CHAPTER I

Introduction

*The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey.*

(Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*)

Europe’s attempt to cast its reflection upon lands and oceans and to establish its economic supremacy as well as political authority goes back several centuries. For the British, the post 1815 period, or more specifically the time of Queen Victoria’s reign (1837-1901), represented their great age of colonization. Historians have also tended to find different period demarcations for the Age of Empire and its different phases. Eric Hobsbawm gives the dates 1875 -1914 to formal Empire. The Historian of India, C.A. Bayly, argues that a ‘constructive authoritarian’ British imperialism came of age as early as 1783-1820 (Boehmer 29). In the late Victorian age the projection of British authority abroad was particularly powerful and far-reaching. It is this period which outlines the boundaries of discussion of British colonialism on a grand scale, or high imperialism, and the decades of anti-and/or postcolonial activity which followed. Before we proceed further, a preliminary discussion of terms like ‘colonial’, ‘Imperial’ and ‘Postcolonial’ is
must. ‘Imperialism’ can be taken to refer to the authority assumed by a state over another
territory — authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as in military and
economic power. It is a term associated in particular with the expans ion of the European
nation-state in the nineteenth century. ‘Colonialism’ involves the consolidation of
imperial power, and is manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation or
development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of
occupied lands, often by force (Boehmer 2).

Colonialism can also be defined as a way of maintaining an unequal international
relation of economic and political power which means oppression of institutional and
state apparatus. In fact Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes colonization not just as a political
and economic subjugation but rather an on going programme of cultural colonization to
support and maintain the hegemony of the colonizers ( qtd in Juneja 2). Edward Said in
Culture and Imperialism tries to differentiate between ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’.
According to Said, “… ‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a
dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’, which is almost
always a co nsequence of imperialism, is the implanting of se ttlements on distant
territory”(Said 8). Since the history of mankind is nothing but a long succession of wars
fought to gain control of someone else’s riches and impose one’s gods on to other people,
one is bound to conclude that colonial, and with it postcolonial literature are nothing new.
This also leads to the assumption that colonialism and imperialism are as old as literature
and literature has always been used by the colonizing powers as a means to su bdue the
colonized and to create among its own people a certain image of the “natives”. Literature
has always been concerned with colonial expansion because it embodies the imperialists’ point of view. It helps justify military and cultural imperialism. Elleke Boehmer writes:

If it is agreed that the history of the world for the past few centuries has been profoundly shaped by colonial interests, then there is a sense in which much of the literature produced during that time can be said to be colonial or postcolonial, even if only tangentially so. (1)

Considered from this point, Boehmer insists, that even great classics like *Beowulf* and *Canterbury Tales* can be read as postcolonial texts:

Historically, it extends back five hundred years or so to the days of European mercantile expansion, Columbus’s landing in America, and the exploration of the Cape of Good Hope. … Marlow at the beginning of Joseph Conrad’s ‘*Heart of Darkness*’, for example, draws attention to the similarities between the British colonization of Africa and the conquering of Britain by imperial Rome many centuries before. According to this view, *Beowulf* and *Canterbury Tales* could be read as postcolonial texts. (1)

If origin of colonialism, and hence post-colonialism, dates back to the first empire then the origin of history can be traced back to man’s first attempt to write. Ever since man mastered the art of writing there have been efforts to write about the military victories and monarchian achievements. These records constitute the earliest historical material or inscriptions. The origin of history also led to an endeavour to define history. Historians all over the world have tried to define ‘history’ variously as, ‘the science of the
human past’; ‘(history) studies the development of the earth, of the heavens and of species, as well as of civilization’; ‘the sum total of human activities in the past’; ‘the record of events rather than the events themselves’; ‘all we know about everything man has ever done or thought or hoped or felt’; so on and so forth (Dodiya 96). However, subjectively contemplated, history may be regarded as a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness.

Nineteenth-century historians believed in the invincibility of historical facts and were of the opinion that history is ‘a science, no more and no less’. They pledged by scientific objectivity and empiricism and expressed the hope of producing a “definitive history”. However, these traditional historians in recent times have been challenged by Critical theories and schools of criticism that came one after another and in quick succession. The ‘New Criticism’ of U.S.A. in the 1940s came into being as a reaction against historical and biographical scholarship, which diverted the attention from the author to the text and treated the latter as an autonomous entity. Structuralism, which followed formalism, announced the death of the author. Deconstruction thereafter made the text inconsistent by propagating the indeterminacy of meaning and advocating the ‘free play’ of signifiers without a centre. Reader -response Criticism shifted the emphasis from ‘text’ to the reader and maintained that meaning, like beauty, lies in the mind of the beholder. In the 1980s came the New Historicism as a reaction against the earlier schools of criticism — particularly against Formalism, Structuralism and Deconstruction — to ‘rehistoricize’ literary texts. The term ‘New Historicism’ was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 to describe his method of interpretation of the Renais sance texts. The term occurs in his book, The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance
Some of the leading exponents of New Historicism are Jonathan Goldberg, Jean Howard, Edward Pechter and Louis Advian Montrose. These new historians consider the traditional concept of “definitive history” as casual, closed and linear. Historians can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached, objective and complete. The idea behind this school of criticism is clearly stated in the following observations of V.S. Sethuraman:

The attempt to re-historicize is largely influenced by Bakhtin, Foucault, and later Marxists such as Althusser and Macherey and others. Old historicism of traditional scholars (e.g. E.M.W. Tillyard and John Dover Wilson), it is argued, was ‘monological’ and concerned with discovering a ‘stable point of reference’. For example, Tillyard’s *Elizabethan World Picture* or *Shakespeare’s History Plays* was based on certain assumptions. The first of these assumptions is, history is something like a determinate text and therefore, knowable. The second of these assumptions is that literature reflects directly or indirectly historical reality and is therefore better understood with reference to that.

On the other hand, New Historicism, he suggests:

...while trying to understand the historical conditions, contends that our knowledge of history cannot be objective and we can never recover the past without our own present self modifying what used to be considered objective and stable. What is more radical about New Historicism is that it recognizes a ‘variety of competing centres of cultural power’. (Sethuraman 574)
New historicists tend to stress that authors and poets are not secular saints — that even though they may be more circumspect about their societies than the average citizen, they nonetheless participate in it. They believe no historian can or has been able to transcend his own historical situation. The past is not something which confronts us as if it were a physical object, but is something we construct from already written texts of all kinds which we construe in line with our particular historical concerns. Hence, they argue that the best framework for interpreting literature is to place it in its historical context: what contemporaneous issues, anxieties, and struggles does the work of literature reflect, refract, or try to work through? New Historicists like Hayden White opine that since history, when made up by the historian, is necessarily a political act, the empirical and objective narration of historical material should be discarded as, ‘real’ life can never be truthfully represented. Ezra Pound says, “…our knowledge of the past is marred by ‘omissions’ of the most vital facts” (qtd in Dodiya 96). E.H. Carr in *What is History* writes, “History has been called an enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts” (13). To borrow Droysen’s words, “…the historical records are incomplete” (qtd in Dodiya 97). How then, does a historian write or interpret history is the big question. According to Hayden White, historiography, in fact, is a poetic construct and the historian has to interpret his material in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored (qtd in Dodiya 96). According to G. Barraclough: “The history we read though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments” (qtd in Carr 14). The historian, thus, must ‘interpret’ his data by either excluding certain facts from his account as irrelevant to his narrative purpose or in order to reconstruct, he must include in his narrative an account of
some events for which the facts regarding the explanation of its occurrence are lacking.

Carr opines:

When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog. The facts are really not at all like the fish on the fish monger’s slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use — these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation. (23)

This observation can be said to be proceeding from the poststructuralist assumption that reality, history, subjectivity and identity are textualised and hence the New Historicists practice an extremely close reading of texts. New Historicism may be defined as a simultaneous reading of literary and non-literary texts, and demonstrating how a work of art may be read and interpreted on terms of its context of other texts. It lays stress on the fact that there are no ‘universal truths’, no ‘natural behaviour’, that no text can offer a transparent window to historical facts, and that the text is a product of social causes and a producer of social effects.

Hayden White is indisputably the most important theorist of New Historicism and his notion of history is available mainly in his works like *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), *Metahistory* (1973), and *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representations* (1987). According to White, history is a verbal prose structure in the
form of a narrative discourse, the content of which is as much imagined/ invented as found. In the construction of their historical narratives, historians inevitably combine known parts (facts) with imagined wholes. This implies that there is a definite textualisation of historical “facts”, and there is no empirical history possible outside the text. This is metahistory. White tries to sum up his reading of history by putting forward the argument that almost all historical writing is interpretive and that a primary form that this interpretation takes is narration. He also insists that every historical narrative has the following components: (i) chronicle (ii) story (iii) mode of emplotment (iv) mode of argument and (v) mode of ideological implication. In his essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, he proposes,

…histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called “emplotment”. And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with “fictions” in general. (16)

This leads to the argument that both chronicle and story may be the “primitive elements” in the historical account but they are selected, arranged and combined in certain ways for certain audiences. Chronicle which is simply the arrangement of events and people to be dealt with in the temporal order of occurrence, is usually open ended, without beginnings or ends and begins when the chronicler begins. These events when arranged with a beginning, middle and an end, take the form of a story. Characterizing
the place and time of occurrence, the detailing of the importance of the event are features of a story. The conversion of the chronicle into a story is fiction making. Here the historian decides which events are to be given importance and he also decides the order of the events, this resulted in that and so on. The historian endows the events narrated with meaning and importance so that a comprehensible story emerges. This also results in providing an indication to the relationships between people and events. White in the same essay quotes Collingwood’s views on historian and historical facts in the following words:

The late R. G. Collingwood insisted that the historian was a story teller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a congeries of “facts” which, in their unprocessed form, made no sense at all. In their efforts to make sense of the historical record, which is fragmentary and always incomplete, historians have to make use of what Collingwood called “the constructive imagination,”…. (17)

White, wholeheartedly agrees to Collingwood’s views about facts and the idea of constructive imagination, yet goes a step further and emphasizes the need to employ these facts in a particular sequence to change a sequential story into a meaningful narrative. He writes:

What Collingwood failed to see was that no given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story elements. The events are made into a story by the suppression, or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by
characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like — in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (18)

White further argues that since events themselves are not organized into plot, emplotment is necessary in the retelling. For example, no set of events is intrinsically tragic, comic or farcical. Imposition of the structure of the story alone gives them this quality. Thus the writer of a historical narrative may use different modes of emplotment like, romance, comedy, tragedy or satire, depending upon the “historian’s decision to configure them according to the imperatives of one plot structure or mythos rather than another” (18). After emplotment of events comes the mode of argument which includes the various modes employed by the historian to reveal to his audiences how the random collection of events is integrated. They may show this integration under the cause-effect relationship between events or as various constituent parts under a general/whole event or by focusing on the background to the particular events. Finally, White argues that the detection of “coherence” in the events is implicated in the ideology of the historian. He makes use of the various theories of knowledge conventionally used in his culture to endow unfamiliar events and situations with meanings. Thus, the classical orthodox idea of history has given way to the postmodernist precept which considers a “historical situation a fresh and revealing possibility of the human world” (Kundera 44).

New Historicism which emerged as a result of the poststructuralist revolution of the 1960s and 1970s challenges the older historicism on the basis of certain assumptions. The New Historicists conclude that there are two meanings of the word ‘history’: (a) ‘the
events of the past’ and (b) ‘telling a story about the events of the past’. New historicists propose that since history is always ‘narrated’, the first sense is problematic. This leads to the fact that the past can never be available to us in ‘pure’ form, but always in the form of ‘representations’. After post structuralism, history became textualised. New historicists also proposed that historical periods are not unified entities. There is no single ‘history’, only discontinuous and contradictory ‘histories’. The idea of a uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed on history and propagated by the ruling classes in their own interest. They further suggest that historians can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective as there is no objective view of the past. The historian too is a part of the social order in which he lives and hence is unable to transcend his own historical situation. Hayden White writes:

> It is difficult to get an objective history of a scholarly discipline, because if the historian is himself a practitioner of it, he is likely to be a devotee of one or another of its sects and hence biased; and if he is not a practitioner, he is unlikely to have the expertise necessary to distinguish between the significant and the insignificant events of the field’s development. (15)

Since the past is something the historian constructs from existing written texts of all kinds, the New Historicists purport that the relation between literature and history is something which needs to be rethought. They aim simultaneously to understand a literary work through its historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature. According to them, literary and non-literary “texts” circulate inseparably and hence must be read simultaneously to demonstrate how a work of art
may be read and interpreted in terms of its context of other texts produced by lawyers, popular writers, theologians, scientists and historians. As there is no stable and fixed ‘history’ which can be treated as the background against which literature can be foregrounded, the New Historicists thus foreground the background.

New Historicism frequently addresses the idea that the lowest common denominator for all human actions is power, so the New Historicist seeks to find examples of power and how it is dispersed within the text. Power is the means through which the marginalized are controlled, and the thing that the marginalized (or, the other) seek to gain. This links back to the idea that because literature is written by those who have the most power, there must be details in it to show the views of the common people. They seek to find “sites of struggle” to identify who is the group or entity with the most power. The most important influence felt on New Historicists is that of Michael Foucault’s understanding of discourses, or discursive formations, as rooted in social institutions and as playing a key role in relations of power. They rejected the separation of the literary text from other forms of cultural production and refused to see art as an autonomous and self-contained object. They suggested a careful historicizing of texts which required understanding the texts and their implications with the forms/structures of power prevalent in that period. Therefore one needs to rethink the framework of literary analysis by paying attention to the links between the text and the cultural system in which they are produced. P.C. Kar in his essay, “New Historicism and interpretation of the Text”, points out the function of the New Historicist in the following words:
By discarding the conventional distinction between text and context, made much of by earlier historians of ideas under the impact of the rational logic of the Enlightenment, the New Historicists have tried to redefine the context-text relationship through the dynamics of their “negotiation and exchange”, to use Stephen Greenblatt’s phrase. History as a repository of knowledge providing base for literature was the product of the binarism of the West which resulted in the hegemonic discourse of history drawing its power and ideology from the belief that there is an unbridgeable gap between the self and the Other, the “emergent” and the “residual”, to use Raymond William’s famous distinction. (qtd in Pathak 170-71)

Thus, drawing upon Hayden White’s views once more it can be assumed that if we recognized the literary or fictive element in every historical account, we would be able to move the teaching of historiography onto a higher level of self-consciousness than it currently occupies:

The older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable. As thus conceived, historical narratives are complex structures in which a world of experience is imagined to exist under at least two modes, one of which is encoded as ‘real,’ the other of which is “revealed” to have been illusory in the course of the narrative. (White 31)
The New Historicists’ concept of viewing a literary text as a historical process brings forth the observation of Louis Montrose that “the historicity of the text and the textuality of history formulate New Historicism’s dialogic relation between history and literature” (qtd in Das 171).

Historiography is repressive, partial and incomplete as most of what goes in the name of history is a tale of conquest and the repression of the subaltern by the dominant perspectives. Fictionally narrativised history, on the other hand, is more humane and comprehensive as it accommodates multiple, at times even contradictory, voices within the same discourse thereby allowing subaltern perspectives the scope to surface and assert themselves. History of a place or nation, hence, needs to be narrativised because it presents multiple views, which cumulatively constitute identity. The writer of historical narrative, as White propounds, brings with him a notion of the ‘story’ that lies embedded in the “facts” given by the record. Historical novels, an example of fictionally narrativised history, on the other hand, tend to present an intimate view of life while providing a holistic picture of perceived reality. They transport the reader into a particular setting to involve him/her in the lives and thoughts of a set of characters. The development of these fictitious characters, however, occurs against a background of their socio-political environs. These historical writers endeavour to postulate their own version of history of their people, and thereby reject the traditional history. Hence, a novelist shares ‘emplotment strategies’ with a historian, who excludes, emphasizes or subordinates details of historical events. Om P Juneja in his book, *Post Colonial Novel*, differentiates between a novelist and a historian as, “While the novelist is interested in how power is sought and exercised by the individuals, the interest of the historian lies in
studying the operation of power by groups” (58). This operation of power is examined by both the historian and the novelist through representative figures, though for different reasons. He further continues that besides sharing interest in the positionality of power, the historian and the novelist also share the narrative space of textuality. He quotes Laurence Lerner to show that both history and literature are interested in power and that, “history and story: etymologically the two words are the same, and only in English have they separated in this way” (qtd in Juneja 94). According to him in French, German and Italian, history still retains an element of fiction in it.

This brings us to our next issue of concern, namely, the origin and development of historical novel in English literature. Novel, as an extended fiction written in prose, may have any kind of plot form — tragic, comic, satiric or romantic. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his preface to *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) and elsewhere, makes a distinction between two basic types of prose fiction: the realistic novel, which he calls the novel proper, and the romance. M. H. Abrams defines realistic novel as, “the fictional attempt to give the effect of realism, by representing complex characters with mixed motives that are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience” (Abrams 192). Some of these realistic novels may make use of events and personages from the historical past to add picturesqueness or interest to the narrative. They have to demonstrate through artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way. These are then categorized as the historical novels. Such novels not only borrow their setting, some characters and events from history but also make the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative. Some of the greatest
historical novels also use the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as
the deep forces that impel the historical process. Georg Lukacs in *The Historical Novel*
records the beginning of the nineteenth century as the time of origin of the historical
novel and “it is no accident that this new type of novel arose in England” (31). In dealing
with the literature of the eighteenth century, it was found that the English novel revealed
realistic features which are described as necessary consequences of the post-
revolutionary character of England’s development at the time, in contrast to France and
Germany. The fact that England had fought out its bourgeois revolution in the
seventeenth century (the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688) made England experience a
lasting, peaceful and upward development. The relative stability of England in
comparison with that of the rest of Europe, during this stormy period, made it possible to
channel the newly awoken historical feeling artistically into a broad, objective, epic form:

The Historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the
time of Napoleon’s collapse (Scott’s *Waverley* appeared in 1814). Of course,
novels with historical themes are to be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth
centuries, too, and, should one feel inclined, one can treat the medieval
adaptations of classical history or myth as “precursors” of the historical novel and
indeed go back still further to China or India. But one will find nothing here that
sheds any real light on the phenomenon of the historical novel. The so-called
historical novels of the seventeenth century are historical only as regards their
purely external choice of theme and costume. (Lukacs 19)
Lukacs rejects the seventeenth century historical novels as the psychology of the characters as well as the manners depicted in these novels are entirely those of the writer’s own day. Similarly, he rejects the most famous “historical novel” of the eighteenth century, Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*, on the ground that history is treated as mere costumery. However, the historical novel enjoyed immense popularity in the nineteenth century under the patronage of Sir Walter Scott. Scott’s historical novel is the direct continuation of the great realistic social novel of the eighteenth century. He combines the “objectivity” provided by the development of the English society with his own “conservatism”. He belongs neither with the ardent enthusiasts of this development, nor with its pathetic, passionate indicters. He tries to find a “middle way” between the warring extremes and endeavours to demonstrate artistically the historical reality of this way by means of his portrayal of the great crises in English history. The Waverley Novels, which brought Scott fame and fortune, appeared anonymously, beginning with *Waverley* in 1814 and continuing with *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* and *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Ray* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) and *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Legend of Montrose* (1819). It was after these novels that Scott turned from Scottish to English and then European themes to keep his public provided with new historical fiction. *Ivanhoe* appeared in 1819, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* in 1820, *Kenilworth* in 1821, *The Pirate* in 1822, *The Fortunes of the Nigel* in 1822, and many others, including *Quentin Durward* in 1823, *St. Ronan’s Well* in 1824 and the same year, the last and in many ways the most revealing of his Scottish novels, *Redgauntlet*. Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819) set in the period of Norman domination of the Saxons at the time of Richard I, portrays the central problem of medieval England, the opposition between
the Saxons and the Normans. Although he makes it very clear at the onset of the novel that this opposition is above all one between Saxon serfs and Norman feudal lords yet in truly historical manner he goes further than this opposition. Scott’s combination of popular spirit and historical authenticity emerge very clearly and strongly in his works.

Scott very seldom speaks of the present. He does not raise the social questions of contemporary England in his novels, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat which was then beginning to sharpen. As far as he is able to answer these questions for himself, he does so in the indirect way of embodying the most important stages of the whole of English history in his writing.

(Lukacs 33)

The historical novel, founded by Scott, saw many practitioners in the nineteenth century. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, popularly known as Lord Lytton, began under the influence of the Gothic novel and finally settled down as a historical novelist with novels like *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), *Rienzi* (1835), and *Harold, the Last of the Saxons* (1848). Other novelists to follow him were William Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882), who wrote over forty novels dealing with different periods of English history, and G. P. R. James (1801-1860), who covered Europe as well as England within his sixty novels. David Daiches in the fourth volume of *A Critical History of English Literature* writes, “Competently plotted intrigue, would-be period dialogue, and as much local colour as could be conveniently brought in, was the recipe for the historical novel as practiced by these professionals” (1085). Examples of historical novels can also be found in the works of some of the greatest writers of the nineteenth century. Dickens, inspired by the French
Revolution successfully made use of history in his *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), with Paris and London as the backdrop during the Revolution. George Eliot’s *Ramola* (1863) set in Florence during the Renaissance; Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1869), with Napoleon’s invasion of Russia; and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936), with Georgia as its setting during the Civil War and Reconstruction are examples of some of the popular historical novels.

Great political movements, conflicts and revolutions are the warp and woof of a historical novel. Twentieth century saw the Continental novelists establishing their foothold in the field of the historical novel. Historical novel, in the twentieth century, has been largely the province of these novelists for whom themes of revolution and foreign occupation are much closer to the bone than studies of middle class manners and morals in a relatively stable society such as England’s. Historical and political circumstances combined to introduce the British education system in India and one of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction. Though India was probably the fountainhead of story-telling, the novel, the genre of imaginative literature was an importation from the West. The delay in the prose fiction in Indian literature has often been related to the late emergence of the historical sense among Indians. Since Bengal was the first region to come in close association with the British, the earliest Indian novels came to be written in Bengali. The initial attempts at prose writing consisted of sketches of contemporary Bengali society, but the new genre really became established with the historical novel form. An interesting coincidence is that though the novel emerged at different times in different regions of India, but almost everywhere the first
crop showed a preoccupation with historical romance. Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Twice Born Fiction* writes:

In fact, the full development of the Indian novel as a whole, allowing for certain oversimplification of details, may be divided into three large stages: (1) historical romance, (2) social or political realism, (3) psychological novels showing an introspective concern with the individual. (30)

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was one of the earliest prose writers who ventured into the field of novel writing. He wrote in Hindi as well as in English and his novels are basically romances based on history. He wrote only one historical novel, *Raj Singha* published in 1881. Romesh Chander Dutt’s *Mahrashtra Jeevan Prabhat* (1878) adheres more closely to historical reality. Meenakshi Mukherjee highlights the role of Bankim Chandra in the development of the historical novel in the following words:

Bankimchandra’s influence — and through him the impact of Sir Walter Scott — was evident in the early historical novels of Hindi in which Kishorilal Goswami led the field for a long time. The first of his long series of historical novels, *Labangalata* (1891), appeared almost at the same time as Devaki Nandan Khatri’s *Chandrakanta*, and together they launched this particular phase of the Hindi novel which continued well into the twentieth century. (30)

Hari Narayan Apte made a name for himself in the field of Marathi novel with his first novel, *Maisorcha Wagh* (1890), a translation of Meadows Taylor’s *Tippoo Sultan*. His later novels are based on the life and times of Shivaji Maharaj. Almost contemporary
with Goswami in Hindi and Apte in Marathi was Raman Pillai, the Malayali novelist, whose *Marthanda Varma* (1891) and subsequent works are based on Travancore history. Bankim Chandra and Apte’s works were successfully translated and widely read in Kannada until 1913, when the first modern historical novel in Kannada, *Kumudini* by Galagnath, was published.

The last to be born and grow up among various branches of Indian fiction, Indo-Anglian fiction, too began with a variety of historical fiction in novels like Mirza Moorad Alee Beg’s *Lalun, the Beragun*, or *The Battle of Panipat* (1884); T. Ramakrishna’s *Padmini* (1903) and *A Dive for Death* (1911); S. K. Ghose’s *The Prince of Destiny*, R. C. Dutt’s *The Slave Girl of Agra*, Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* and S. K. Mitra’s *Hindupur*, all published in 1909; Svarna Kumari Ghosal’s *The Fatal Garland* (1915); and A. Madhaviah’s *Clarinda* (1915). The ‘history’, however, in these novels is entirely romantic with no basis at all in actual facts. After a gap of nearly fifteen years around 1930 we find a series of historical novels by A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar beginning with *Baladitya* (1930). This was followed by Umrao Bahadur’s The *Unveiled Court* (1933) which emulated the lead given by Mitra’s *Hindupur* and presented the story of a native prince’s court exploiting the glamour of a past time as in the genuine historical novel. History is one such subject to which writers of Indo-Anglian fiction have returned more often and the interest in historical material sometimes co-existed with the more recent social and political awareness which swept the entire country around 1930. A Marathi critic has summed up the literary trend of the nineteen thirties in these words: “If past history was romanticized by the previous generation of writers, the history of the present was romanticized by some of these novelists, and most readers lapped it up as
realism and politics” (qtd in Sanyal 41). Thus the initial vogue of the historical novel now came to be associated with the awakening of Indian nationalism. During the height of British rule, the safest form of patriotism available to the Indian writers was the celebration of past glory. The upsurge of nationalistic feelings in the life of the Indians led the writers in the nineteen-twenties and thirties to move from distant past to the recent. The novelists no longer deemed it necessary to make their heroes sufficiently removed in time; the scene could now be shifted to the contemporary battles and agitations. Nineteen thirties saw the emergence of the social novels that aimed largely at the faithful portrayal of the changing social scene. However, one serious practitioner of the historical novel during this period who used historical fiction as a convenient substitute for writing about the contemporary present was A. S. P. Ayyar, a member of the Indian Civil Services. As a keen student of history, Ayyar shows a deep knowledge of the Indian past and therefore went back to ancient Indian history again and again whether of the Maurya age as in *Three Men of Destiny* (1939), a novel set against the background of Alexander’s invasion of India in fourth century B.C. or of the Maratha period as in *Sivaji* (1944).

After World War I Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealized, yet, the stage had come when the writers were showing tendencies of experimentation in their works to bring recognition to the Indo-Anglian fiction. The period from 1920-1950 was largely dominated by novels with political and social themes but a few examples of historical novels can still be found. Raja Rao successfully amalgamates the story of a small south-Indian village with the Civil Disobedience Movement in his novel *Kanthapura* (1938). *Kanthapura* is an attempt on the part of Raja
Rao to rewrite history with a view to unravel the mysterious nature of reality by mythologizing it. Historical fiction in post-independence India continues to be as sparsely cultivated as in the years preceding it. Though the freedom struggle was now over, events of the early post-independence period such as the Partition, and its terrible aftermath, the merger of the princely states into the Indian Union, and the wars with Pakistan and China, provided usable material to the writers. The tragic drama of Partition inspired many works, notable among them are: Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) and Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964). Manohar Malgonkar emerged as one of the prominent writer to present fictional account of the recent Indian history in his novels like *Distant Drum* (1960), *The Princes* (1973), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *The Devils Wind* (1971) etc. Kamala Markandaya’s novels like *Some Inner Fury* (1956) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1972) deal with the events from pre-independent India and present a fictional account by making her characters become involved in actual events.

After a hiatus of about a decade, the historical novel staged a comeback on the Indian literary scene in the form of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980). But the traditional historical novel had undergone complete metamorphoses under the influence of the craftsmanship of Rushdie. Rushdie lends a breath of fresh air to the concept of history and its interplay with the individual. His novels *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame* (1983) and *Satanic Verses* (1988) are steeped in history and he very honestly tries to present realities of the public history influencing, and getting influenced by, individuals’ actions and aspirations. As the idea of history has evolved from the classical orthodox concept to the postmodern deconstructive precept, the literary function of
history has also changed drastically in keeping with the plural, partial but sovereign nature of ‘reality’. The postmodernist writers and particularly post colonial writers, therefore, write with an acceptance of uncertainty, doubt and change in modern life. They ascribe to a belief in the provisional knowledge of truth and reality. Writers in the corpus of Indian writing in English who have displayed fascination for history apart from Rushdie include Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Gita Mehta, Kiran Nagarkar and many more. Most of the novelists have tried to reinterpret the history of modern India and feel as if they are, like Rushdie, “handcuffed to history.” They have tried to tackle the besetting problem of reality vis-à-vis fantasy. They make unprecedented innovations in their narrative techniques to suit their purposes. They consciously have a date with history which till recently was largely a European construct and was written by the colonizer. In order to situate itself in the contestory space of history, the novel of colonial consciousness challenges “the master narrative” and the writers of these novels use varied forms to re-write these “histories”.

Any study of Indian Novels in English, undertaken to explore a literary work from the point of view of New Historicism and historicity, must also focus on the innate concept of Indianness in these works. In fact, from the above discussion, a natural query that emerges by way of a corollary is: “What about the treatment of Indianness in Postcolonial Indian Novels in English?” “Has the concept of Indianness also become a complex and subtle undertone like the concept of historicity or does it still exist in a linear, monochromatic mode?” When Raja Rao writes a Sthalapurana in Kanthapura or Shashi Tharoor the Mahabharata in The Great Indian Novel or Allan Sealy the history of
Anglo-Indians in *Trotternama* — the novelist obviously participates in an Indian tradition of re-writing history. And while doing so, his focus, at times, alternates between Indianness and historicity. Since the purpose of the present study is to understand this double focus, it would be worthwhile to delineate on the concept of Indianness in Post-colonial Indian Novels.

The question of Indianness arises only when we speak of Indian Writing in English and not in contexts relating to writings in regional languages. While Indianness is taken for granted in the latter, in the former it is a specific dimension which stands out from all other dimensions. Emphasizing a need for a study of Indianness in works written in English, K.S. Ramamurthy feels:

> It is when the medium is English and when the literary forms, conventions adopted by a writer are English one feels compelled to examine the claims of a work for being considered as Indian literature. In other words, an examination of its Indianness becomes an exercise necessary for determining its individuality and for establishing its identity. (qtd in Ram)

'Indianness' is a crucial term in Indo-English criticism with a wide spectrum, multi-dimensional meaning. It has, in fact, defied interpretation by critics of repute in the field of Indian Writing in English. It is perhaps only Anand K. Coomaraswamy, the doyen among scholars of Indian art and culture, who has perceived the essence of this evasive term 'Indianness'. He identifies certain essential features. These essential features — common to great works of art produced in the subcontinent that are valid values in terms of art — are, he believes, what make the traditional art great. These points have
been discussed, in detail, by Coomaraswamy in his celebrated book of essays, *The Dance of Shiva*. Many other critics have also tried to interpret this concept variously.

Anand K. Coomaraswamy is perhaps the first critic who has tapped the root of the matter. He identifies Indianness with the essential Indian Philosophy. But the more important question is: “How does this aspect contribute to the value of a work of art written in English by Indians?” For this, one has to look into the different aspects of this term and establish its relevance as a value in terms of art. Uma Ram is of the opinion that, “Defining Indianness is like defining truth. In Hopkins' language one might say it is the inscape of an Indian. And, more, perhaps, it represents our sva-bhava, our 'ourness'. What is it worth is a different matter.” (Ram)

This concept is certainly not like political citizenship that accrues by the accident of birth. This applies equally to India-born writers writing in English and the writers writing in the other regional languages. What is it, then? It is true that this term has been for long teased critics trying to define it, but such teasing only heightens the challenge it poses and in no way undermines its value. P. Lal comes very close to a clear understanding of the term in his introduction to the English translation of *The Mahabharata* of Vyasa where he says:

To be an Indian or simply to live in India at any period in her recorded History is to open oneself to the benign moral influence of the two epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Caste, creed, colour do not matter here; what matters here is the degree, range and subtlety of exposure, which in turn determines the quality of the affected person's 'Indianness', whatever that very
large word means. It certainly means the very opposite of cultural myopia and has no connection with any kind of hypersensitive parochial inwardness. (Lal)

Anand Coomaraswamy's concept of Indianness goes right into its origin — the Indian philosophy. He says:

There cannot be anything absolutely unique in the experience of any race. Its peculiarities will be chiefly a matter of selection and emphasis, certainly not a difference in specific humanity.... The heart and essence of the Indian experience is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life and the instinctive and ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom. (Coomaraswamy)

Indianness entails with it an integral cultural awareness, an awareness of the entire Indian heritage which includes its history, philosophy and language. As V. K. Gokak observes in his essay “The Concept of Indianness”:

The Indianness of Indian Writing in English consists in the writer's intense awareness of his entire culture. This awareness has to be vertical as well as horizontal. The continuity of this culture for three to five hundred thousand years has to form part of the panorama on Indian life from Kashmir to Cape-Comorin. The consciousness cannot be subordinated to any philosophic system, nor any metaphysical creed iron it out. The greater the consubstantiation in the writer's consciousness, the more inclusive and many faceted will be the expression of it. (Gokak 24)
Another important characteristic of Indianness is its religious foundation in the truest sense of the term. There is no scope here for atheism and vanity. The religious attitude manifests itself in a perception of holiness in everything that is: *Ishavasyam idam sarvam* (all this is pervaded by the Lord) (*Ishopanishad*, Sloka 1).

The seemingly disparate points discussed above are all pointers towards excellence of a national personality; we for our convenience can label as Indianness. An intelligent and sensitive mind should be able to arrive at their ‘organic connectedness’ to form in the mind some semblance of a definition of the term 'Indianness' and its values in terms of art.

The entire world, especially the Western world has always been fascinated by all that is Indian — more so by Indian Philosophy, mythology, spirituality and religion. It is not uncommon to see a foreigner traveling thousands of miles to India in search of the meaning of life:

I once saw him standing on the ghats gesturing towards the sandy expanses across the river. ‘That’, he was saying to his companion, a slightly terrified young student, ‘is sunyata, the void. And this’, he pointed to the teeming conglomeration of temples and houses behind us, ‘is Maya, illusion. Do you know what our task is? Our task is to live somewhere in between. (Chaudhuri 362–363)

An attempt will be made in this thesis to study the comparative elements of historicity and Indianness, as they manifest in the various postcolonial texts selected for
this study. Consequently, a detailed discussion of these novels of colonial consciousness from this angle will be pursued in the following chapters. The novels, in spite of their complex narrations, introduce the readers to new and exciting worlds and to vital contemporary debates, while suggesting a particular perspective upon them. For this very reason, they shall be read as Postcolonial texts and their two-fold relation to literature would also be viewed, that is, on the one hand the writer’s intention to promote, even celebrate the ‘new literatures’ which have emerged over the last century from the former colonies; and on the other, the need to analyze and resist continuing colonial attitudes. It will be analyzed in what various subtle modes historicity and Indianness form a part of these texts and how the novelists’ handling of the subject transmutes it into an artistic construct.
Works cited:


