Myth is used in conjunction with history in the four novels representing different cultures chosen for study in this thesis. All of them are multicultural texts and make use of intertextuality as a narrative strategy and therefore the theories of myth and theories of reading help in the literary analysis. This thesis proposes to study how the fictionalization of myth and history helps the author to reinterpret and reassess both in the light of his social and political beliefs. The four novels are postcolonial texts. In order to understand the problems of the present, the writer and the reader make a journey into the past to learn from the myths and history of the culture that has been suppressed by imperialism. The writers draw from the myths of the conqueror's culture as well.

The word “fictionalizing” is used to refer to a host of narrative strategies such as repetition, parallelism, analogy, distortion, deconstruction, modification and subversion and the writers use such strategies in various combinations. In the multicultural context, the genre of fiction provides the space where analysis and synthesis is possible.

The word “myth” inheres in itself two contradictory meanings, truth and false belief and the writers exploit this irony and tension. Myth is a narrative that tries to explain transcendental truths in symbolic form, which in turn
gives rise to a system of beliefs and culture codes. It becomes evident that if one is situated within the belief system, be it religious belief or political belief, “myth” is truth, whereas, if one is situated outside the belief system, “myth” becomes false belief. The word “myth” is false belief in another sense, because the tales themselves may not be factually true.

There is another contradiction inherent in the term “myth”. There is a changeless, repetitive core in any mythological system that persists in spite of change. Yet, a myth can die out or be dormant for some time and be revived at a later point in time. When writers draw from the myths of the religion of a culture they are indeed making use of the changeless core. Yet, their purpose may not be to reinforce belief in that religion, but to throw light on a social or political problem. Again, by changing or distorting or deconstructing the myth, they are creating outcomes that are not religious but social and political.

History is commonly considered to be a record of past events which is true. Yet, the historian has to use some techniques of the fiction writer to give form and meaning to the chaos of facts around him. He has to select, prioritize, explain and narrate in a coherent manner. The postcolonial writer shows that there is always a dominant version and a subaltern version of history. Since events are caused by multiple and often indeterminate causes,
interpretation becomes the task of the historian as well. The fictionalizing of history touches the concerns of the philosophy of history.

The theories of myth and language put forward by Frye, Cassirer, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and others are used only in so far as they help in the analysis of a text. This thesis does not attempt to examine or apply any one of these theories throughout. Deconstruction and reader response theory is applied where appropriate. Since all the four novels are multicultural metafictional texts, they demand a similar plurality of approaches from the critic if their rich diversity is to be adequately explored.
ABSTRACT

Chapter I examines the symbiotic relationship between myth and literature and sees both as metasystems of overlapping categories. A study of the use of myth in literature becomes an interdisciplinary one for it draws from psychology, anthropology, religion, philosophy, sociology, politics and even linguistics and semiotics. This is demonstrated in a study of the theories of Frye, Cassirer, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and others. The chapter examines how patterns from myth are incorporated into some examples from fiction. Myth, fiction and history use similar narrative strategies.

Chapter II takes up Ngugi wa Thiong'o’s novel Matigari for discussion. The history of Kenya from the time of the Mau Mau struggle to the neo-colonialism of Kenyatta forms the backdrop. The ideals of the revolution had been subverted by Kenyatta and the fictional world of Matigari reflects this. Matigari, drawn on the lines of a mythical hero, is the only one with the courage to stand up against the repressive regime of the Minister, His Excellency Ole Excellence. As the name of Matigari spreads in the land, the public imagination builds up a Christ-like figure, and expectations are soon linked to the Second Coming. The Minister sees the dangerous power of this new myth spontaneously created by the people and uses all his power to expose it as untrue. On the other hand, the myth of Christian Democracy
created by the government is shown to be false propaganda by Matigari. The novel deals with the conflict of these two myth systems.

Chapter III takes us to New Zealand and the struggle of the Maori to retain their cultural identity in the midst of a dominant western culture. This means that Maori myth and religion which had suffered a decline must first regain their status with the Maori and then win the respect and acceptance of the white man or Pakeha. To this end Witi Ihimaera in his novel The Matriarch indulges in a lyrical retelling of Maori myth, integrating it with the history of the tribe as well as family history. Ihimaera deals with the land wars, the Hauhau movement and other historical events. The section on Te Kooti makes significant use of Christian myth. The inevitable hybridization of cultures is seen in the way in which Te Kooti synthesizes Maori and Christian myth to create the Ringatu religion.

Chapter IV discusses how Shashi Tharoor draws on the myths in the Indian epic Mahabharata to delineate Indian history from the freedom struggle to the reign of Indira Gandhi. Tharoor finds many remarkable parallels between the characters of the Mahabharata and the people who played an important part in Indian history. Some of the parallels are Gandhi/Bhishma, Nehru/Dhritarashtra, Jinnah/Karna, Indira Gandhi/Duryodhana. The five Pandava brothers represent the institutions that support democracy or Draupadi. Many ingenious parallels between incidents in the epic and events
in Indian history are also drawn. The tone of parody is used throughout and the satire is full of good humour. Tharoor also shows how relative the truths of history can be.

Chapter V looks at the way Salman Rushdie draws on four myth systems in his novel *Midnight’s Children* --Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Islamic myth. Saleem, who projects himself as the hero with a great destiny is really no hero at all. Using the deconstructive strategy throughout the novel, Rushdie makes us reconsider the theory of genres in literature, theories of myth as well as history. Our understanding of history is shown to be necessarily limited. Saleem, the historian, is himself one of the illusionists. Using metaphor and symbol, Rushdie creates a pastiche of events that make us aware of the relativity of all things projected as true.

Chapter VI, looks at the way in which the four authors have interfaced myth and history in their fiction. Their fiction creates outcomes that neither myth nor history can create independently. The chapter examines the need for postcolonial writers to use myth and history for their social and political purpose. It also looks at the way some assumptions made by the philosophers of history are used in fiction. These works defy classification, for they are not exclusively myth, history or fiction, but all of these in synthesis.