to kick the bucket. When he can never again talk, she asks him, 'Would you say you are sad since you went there?' He shakes his head no and composes for her, 'When I kick the bucket, move the vehicle, and the extra tire, and don't wed Tolik.' Tolik is his sibling. She doesn't wed him. In the middle of these urgent distresses are accounts of pessimism and dreamlike snapshots of covetousness and

disarray. Radioactive tractors, motorbikes and fur garments pirated from the zone have, it appears, been sold all over what was the Soviet Union. Be that as it may, potentially the most bizarre component of the calamity is the satisfaction it produces. Where man is never again a predator, elk, wolves and hog return. A cameraman says, 'A weird thing transpired. I turned out to be nearer to creatures. Furthermore, trees, and flying creatures.'

Her another novel *Secondhand Time* is a collection of narratives by Russophones, most of whom began the nineties in the Soviet Union and finished those years only to find themselves in another country, the Russian Federation. The book is subtitled *Last of the Soviets*. It begins with an introduction by Alexievich herself, then presents several recollections of the days of protest during the August 1991 coup. Many of the chapters are life stories of the witnesses, who recount their experiences from World War II until the fall of the Soviet Union.

Alexievich embraces the literal truth alone through "little history," many personal stories. Yet while the personal stories and revelations conveyed by the witnesses of *Secondhand Time* are ones which naturally interest writers and readers of fiction, the verisimilitude that good storytelling creates is something untrustworthy to nonfiction writers, who, as a practice, have a mistrust of unsubstantiated anecdote, no matter how much "more abstract" truth might come across.

For both the Soviet and post-Soviet worlds, Alexievich presents counter-narratives, little histories which complicate and depart from the familiar Big History, which most writers before her have chronicled in one form or another. For example, despite the shift of their entire political economy, many of the voices recorded by Alexievich are not sympathetic to the capitalism brought on by the new regime.

### CONCLUSION:

Poets, playwrights, and novelists are free to pick and choose from the material provided by the real world, and embellish and invent as they please. Their work is judged on its success in conveying a deeper, more abstract kind of truth—what in Russian is called *istina*, as opposed to *pravda*, the literal truth, the facts. Literary nonfiction writers, who search for deep truths while remaining faithful to facts, have obligations to both *istina* and *pravda*. They shape chaotic reality into compelling narrative, but they aren't supposed to invent, or to edit so heavily that their subjects become unrecognizable. In exchange for this fidelity, nonfiction writers receive the trust of the reader, who accepts the improbable or poorly written simply because it is true. Pinkham quotes Alexievich as referring to her work as a "novel in voices." But Pinkham states, "Without the imprimatur of nonfiction, it is unlikely that Alexievich's work would have won so much praise around the world." As a nonfiction writer herself, Pinkham may feel betrayed by those who decided to include Alexievich in the "investigative journalism" or "oral history" sections of the bookstore, whether or not and how much Alexievich herself has embraced these labels for her work. The Russian critic Aleksandr Bikbov confirms that Alexievich creatively edits her interviews, which is problematic from the point of view of social science, but from a "non-professional point of view, brought up in the schools' high literature program, it's unnoticeable".

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