Conclusion

I must say first of all that description is itself a political act... So it is clear that re describing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it...altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized.


In a review of Githa Hariharan’s novel In Times of Siege (2003), Alok Rai wrote that “History is plastic”! He also invoked George Orwell’s famous dictum from 1984: He who controls the past controls the future. Hariharan’s novel deals with some of the most important issues of Indian public life: the control of history by those in power, the abuse of history in the interest of politics and religion, and most importantly the re-writing of history.

In Times of Siege explores the battle over history in modern India, the distortion of history by political parties, and the ‘Hinduisation’ of education. In the novel, Shiv Murthy is a professor at an Open University in Delhi who is in charge of preparing a course-module on Medieval Indian History. Problem arises when a group of fundamentalist accuses Professor Murthy of making insulting statements about Basava, the 12th century founder of the Virsaiava movement and the first of its great poets. The Hindu fundamental organization demands the withdrawal of the module and an apology from Murthy. His refusal to bow down to the communal forces result in mobs and mayhem, media frenzy, and violence that ultimately threatens the very existence of Professor Murthy and his family. Echoes of the Mandir-Masjid debate reverberate, the demolition of the Babri Masjid becoming a metaphor for the collapse of values that could have held a nation together.

An important concern of the novel is the re-writing of history. History is characterized by a kind of plasticity that can be moulded by anybody. This malleability of history gives any version of particular event validity and it can claim to be the real truth. The university authorities, well aware of the power of the mob, would ultimately bow down before the rabble and concede to its irrational demands. The novel, in a way, charts the troubled reality of
contemporary India where history text-books have been re-written by people in power to suit religious and narrow essentialist agendas. In recent decades, there have been numerous instances when history has been moulded and distorted by political parties to give their version of “truth”. To carry out religiously-motivated ideologies, devices have been envisaged to change the Constitution. Dalits, tribals, backward castes and other marginalized and suppressed communities are in search of a nation inspired by egalitarian values, social justice, economic opportunities and participation in political decision-making. The Right-wings, mostly Hindutva ideologues, are equally strong in trying to insist on a model of the nation based on ancient Hindu cultural values.

The novel also draws our attention to censorship and the freedom of speech. It mentions other instances when the voice of the intellectual has been ruthlessly silenced by fundamentalism—Salman Rushdie’s, for instance, or Taslima Nasrin’s. The last of Deepa Mehta’s trilogy, Water, the filming of which was abandoned on similar grounds, can also be mentioned. The most recent case was the withdrawal of Rohinton Mistry’s novel Such a Long Journey from the University of Mumbai English honours course when last year the Shiv Sena accused that Mistry wrote some offensive things about Shiv Sena and its leader Bal Thakeray. Incidents like these put serious doubt about the place of intellectual freedom in contemporary India.

Despite the fact that “ahistoricism is one of the defining features” and “greatest attractions” of Indian civilization, history as a discipline has increasingly assumed a major role in India as the past has become an object of debate in the post-independence period. This is particularly true of the last twenty years or so, when the rise of a Hindu right has led to speculations about the future of secularism in the country. There has been an intense interface between professional historians and the wider public. While examining this remarkable phenomenon of “history in the ascendant mode” in contemporary India, Vinay Lal writes:

Almost nothing must appear more remarkable to a student of the social sciences, or of the wider intellectual scene, in India than the recent ascendancy of ‘history’ and the elevation of historians to a position of public recognition if not eminence. Outside the hard sciences, as well as those disciplines, such as economics, which have self-consciously fashioned themselves after the
sciences and mathematics, and in all of which Indian achievements have acquired something of an international dimension, no discipline has gained as much visibility as has history in the course of the previous two to three decades.  

Most of these debates that have animated public life of India are related to questions of identity, religion, nationalism, and the idea of India, or what India is or should be. While militant Hindu revivalism trying to define India in terms of an essentialized Hindu identity, on the other hand, voices from below—tribals, Dalits, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups are clamouring for recognition and acceptance in the Indian national commonwealth. Due to such contrary and often violent claims, the nation of India has become a site of constant conflicts and fissures. The discipline of history has been the preferred arena on which these debates have been played out. It is always history which have been used and abused by various political parties and institutions to justify their respective claims or to refute the claims of others.

One of the biggest signposts of how historical thinking has forged its way into the public consciousness is regarding the dispute over the Babri Masjid. When in the late 1980s, the dispute over the origins of the sixteenth-century mosque began to engulf the nation, and culminated in its destruction on 6th December 1992 and the eventual bloody communal riots across India, historians were suddenly thrust into the limelight. Academic historians were summoned into service to verify or repudiate the claims and counter-claims. The striking thing was that the dispute was shifted onto the terrain of historical discourse, with both the “secularists” and their purported opposites, the “fundamentalists” choosing to take recourse to notions of historical “truth” and “evidence” to stake their positions.

Another marker of this dominance of history and historians in Indian public life has been the issues of the re-writing of history text-books. Aurangzeb becomes, in these politically and ideologically tilted histories, the typical Muslim villain who razed temples and Shivaji becomes the earliest nationalist who fought for cultural and nationalist self-assertion. The controversial issue of history text-books being given communal and Hindutva touch flared up during the rule of the BJP-led government in the late 1990s. But intimations of the controversy can be traced to the time of the first non-Congress government in 1977-80
following Indira Gandhi’s defeat at the polls in 1977. At that time certain history text-books, used widely in schools around the country, were proposed to be withdrawn from circulation on the grounds that their authors—among them Romila Thapar, R. S. Sharma, and Bipan Chandra—were insufficiently critical of the “dark period” of Indian history under Muslim rule and the despotism of Aurangzeb, and similarly not appreciative enough of the stellar contributions towards Indian independence of such nationalist stalwarts as Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh.

The situation has changed but little in the intervening years. The publication of Towards Freedom, a two-volume history on the freedom movement by the respected as a result of pressure from right-wing Hindu fundamentalists who objected to the two authors’ criticism of the role played by Hindu communalist organizations in the freedom movement and the highlighting of the movement’s secular nature. From the 1990s onwards, history and historians have become more prominent in the public life of the country as the tendency of re-writing of text-books and fabrication of history have taken more sinister turns.

What becomes apparent from the above discussion is that the process of history writing in contemporary India has attained a great deal of complexity, and the whole enterprise of historical recreations in the country has been riddled with several kinds of biases and risky political interests. This difficult and complicated situation reached its nadir when the historians of the country openly clashed with each other in 1991. The main groups in the clash were identified as Marxist and communalist historians; both charged each other with paying undue attention to certain specific periods of India’s past, to legitimatize their own views and positions, and paying little attention to the damage they were causing to the body politic. Hardly a few days before this, the minister of Human Resource Development in the government complicated the situation by announcing in the parliament that a committee had been formed to initiate a project on writing a post-1947 history of the country. It consisted of several distinguished academics who aroused considerable controversy in the press because of their pronounced leftist leanings. Although the minister assured the members of the house that the committee would be completely autonomous akin to the Royal Commission set up in Britain, several members expressed their apprehensions about the domineering role of the government in shaping public opinion and thinking to suit its own interests. The chairman of the committee, S Gopal as well as some members came out in defense of the government in
the national press. But some members of the committee expressed surprise over their inclusion and came out strongly against the idea, and dissociated themselves from it. They said that they were opposed to all kinds of state-sponsored history, no matter how meaningful and well-intentioned it might be.

Dharma Kumar, who dissociated himself from the committee, draws attention to its two major defects. First, that Indian history would be used as a political resource and not necessarily for promoting social amity through an objective history of the nation where all people would be given due representation and historical agency as intended by the government: "Politics whip up public passions by dwelling on past injustices, real or imaginary...Now that 'historical injustice' establishes a claim to state benefits, the demand for the manufacture of usable history is increasing." The second defect is the illusive thinking on the part of the historians that they could counter politics involved in history-writing through government agencies: "the thought that the 'objective and impartial history' of modern India can be determined by a few academics and ultimately by MPs is frightening, besides being comic".

Instances and accusations of use, misuse and abuse of history by the government have increased considerably during the past several years. The central government led by different political parties have been time and again held guilty of using history for establishing its power base. The most controversial and by far the most damaging of such instance was during the tenure of BJP led government when historiography was again used as a political weapon when it tried to give Indian history an overtly Hindu colour.

The dismissed BJP governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh were charged with rewriting, during their rule, history books for school-going children with an overwhelming Hindu bias in them. How much it damaged the body politic of the nation can be witnessed in the controversy regarding the Ram Janmabhumi/Babari Masjid case and the consequent communal horror that followed. Rewriting of history that is based on communal, religious and political motives often spawns ugly identity politics and violent ethnic and communal tensions. It is in this context that the texts under the present study become relevant in this discussion. Writers like Rushdie, Tharoor, Mistry, Sealy, and Kesavan are acutely aware of the ways in which history has often been abused and manipulated by the state machineries for political gains. Most of these writers are themselves victims of this political
game. These writers not only expose the ways in which history has been put to abuse, but also try to write alternative versions of history that contest and confront both colonial and neo/post-colonial historiography with a view to historical reparation, recuperation, and historical excavation.

Speaking about the significance of the role and prominence of historians in the Babri Masjid episode, Vinay Lal wrote:

The public might have been forgiven for thinking that right belonged to the party which produced the more plausible historical account, and that it was enough to produce compelling ‘historical’ evidence to settle the vexed questions surrounding the histories of conquest, the politics of memory, the notions of ‘historical wrongs’ and ‘retribution’, the communalization of history, the anxieties generated by masculinity, and the emergence of nation-states in the Indian sub-continent which underlay the dispute over the Babri Masjid.²

Since history is regarded as the repository of identity and national-character, historians and history have assumed a prominent position in Indian public life. While Indian historiography has tried to make its way through this maze of political, ideological and cultural dilemmas and conflicts, Indian Writing in English have also supplemented in working out alternative models of history and historical thinking as we have discussed in the previous chapters. In spite of the many pitfalls and dangerous developments, there have been strands of history writing which have tried resolutely to resist the abuse of history at the hands of power. While, historians like Dipesh Chakravorty, Sumit Sarkar, Irfan Habib, Partha Chatterjee, Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash, Ashish Nandy etc have advocated and practised alternative ways of doing history—history of the “third kind”, “mythographies”—writers like Rushdie, Tharoor, Sealy, Mistry etc. have supplemented the historical enterprise. The imaginative writings by these authors may not be taken as historical documents, but they help us to think about the diverse ways that history of India can be explored. By displacing the idea of “historical objectivity” they dismantle the claims of ideological discourses that seek to hegemonize historical truth and
historical evidence as immutable facts, which go on to essentialize Indian history and cultural identity.

Today the pluralistic characteristics of Indian society are being threatened by various forces. It is during such a scenario of growing fundamentalism, chauvinism and exclusionary policies of the ruling elites that the intellectuals and writers in India have a committed role to play., and there is a great and urgent need In an essay “In Search of Our Selves”, Gittha Hariharan says that we, the citizens of India, live in a “time of siege” and then goes on to underscore the role of writers in public life when the cultural and democratic space is shrinking and censorship is stifling all kinds of dissent:

Obviously, in times of siege the writer is more, not less, important...The overall object of resistance—in the Indian context, but this can be extended to other contexts—is resisting the marking of this heterogeneity as a disputed structure, allowing it to grow weak, turn divisive when attacked by the various homogenizing religious and cultural nationalisms.⁵

There is an urgent need to understand the historical processes of the past and the sociopolitical maladies of the present. There must be greater engagement and interactions among the various forces and institutions and historical schools. Such interactions and dialogues should involve wide participation of public, intellectuals, and institutions and engage with socio-political questions of our present times. While the historical enterprise on the academic front are engaged in such a dialogue, literature is also contributing to this exploration of the past and understanding of the present, while at the same time drawing attention to the blind-spots of academic, official historical enterprise.

This thesis, in a way, can be seen as an extended exploration of the ways in which Indian English writers have sought to resist exclusion, oppression, bigotry, and erasure through strategies such as irony and irreverence, the humanization of perpetrators of crime, and by refusing always to place readers into comfortable superior positions of anger and indignation. Imaginative writing, novel being one, provides a space for the enunciation of the multi-vocality of the nation thereby resisting or undermining those forces that forbid the healthy growth and proliferation of true democratic ethos. Indian English writings of the last
two or three decades have shown the commitment of engaging sincerely and powerfully with the issues and debates most crucial to Indian public life.

History remains a contested site in India as everybody tries to mould it according to his or her agendas. Contemporary writers are well-aware of the plasticity of history. The novels and their subversive histories as opposed to the monologic official history are important interventions in working out alternative ways of historicizing our times as well as the past in meaningful, open-ended narratives which align themselves to the ecological plurality of Indian life. These novels may not be authentic histories, nor do they claim such status. They have their own fallibilities; they are marked by various ellipses and ideological-conceptual-linguistic paradoxes. But they remain important in maintaining the balance in understanding our times in wider perspectives, and also because they warn us to the dangers when the historical enterprise becomes a plaything at the hands of those in power.

Intimately connected to the historical enterprise and debates are crucial questions about whose memories will prevail, which accounts are the most accurate, and how particular meanings are conveyed (and others ignored) by specific kinds of representation. Making matters worse, clear protocols about adequate or appropriate forms for narrating particular pasts are not shared by all, nor are there commonly held notions of responsibility for historical truth-telling among the various producers of history. In this postmodern age, the fact that there are multiple ways of producing the past and all these ways have their effects on historical consciousness of a nation and its people, is widely accepted. Imaginative writing, novels in particular, is one way of doing history, as we have discussed in the preceding chapters. Novels, stories, dramas, films and other media have always dealt with history, and the demand for historical narratives in popular mediums has increased in recent times.

This should enable us to look at historical events through somewhat wider lens so that we are able to think simultaneously about different kinds of histories and their meanings in the present. As Vivian Sobchack argues, the exchanges of an electronic discussion group called H-Film [history film] demonstrate that “our encounters with a variety of historicized images and narratives from a variety of textual [and non-textual] sources both layer themselves and sit beside each other as the historical field-and none of them can be completely erased”. In this broader sense, making history becomes, then, less the autonomous preserve of any one constituency or guild, and the historical narrative less a
finished story, than a dynamic project that encompasses both the production and reception of intersecting, overlapping, contradictory, and parallel accounts of the past. This observation is crucial in doing or thinking about history in general in India, and in understanding the narrativization of history by the writers in this study.

These novels make serious intervention into the discourse of history, seeking to dismantle the claims of authority by those in power. At the same time they offer their own versions of history which are equally valid “parallel accounts of the past”. It is not surprising that many characters in the novels under the present study are historians or chroniclers, or at least, inspired by historical methodology. Saleem Sinai in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children is a historian who tries to write his own life as well as that of the nation. He is well aware of the problems of historiography, and in the role of a historian or chronicler of his life and that of the nation, Saleem makes incisive comments on the fallibility of teleology and objectivity in historiography and emphasizes the role of memory in creating a personal version. In Sealy’s novel The Trotter Nama, Eugene is a chronicler who was set forth on his mission of excavating the history of his illustrious family by the ghost of the founder of the Trotter clan Justin Trotter. There is another historian figure in the novel: the colonial Theobald Horatius Montagu who exemplifies the historian who is motivated by political partisanship and whose supposedly definitive history is full of gaps and silences. Eugene calls Montagu the devil and “Anti-Trotter” and goes out to set the record straight by resorting to a more colourful and inclusive method of historical investigation. The unnamed narrator in Amitav Ghosh’s novel The Shadow Lines is a student of history engaged in research. In fact, almost all of Ghosh’s works have such researcher figures. Mukul Kesavan’s novel Looking Through Glass has a narrator who is much beholden to historical methodologies and well-aware of the complexities involved in the writing and doing history. in real life also both Ghosh and Kesavan are related to similar disciplines—Ghosh was trained as an anthropologist in India and at Oxford, and Kesavan is a historian at Jamia Milia Islamia. Towards the end of Sahgal’s Rich Like Us, we see Sonali engaged in research on Indian history. She takes up the study of the decorative art of the seventeenth century, one of the greatest and richest periods of Indian history. This historical investigation helps her overcome the nightmarish experience of the Emergency and redeems her faith in the resilient spirit of India. She comes to realize that one should not be pessimistic about India because India is rich in spirit and history and
heritage. O. P. Mathur says that this historical research on the part of Sonali suggests that "the past of India is not all cruel and barbarous but that there is much in it that appeals to sensitive souls. Such riches and such heroic individuals and events subsume and overwhelm such nauseating episodes as the 'Sati' and the Emergency".

In fact, historical research and investigation in the texts are shown to be acts of redemption—from both personal and public trauma. The characters are depicted as involved in historical investigation, reconstruction or research, through which they hope to salvage some meaning and pattern from the chaos of lies, illusions, silences, horror and tragedy. Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, the unnamed narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, Eugene in *The Trotter-Nama*—they are desperately looking for answers and meaning which they do not hope to find in histories written or narrated by others. The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* finds the answer to the mystery that he has been chasing for long fifteen years—and when he finds it—all the puzzles fit into places and the truth sets him free.

This thesis elaborately explored the engagement of history in selected Indian English novels. Indian English writers have been able to assimilate the social scenario of modern India in the throes of change and the complex dilemmas confronting it in its efforts to find solutions to the problems bedevilling it. Indian fiction in English has always held a mirror up to Indian social life. The gruesome poverty, the struggle for Independence, the trauma of the Partition, social changes, crisis of identity, emerging experiences of alienation and anarchy—all these have figured on the screen of the Indian novel in English.

The intense and insistent engagement with history reflects "the radical wishes to alter being, to change, to reshape, destroy it, to leave it different from what it is". In the novels of Rushdie, Ghosh, Sahgal, Tharoor, Sealy, Chandra, Mistry, Baldwin, Kesavan and Deband many other contemporary writers, multiple readings of history and current politics are provided to destabilize the official version. All these novels question the dominant record of western history and are characterized with a critical attitude to nationalist history and representation of the nation. They highlight the selectivity, omissions and emphasis involved in all historicization and narrativization. By exposing the fictionality of history and underscoring the importance and role of narrativity of history, and by blurring the distinction between history and fiction, these novels resist the hegemonic drive at all kinds of totalization and fixity of meaning and identity. The writers in their works give the picture of "an India of
multiple realities and of multiple interpretations of reality” and the Indian sensibility emerges as a cosmopolitan one shaped by “a variety of sources and influences, indigenous and international”.

The novels that emerged during the 1980 and the ones that followed have vehemently contested many conventional ideas and attitudes regarding official versions of history, patriarchal versions of womanhood, and institutionalized versions of the subaltern. They destabilize given versions, undermine their ideological underpinnings, and subvert them with the installation of newer versions to correct the relations of power in contemporary Indian society. These writers espouse the impinging experience of multicultural heterogeneity of India while at the same time revealing the conflicts and crisis that beset national life. These novels are marked by a sense of multiplicity, fragmentation, instability of meaning, dissension, breakdown of assumptions and heterogeneity rather than consensus and totality.

The novels under the study concern themselves with almost all the important historical events of the history of the nation of the last couple of centuries. Post-colonial literature, such as these, addresses the question of national identity after the Empire, and these novels chart the coming into being of the nation and its subsequent historical and socio-political development after decolonization. As such, these novels can help us understand the profoundly complex political, racial and cultural transaction between the colonizer and colonized, the several distinct phases of nationalism that the nation has gone through, from imitation and assimilation to resistance and finally to post-colonial internationalization.

The new novels in English encompass both aesthetic considerations and social concerns, thereby performing the twin objectives of literature—delight and instruction. Rushdie himself claims in one of his interviews that a good novelist is not who teaches but leaves the judgement in the hands of readers or critics. Rushdie allows the readers to assert their own choice between faith and doubt. Literature has its roots in history, both past and present. The literary text comes out of literary environment, which in turns is inspired and shaped by the historical environment. Rushdie says “we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool”. In other words, we remember and write in order to know and have some control over the production of our present. Writers of historiographic metafiction like Rushdie and Tharoor sometimes seem to take sportive flight from history, a reversal and resistance to history, a liberated zone in which the exigencies of the “real” seem

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to evaporate. But nonetheless, the “real” of the national and historical sites are what concerns them. Despite, the literary polishing and embellishment of the fantastic, fabulativ, imaginative, the core is the “real” itself and these novels always present what is historically real. All the novels under the present study offer different and often competing versions of reality. An artist’s version of reality may differ from a politician’s, but this does not make it any less valid. Politically conscious fiction is made up of “books that draw new and better maps of reality.” Through an inclusive consciousness of history, these writers not only intervene into the discourse of history but also write the nation in all its riddles and miracles.

The “maps of reality” that these novels chart is that of India as a postcolonial nation-state and its potted and, for the most part, traumatic journey from colonial slavery to sovereign, liberal democracy. Reading these texts and their representation of this history make it clear that this map is full of riddles, conflicts and violence. They not only reveal the betrayal of the promise of anti-colonial nationalism but also bear witness to the ongoing and relentless tide of violent struggles, conflicts and oppression. The writers, through their historical consciousness, reveal that contemporary India is a “zone of instability” where different communities and ethnicities continue to fight and struggle against various forces and structures of power. These novels represent social sufferings and historical dilemmas and problems—many of which are inherited and many are created by the postcolonial ruling elites.

At the same time, Indian society remains “deeply hierarchical and unequal” and the problem of establishing “effective” democracy in a nation beset with crisis, both internal and external, haunts the national fabric. All the novels studied here and many others, both older and the new ones, speak about these problems that stunt the growth of democratic ethos in the country. Liberal democracy in all its utopian glory remains just that—a utopia, and therefore history, in the sense of Fukuyama (a la Hegel and Kojeve) remains very much alive and real for Indians.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the enthusiastic glorification of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Francis Fukuyama announced the “End of History”, by which he meant that, with the collapse of communism, the democratic capitalist order has come to stay. According to Fukuyama, it is the most natural and best form of governance and one that exists as “the end of history”. Obviously, Fukuyama’s theory draws from the ideas of Hegel for

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whom "the end of history" was something like the Prussian state in which he ended his career. Again, for Marx, the "end of history" could mean the advent of communism and the "dictatorship of the proletariat". For Fukuyama, it is the end of a certain ideological order and the solidification of another ideal—liberal democracy. He envisions the triumph of liberal democracy (which he does not hesitate to identify with capitalist democracy) as the end of History. Once it is achieved, "there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all the really big questions had been settled."  

He proclaims free market economy as the most natural form of economic organization. But the truth, as it has emerged, in the aftermath of 9/11, the never-ending conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, the dissents in Yemen, Egypt, former Yugoslavia, and in many Asian countries, history has a long way to go before liberal democracy triumphs over chaos.

In India, we have already seen the many failures and betrayals by this form of government. This thesis, in a way, charted this failure and the conflicts, crisis, fissures inherent in our democratic set-up. Fukuyama relies heavily on Hegelian dialectics and it has serious consequences for historical thinking in the context of India. Already Hegel is a much hated figure in the novels by Rushdie, Tharoor and Sealy. Fukuyama’s thesis subscribes to Hegel’s philosophy of Universal History where mankind moves inevitably to one final destination through its historical lineal progress. But contesting such prophetic teleology, Roger Kimball writes:

Is it not rather that what one needs in order to discern progress is knowledge of where mankind has been, not where it is going? And in any case, whom should we trust to furnish us with accurate reports about where mankind is going? Is G. W. F. Hegel, for all his genius, really a reliable guide? Is Fukuyama? No: History, a humble account of how man has lived and suffered, is what we require to declare progress, not prophecy.  

Imaginative writing, and novels in particular have accounted for this human side of history—the sufferings, pain, chaos, displacement, loss—that prophetic history or celebratory accounts of democracy and the new world order have ignored. Perhaps the most obvious problem with Hegel’s philosophy of history is that the necessary freedom which his system mandates can
look a lot like unfreedom to others who disagree with its dictates. Sometimes “real freedom” that Hegel speaks of demands the subjugation of mere contingent will.

Growing tides of globalization has further given strength to the proposition of the death of history. Theories of globalization have increasingly emphasized the erasure of cultural differences under globalization. The much discussed book Empire by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) well illustrates globalization theory’s manoeuvre of a paradigm shift in cultural critique away from the question of history.17 But to speak of such a demise or downplaying of the relevance of history is nothing but a premature and potentially dangerous gesture. On the contrary, it is just because of globalization’s onslaught that the question of history becomes all the more urgent for postcolonial societies. Postcolonial studies cannot afford to do without a consideration of history as the defining characteristic of postcolonial studies is nothing less than the engagement with colonial pasts and the historical processes by which postcolonial societies have come into being.

Philosophers, historians and ideologues like Hegel, Fukuyama and Kojève are all exponents of a strain of triumphalism within Western culture that is ideologically highly suspect. This strain becomes defunct in the presence of the kind of historical narratives of the nation that the writers under this study offer. Derrida was vehemently opposed to this kind of triumphalism in the ideology of the end of history which also implies intolerance towards ways of life other than one’s own. Dissent is one way of countering such hegemonic moves and imaginative writing is definitely a powerful site of such dissent. Derrida, in Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International (1994), speaks of benign spirits and frightening specters of the past who are always with us, and that those dead will continue to haunt us and to defer the possibility of any end to history; as he says: “the dead can often be more powerful than the living”.18 We cannot escape from history because we are products of as well as heir to the past. As such a society simply extends history as it goes along. Derrida’s spirit of Marx, with its appeal to plural socio-political constituencies is designed to counter such triumphalism, with all the drawbacks that accompany it.

Zygmunt Bauman, bemoaning the lack of ideological alternative to Western capitalist democracy post-Cold War, warned of the dangerously rampant and unchecked nature of liberal democracy, with its almost unlimited power and authority to exploit and control lives
of defenceless individuals—a scenario that is fast emerging in India.\textsuperscript{19} Seen from such perspectives, and keeping in mind the need for dissent and plurality of life, "one can, indeed one \textit{should,} be late to the end of history, since that demonstrates resistance to an authoritarianism that is all too typically a stock-in-trade of ideology in general" (italics in original).\textsuperscript{20} An oppositional ideology is necessary to keep the state of affairs in balance. Postcolonial writers and intellectuals, despite the many fissures and failures, are engaged in working out such an oppositional discourse.

History and the nation remain, for Indian English writers, the prime focus, as Indian democracy goes through crisis of cessation, fundamentalism, terrorism, corruption, as well as showing occasional signs of real progress. In this sense, the journey of liberal democracy in India continues and so, with it, "history" goes on, too. Consequently, writers go on producing narratives of history of this journey of the nation.

Many of the most significant works that have emerged in recent years pick up and rework the themes of the novels discussed in this study, albeit in fresh ways and in different contexts. History and historical consciousness remains the central concern of Indian English writers. Both older writers and a new crop of writers continue to explore historical issues in fiction. Among the older writers, Amitav Ghosh’s \textit{The Hungry Tide,} and \textit{The Sea of Poppies,} Rushdie’s \textit{Shalimar the Clown} and the recent \textit{The Enchantress of Florence}, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s \textit{The Mamaries of the Welfare State} and \textit{Weight-loss,} Amit Choudhury’s \textit{A New World} etc are all about history. As in the novels under the study, we see the more recent writers writing about family and community. One of the best novels that incorporate family story and larger historical perspectives is Rohinton Mistry’s \textit{Family Matters} published in 2002. In 2004 an even older writer, Kushwant Singh wrote a novel \textit{Burial at Sea,} returning once again to the territories he knows best: twentieth century Indian history, bogus religion and sexuality.

The nation remains an integral concern of the writers. The younger and recent writers, though not rejecting the national altogether, seem to be moving away from pan-Indian nation-centric engagement to a more diffused and wide-ranging approach to engaging with history. This concern with local allegiance and people seems to be increasingly the dominant tendency of recent Indian English novels in their representation of history and the nation. Many recent
novels have focussed on communal and sectarian religious tensions. Hindu majoritarianism, Islamism, and movements of secession, all of which put pressure on the idea of a unitary postcolonial nation-state, also emerge as prominent concerns.

Some of the recent novels, especially those written after the terror attack in New York in September 2001, attempt to make sense of the menace of terrorism and the growing concern regarding America’s war on Terror and its fallout around the world. Rushdie’s novel *Fury* (2001), though coming out before 9/11 is about the atmosphere of fear, menace and anger in New York and the religious revival and Islamism in America. Rushdie has always been concerned with fundamentalism and religious bigotry and in his later novels like *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* he exposes Hindu religious nationalism which has threatened the secular, cosmopolitan essence of India. *The Moor’s Last Sigh* provides an elegy to Rushdie’s ideal of hybridity as a consequence of his realisation that such a concept was no longer applicable in an India dominated by Hindu nationalism and the homogenising forces of a global capitalist economy. *Midnight’s Children* still pleads for a fulfilment of the promises of equality and justice made by the Nehruvian nation-state. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, in contrast, the Nehruvian consensus is depicted as crumbling and Hindu nationalism is portrayed as the new dominant force in the late twentieth century, a force which imagines India as an exclusive Hindu nation.

Fundamentalism and its contamination of civil society and democratic ethos of the country as a theme has always been a concern—from *Midnight’s Children*, *Satanic Verses* and *The Shadow Lines* to *The Great Indian Novel* and *Such a long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*. These historical novels are intimately caught up in the debate around secular and religious identities in the public sphere that gained increasing momentum in India of the 1980s and 1990s. In India, the rise of the Hindu right has resulted in a sidelining of secular nationalism, based on the idea of a composite national culture, in favour of Hinduized versions of it. But in recent times, especially after the Ayodhya and Godhra incident, and the several riots in Gujrat and other parts of India, the theme has taken the centre-stage. We have seen one aspect of this theme in Hariharan’s novel *In Times of Siege*. Tharoor’s later novel *Riot* is exclusively about religious fundamentalism and its senseless violence. Raj Kamal Jha’s *The Blue Bedspread* is a moving tale of loss of innocence in time of religious violence. Shama Futehally’s *Reaching Bombay Central* (2002) and Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* deal
with similar themes but they do so from from different perspectives. In each book the crucible from which the characters are cast has been forged out of communalist pressures on individual civil servants. In *In Times of Siège* the pressures come from fundamentalist fervor, whereas in *Reaching Bombay Central*, it's simple political expediency that menaces the characters. Futehally's novel portrays the anguish of a Muslim couple, the toll it takes on their marriage and family life, the simple awkwardness of being Muslim in India today.

Another significant development to this diffused approach towards history and nation is the growing urge of Indian English writers to tackle the issues of globalization and ramifications of economic liberalization. Indian English writing is now strongly embedded in the global frame, and it is now engaged in asking questions like "what shape does 'India' take fifty or more years after the independent nation-state officially came into existence on the world stage? How are older narratives of nation being rewritten or replaced by new ones that seek to break, remould or interrogate the former in the face of migration and globalization? Who owns 'the past' and what is the writer's responsibility in relation to it?"\(^{21}\)

Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* published in 1997 was, it seems in retrospect, to be one of those novels that heralded a new kind of engagement with the question of history than the Rushdie-inspired earlier novels. If Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and the novels following in its wake were marked with the big questions of the nation and history on epic scales, *God of Small Things* concentrates on "small voice of history".\(^{22}\) It makes use of personal memories of childhood, which is both idyllic and tragic, and through this Roy displaces the fixation on the nation-state. History is very much a presence in Roy's novel. But unlike the novels discussed in this study, *God of Small Things* uses History as an abstract idea rather than events. Of course, this abstract notion of history tends to make the novel ahistorical at times. But the point is that the novel eschews large narratives and seeks to articulate the inner, tragic world of people which cannot be articulated through the narratives of official history.

Ever conscious of the larger world—of globalization, the nation, the collapse of non-alignment, American dominance—the novel still resolutely keeps its focus on the local. Anna Guttman, in her discussion of the novel, points out that the novel may not be "an unequivocal celebration of the small in opposition to the large, despite what the title suggests" and that History "looms large" in the novel; but nevertheless, it overtly rejects "national allegory as a
governing conceit in favour of an emphasis on the domestic, the marginal, and the unspeakable".23

Among other things, Roy’s The God of Small Things emphasizes the material or economic aspects of globalization as well as the asymmetry it creates between different parties on the cultural level. Margareta Petersson comments: “Through the technique of fragmentation, local history is placed within a larger contemporary perspective where relationships between India and the West are just as asymmetrical as during the colonial times”.24

Rushdie’s later novels like The Moor’s Last Sigh (1995), The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999) and Fury (2001) are marked by what Patrick Bixby calls “the Global aesthetic”. In these later novels Rushdie “writes back” to a postcolonial world that, if it has suffered from the mire of imperialism, is now swept up into the economic, political, and cultural currents of globalization.25 In The Moor’s Last Sigh Rushdie, among other intertexts and allusions, mostly refers to the narrative techniques of Bombay Talkies, to characters drawn from American television, to the advertising slogans. In this text that speak about the global age, American pop figures like the Lone Ranger and Tanto circulate with Indian movie stars, a mixture which registers not so much the hybrid national vigour of the early Moor paintings as the shallow heterogeneity of a transnational popular culture.

The fascination with the landscape of pop and kitsch, is, if anything, intensified in Rushdie’s next novel, The Ground Beneath Her Feet. To chart the trajectory of Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama, musicians of Indian descent who migrate from East to West, the narrator Umeed Merchant calls on not only allusions to Hollywood movies and American TV shows, but most significantly, rock lyrics from the entire history of the genre. Rock ‘n’ Roll here represents the preeminent cultural phenomenon of the global age. It inhabits the mind of the Indian born narrator. Of course Rushdie shows that cultural exchanges do not always necessarily move in one direction, from West to East, but is a two-way traffic. The novel displays a certain reverence for cultural pluralism, which represents less the negative side effects of late capitalism and more of a celebratory vision of globalization as hybridity. Compared to Rushdie’s celebration of the global condition, Roy’s novels is a scathing critique of the negative effects of globalization. Petersson says: “Rushdie sees that which is new, the

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exciting things that grow out of and are created in the hybrid aesthetics, while Roy concentrates on that which is extinguished and is smoothed out”.

The cultural, social and psychological displacement and other negative effects of globalization also inform Kiran Desai’s Booker Prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2005). In the novel Desai straddles three worlds with ease and makes a telling commentary on modern issues that beset all nations—globalization, multiculturalism, modernization, terrorism and insurgency. The novel also questions the very existence of immigrants and their strange isolated lives. Desai takes a skeptical view of the West's consumer-driven multiculturalism, and probes in a subtle yet probing manner the triumphalism of the West which glosses over the horrors that countless others suffer in an unequal and unjust world order. At such moments, Desai seems far from writers like Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru, whose fiction takes a generally optimistic view of the processes and consequences of globalization. It is a subtle yet powerful critique of multiculturalism which is confined to the Western metropolis and academe—a multiculturalism that does not or cannot address the causes of extremism and violence in the modern world. The novel suggests that economic globalization cannot become a route to prosperity for the downtrodden.

Apart from, globalization, fundamentalism and terrorism, recent Indian English writers are much beholden to the problems of insurgency and cessation—problems that affect a large number of states in the country. Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss* which we have already discussed is set in the 1980s when the northeastern state of India, Sikkim was reeling under a terrible grip of insurgent violence. It is one of those novels (Siddhartha Deb’s *Point of Return* is another) that depict an India reeling under growing pressures of cesssionist movements. As in Deb’s novel, the uneasy relationship between the postcolonial nation-state and its north-eastern territories provides the context for an often moving study of loneliness and pain as a historical and emotional legacy as it structures both private and social relations.

An increasing number of novels are being written which depict this insurgency problem (both ethnic and state sponsored) and ethnic assertion by communities and tribes. The Northeastern part of India is a case in point. In the multi-ethnic Indian state, assimilation and agglomeration among various ethnic groups were possible during the national movement and even when the nation-state came to be organized. But as Amedo Maiello observes, the
new Indian state adopted a "policy of benign neglect" of the communities living in the margins, and in the subsequent periods overlooked the silent, concrete internal transformations taking place among such communities/ethnic groups. In India, the postcolonial leadership, emphasizing the inviolability and security of the territory, has repressed and persecuted the marginalized communities, especially the tribes of the peripheral regions. Their value systems and languages are rejected as obscurantist, and not given their due status in the larger pan-Indian scenario.

The Northeast remains a highly volatile region—politically and socially. It is still regarded as frontier region, a concept inaugurated by the British and adopted by postcolonial nation-state, and it remains more or less—marginalized from mainstream India. Various ethnic groups and communities vie for autonomy and downright 'independence' from India. Insurgency and violence have almost become a way of life, and the citizens live precarious lives in this heavily militarized region. It is only very recently that English writing from the northeast have emerged and it has helped put the region in the limelight. Unlike the nation-centric epic narratives of Rushdie and Tharoor, the writings from the northeast show a keen sense of place or rootedness, and always deals with the issues and problems most urgent and real to the region.

The spectre of secession haunts the northeast and it, along with the violence that rises with sub-nationalist ethnic assertion, terrorism, and military atrocities underwrite much of the recent writings from the northeast—Deb’s The Point of Return, Temsula Ao’s These Hills Called Home (2006), Indrani Rai Medhi’s The Deputy Collector’s Wife etc. Like Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu in her two novels A Terrible Matriarchy (2007) and Mari deal with the nationalist assertion among the Naga tribes and the terrible experiences of the people in the militarized zone. Her novel Mari is one of the few novels in English which depicts the rarely-told history of the 2nd World War in Kohima, one of the most crucial theatres of the War that changed the tide of the War in the Eastern side. Deb’s novel Surface, and very recently Siddhartha Sarma’s The Grasshopper’s Song represent this forgotten history and the historical experience of the War in the eastern side of India. Another important writer from the northeast is Mamang Dai who writes about Arunachal Pradesh—a state that has remained a bone of contention between India and China. In her novella The Legends of Pensam (2006), she writes about the Adi tribe of the state—an “in-between” people (in her own words) who
are caught between a traditional way of life and the onslaught of modernity, and how they are negotiating change with memory and remembrance and a terrible sense of loss.

The northeast is a complex region with heterogeneous people and communities with relatively autonomous histories. Numerous cultural groups with conflicting claims for political space and identity, and different stages of development constitute the socio-political matrix of the region. Tilottoma Misra, in her introduction to what is one of the pioneering anthologies of writings from the Northeast (both in English and in translation) writes:

The ‘seven sisters of the North-East’ which had only marginal historical links with each other in pre-colonial times, had their doors open towards South-East Asia, eastern Bengal, Bhutan, and Tibet—regions with which they shared boundaries and lively commercial and cultural contacts. It was only after the Partition of the Sub-continent that the region became totally landlocked with almost all the doors closed except for a narrow corridor that kept it linked with India. The geographical isolation has led to erasures and marginalization on multiple levels, the effect of which is clearly discernible in the writings from the region.28

The people from the region carry a distrust against the center, and conflicts, war, cessation are tearing this region apart. The problems created by illegal migration from neighbouring countries and the resultant demographic and socio-political unrest have taken its toll on the psyche of the people who feel they have been regarded as the “Other” of the mainland India. The nation-centric epic narratives have often failed to notice the micro-stories of the region and to take account of contemporary history-in-the-making. Moreover, there is the added problem of misinterpretation, misrepresentation and stereotyping of the people and events in the northeast by the national media.

There is hardly any discussion or even mention of writers or poets from the Northeast in discussion of Indian English writing. It is as if, speaking the same language, these writers and poets are not heard. The academic engagement with Indian English writing has remained confined to canonical writers and texts, most importantly Rushdie and a few writers who followed in his wake. There is a need to study this body of writing from the Northeast, which
might make for more comprehensive and nuanced approach in writing and thinking about history and the "idea of India".

Moreover, recent Indian English writing shows a maturity and confidence and an urge to experiment further in various genres like science fiction, political thrillers and detective fiction. Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* is set in the year 2030 one of the most interesting futuristic novels that have come out of India and it depicts Indian history backwards upto the year 1930. *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* is a book that spans an entire century, from the tumultuous '30s of the last century to the yet-to-arrive '30s of the current millennium. Some might read the novel as homage to the past, or even a sci-fi exploration of the distant future. Iconic phases in our history: the freedom struggle, Indira Gandhi's Emergency, and a future in which conflicts have given way to new, post-national alliances as well as fresh possibilities of nuclear annihilation. The war, between India and the Saudi-Pakistan alliance is one backdrop. The old war, WW2 is another, and in an interesting episode we see a captured Indian soldier Kalidas flown to a prisoner of war camp where the Indian anti-British leader Subhash Chadra Bose is being held by the Russians. This is one novel that writes the nation and its tumultuous history in a genre that is still at its infancy. Comparing this dystopic novel with two other Indian English sci-fi novels, *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh (1997) and *Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000) by Upamanyu Chatterjee, Anna Guttman writes:

Whereas Ghosh’s novel invokes science as a tool of colonial knowledge and therefore Orientalism and oppression, *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* sees forces of nationalism and internationalism making equally oppressive use of technology. In contrast to *The Calcutta Chromosome*, in which technology paradoxically helps lead the main character to the truth of counterscience, *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* associates technology more generally—from the emergence of water substitutes to new fighter planes—with violent conflict, social and political disintegration, environmental degradation, and indeterminacy. Its target is the Indian nation-state. In this, *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* may most resemble Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000). But while the latter is also set in the future, the date is almost
incidental to the satirical arc in *Mammaries of the Welfare State*, and, unlike Joshi’s novel, technology is not a prominent concern for Chatterjee.29

Vikram Chandra’s recent novel *Sacred Games* is a political thriller that depicts India’s political underbelly and the underworld and corruption. Manjiri Prabhu’s *The Cosmic Clues* (2004) is another detective novel that charts the urban crime-scapes of modern India. Further experimentations can be seen in the emergence of graphic novels in India. Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh’s noir graphic novel *Kashmir Pending* (2007) is a tragic story of two friends set in the canvas of Kashmir militancy, fundamentalism and horrors of everyday life in the valley. These new novels and experimentations are taking Indian English novels and its representation of history, both past and present, to new dimensions.

This study has already demonstrated in some detail that there is no one single “story” of India as colonial and overtly nationalist fiction and historiography claim; there are only *stories*. To attend to the multitudinous stories of India, the post-Rushdie writers, more or less, the contemporary and recent writers are taking up various other issues and problems and themes. The earlier Indian English writers like Rao, Rushdie, Tharoor, Sealy sought to depict all of India and its vast history in epic scale. The representation of India and Indian history was for them a huge project. Rushdie himself spoke of such a project in a joint interview with Arundhati Roy:

What I’m saying is this: India allowed me to become the writer that I have become, that I could not have become otherwise. I mean, I know that this is a book [pointing to Roy’s novel] about small things, and intimacies, and details, and so on and, you know, good for it. But I’m saying that there is this other project which excited me which has to do with taking on the whole damn thing, you know, and that’s what I’ve wanted to do and tried to do [. . .].30

The writers under the present study have all attained great prominence in the literary canon and the global academic scenario. As we have already discussed this very prominence has rightly been the source of vigorous, even fractious, debate. This debate brings to light the faultline that divide these diasporic, metropolitan Indian English writers from the so-called
vernacular writers. Mostly this is a faultline that has profoundly inequitable consequences in terms of both economic privilege and cultural capital. Despite Rushdie’s damning of vernacular Indian literatures, there has been awareness among some Indian English writers regarding this divide. Vikram Seth and Kiran Nagarkar, for instance, have written eloquently about this divide. There is some weight to the argument put forwarded by critics that Indian English novelists—diasporic and metropolitan as they mostly are—remain distanced from the real concerns of most Indians. In their urge to explore the “national” question through diasporic, nostalgic lenses, these writers gloss over the numerous micro hi/stories and the complex transformations and changes happening in the life of the nation and communities. When the world reads these writers as the authentic, informed informers of India, it is often forgotten that their representations can in no way be truely authentic. Priyamvada Gopal asks, “What does it mean that the world reads and believes that it comprehends ‘India’ through Rushdie and Roy rather than Kamleshwar (Hindi), Ambai (Tamil), or Qurrutala in Hyder (Urdu)?”

It is true, to a great extent, that the representations of India and Indian history in these metropolitan writers are lopsided and biased due to market forces and their location. But a younger generation of writers like Pankaj Mishra, Alka Saraogi, Tabish Khair, Dhruba Hazarika, Siddhartha Sarma, and Siddhartha Deb etc are writing novels that show an insistent concern to grapple with just the kind of silent, local histories so often ignored by the earlier generation of writers. In more recent novel that emerged after the fading of pan-Indian nation-centric trope in the texts of the Rushdie generation, the engagement with history has become much more diffused. Apart from engaging transnational and global issues, many of these novels are, on the other hand, about smaller places, particular towns and cities, and small histories rather than the stories of entire India. Pankaj Mishra’s The Romantics (set in Benaras), Tabish Khair’s The Bus Stopped (Patna), Alka Saraogi’s Kalikatha: Via Bypass (Kolkata, 2003), Aminuddin Khan’s A Shift in the Wind (2004) etc are novels set in various cities and towns and all of them depict histories that were ignored or were not represented by the earlier epic narratives of nation.

Even though the metropolitan, diasporic Indian English novelists like Rushdie, Ghosh, Mistry, Chandra etc. have been accused of glossing over many local, silent histories and catering to a fetishized version of India for a global readership, they have scored over regional
writers in a few points. First of all, these novels have made serious interventions into the arena of historical debate in postcolonial India and they have exposed the use and abuse of history by political forces. Secondly they have written novels that probe into the material and psychological conditions, upheavals and negotiations of migrant subjects. The anxieties and fears and sadness of migrancy and cultural displacements in a globalized world have been memorably dealt with by these writers. Thirdly, these novelists display a much more sensitive and involved awareness regarding the dilemmas and transformations brought about by the forces of globalizations and as such their representations regarding the nation and history are aligned to the issues of globalization.

Finally, it can be said that Indian English writing in its present state, as far as engagement of history and nation is concerned, has outgrown the earlier project of “Writing Back” in retort to colonial authority and oppression while being absorbed in a frenzied obsession to create “national allegories” in the Jamesonian sense. The writers, both the old masters and the new crop of writers are writing novels that display a confident movement towards transculturation and transnationalism. Rushdie’s later novels, Vikram Seth’s An Equal Music (1999), Githa Hariharan’s When Dreams Travel (1999), Sunetra Gupta’s A Sin of Colour (1999), Anita Desai’s Fasting, Feasting (1999), Ghosh’s River of Smoke (2011) are not set only in India and they are not just writing about the state of the nation. The spatial locations of these texts illustrate a familiarity with several metropolises in the West and outside India, with an unpromising passage from East to West and back. Novels like these show a very evident receptivity to Western culture while lucidly proffering a healthy critique of Indian society. Even though the Indian moorings are never denied, Indian English novels are increasingly attempting to sidestep the earlier project of binding itself to the epic task of writing the nation as a way to contest the colonial hegemony.

With some notable exceptions the Anglophone novel from and of India has liberated itself from a sense of address to the West and from “anxieties of Indianness”, taking its place in the Indian literary landscape with confidence but without complacency. It is undoubtedly a genre that has come into its own, exuding now a sense of belonging to a cultural and political context that is at once marked by very specific histories and constantly evolving. Its most important writers (themselves bi-or multilingual) are attentive to and remain troubled by the politics of linguistic faultlines and the skewed dynamics of working in a language accorded
disproportionate cultural and economic privilege. This is a genre that began with an interest in how to read the past and continues to remain concerned with the question of the burden of history. In its attempts to understand the pain of the present through reading the past, the Anglophone novel is an engaged and dynamic participant in a conversation that is taking place across the literary spectrum of India. At the same time, the engagement with history in Indian English novel has become diffused and wide-ranging, but nonetheless retains the variety of forms and genre, and a level of commitment and gusto that propels it towards greater and unexpected heights.
Notes and References


4. Dharma Kumar, in T. N. Dhar 71.

5. Vinay Lal 3.


15. Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, xii.

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22. See Ranajit Guha, “The Small Voice of History”, in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.), Subaltern Studies, ix. Writings on South Asian History and Society, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 1–12. Guha argues that Indian history is fixated on the nation-state, which determines how the past is to be read; this can be undone by listening to the myriad ‘small voices’ in civil society.


