CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Of all the literary genres, fiction has come to occupy the most important and powerful position today. As a literary form novel has evolved into a dominant form in the twentieth century. The spirit of the age is more effectively reflected through fiction than in poetry and drama. This is because, by its very nature, a novel is better equipped to deal with the social reality. Hence any substantial contribution of a period comes only from fiction. Thus the novel, being the most acceptable form for embodying one's experiences, ideas and thoughts has been very skilfully exploited by the writers throughout the world.

Indo-Anglian literature sprang from the necessity of the British rulers to impart English education to the natives of the country. The ignition came from Macaulay's Minutes, which stressed the necessity of introducing English language and literature for the benefit of the subjects under the crown. Indo-Anglian literature did not grow as solidly as literature did in the Western countries, in spite of the official support and backing. Though English became the lingua franca of the Indians, for the exchange of thoughts between one province and another, the Indo-Anglian novelists were handicapped in expressing themselves freely in a foreign tongue. So most of the early Indo-Anglian experiments in literature were done in verse.
Though prose of a non-fictional variety existed in abundance, the novel was conspicuously absent until the nineteen-twenties. One important reason for this absence may be found in the fact that the novel as an art form came to India with the British, and it was new in every Indian literature. Hence, for the novel proper, one had to wait till the later half of the nineteenth century. As part of the British colonisation, the Bible, Western classics and a few popular novels were translated into leading regional languages, and subsequently the prose medium gained currency. Keeping the Western novel as a model, the writers in India and other colonised countries were inspired to imitate the same, in spite of the fact that, novel as a form has taken root in India during the past hundred years. The fact is that, the story-telling tradition in the form of legends and puranas were the oldest and the greatest in the world.

The earliest experiments in Indian English Fiction, were tales rather than novels proper. Kylash Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of 48 Hours of the Year 1945*, was published in The Calcutta Literary Gazette (1835). The author has narrated the story of an imaginary unsuccessful revolt against the British rule a hundred years later. In the same vein Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *Republic of Orissa*, depicts an imaginary British defeat leading to the establishment of a democratic republic in Orissa. Though we cannot call these two tales as political fiction, one can always understand the strong nationalistic urge and the pressure of the times.
The first Indian English novel Raj Mohan’s Wife (1864) is a blend of romanticism seen in Walter Scott and the nationalism of Bengal. This novel deals with the story of a long suffering middle class Hindu wife at the hands of her callous husband. The urge for social reform became an important theme in these early Indian English fiction. The questions that engaged the minds of some of the early novelists were the position of women, the plight of the peasants and the decay of the old aristocracy. R.C. Dutt’s The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life (1902) strongly advocates widow-remarriage. Peasant life is the theme of Lal Behari Day’s Bengal Peasant Life (1908). In his Nasrin, An Indian Medley (1911) Sridar Jogendra Singh presents a realistic study of decadent aristocratic life in North India.

The political theme is hardly found in the fictions of this phase, as the day of organised political activity on a large scale was yet far off. However, Sarath Kumar Ghose’s The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna (1909) is an early attempt in which an enlightened Rajput prince hopes for a better understanding, mutual appreciation and goodwill between India and England. The religious life forms the chief motif in B.R. Rajam’s Vasudeva Sastri and A. Madhavaiah’s Thillai Govindan (1908). Another type of fiction which made an early appearance was historical romance. Prominent novels in this group are: T. Ramakrishna’s Padmini (1903); R.C. Dutt’s The Slave Girl of Agra (1909), Jogendra Singh’s Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen (1909).
In spite of the fact that, Indian English novels were written since 1856, these novels were rejected, with the argument that they were technically poor and of mediocre stuff, and an imitation of the Victorian model. However, K.S. Ramamurthi argues that, these early Indian English novelists were “conscious experimenters who adapted an alien form and medium to a socio-cultural situation and sensibility which were specifically Indian” (1980:10). Rejecting this claim, critics like Iyengar and Bhupal Singh have asserted the fact that, the Indo-Anglian novel made a real beginning only in the 1920s and 1930s. In spite of the claim that the literary scene in the beginning of the present century was dismal, the fact remains that a pioneering effort was made by these novelists.

The emergence of ‘The Big Three’ (as they were popularly known) – Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, brought new hopes in Indo-Anglian fiction. They not only re-laid the foundation and defined the area in which Indian novel in English was to grow, but also were the inaugurators of the revised novel form in India. Indian English novel began to follow certain definite patterns and consisted of well-defined stages. As R.S. Pathak observes, “The gradual progression from the imitative stage to realistic to psychological to experimental is not difficult to trace” (1999:11).

By 1930, Indian English literature was more than a century old and yet a single novelist with a substantial output did not emerge. And then came the Gandhian age (1920-1947), with the freedom
movement and the nationalist upsurge, which stirred the whole country to the roots. Emerging under the influence of Gandhi’s political and social programmes, Indian English novels, have tried to fuse form, substance and expression, which can be recognised as Indian. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, began their career during this phase. It was, in fact, during this period that Indian English fiction discovered some of the most significant themes such as the ordeal of the freedom-struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the economically exploited, etc.

Mulk Raj Anand’s pre-independence fiction deals with several aspects of social reform, including the plight of the untouchables in Untouchable (1935), which depicts a day in the life of Bakha, a sweeper boy. The novel is a forceful indictment of the evils of a perverted and decadent orthodoxy. His Coolie (1936) is another great epic of misery, dealing with the suffering and misery of the downtrodden and exploited masses of India. Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), as the title suggests, deals with the sufferings of the tea plantation workers and their exploitation by the colonial masters.

Raja Rao, like his contemporaries, was also influenced by Gandhi’s social reforms and freedom struggle. Some of his important works are Kanthapura (1938), which describes the civil disobedience struggle in a village Kanthapura. With its ingenuous mixing of myth
and history it is the outstanding Indian English novel of nation-building.

A new dimension was added to the novel of social portraiture when R.K. Narayan began his series of Malgudi novels with *Swami and Friends* (1935). Like Anand or Raja Rao, his novels are not aimed at reforming society or as a protest, but it is packed with humour and satire. His novels have created a world, which has appealed to readers across the globe. Narayan has produced his best works after Independence, when the little small-town of his microcosm developed into an awareness of the larger existential irony of human nature and life itself.

Apart from Anand, Rao and Narayan, the Pre-independence period gave birth to novels like K.S. Venkataramani’s *Murugan the Tiller, Kandan, the Patriot*; A.S.P. Ayyar’s *Baladitya*; K. Nagarajan’s *Athavar House* Dhan Gopal Mukherji’s *My Brother’s Face*, to name a few. With the intensification of the freedom-struggle and social-reform, politics and social themes loom large in the fiction of this period.

The momentum gained before independence was sustained after independence by these major novelists. This period also saw a number of novelists, for whom fiction became a vehicle for communicating different kinds of social, political and personal truths. These novelists began to promote the real India, putting aside, the Maharajahs, Mysteries and Mysticism. Bhabani Bhattacharya,
G.V. Desani, B. Rajan, Manohar Malgonkar, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai are some of the important novelists after independence, who have experimented with innovative techniques and themes.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), his first novel published within few months of independence, continued the tradition of social realism like Anand stressing, the importance of social purpose in fiction. This novel offers a realistic study of the Bengal famine of the early forties. The most daring experimental novel is G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter* (1948). The novel is extremely complex in theme and technique. It is a comic autobiography of a Eurasian eccentric and his serious quest for understanding the meaning of life. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will* (1955) offers engaging comedies of north Indian urban middle class life. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *Two Virgins* (1973) picture rustic life, while *A Handful of Rice* (1966) is a realistic novel on the low class urban life. The Chinese invasion of 1962 forms the setting of Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966). The tragic drama of partition has inspired novelists like Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Attia Hosain. While Arun Joshi is preoccupied with the theme of alienation, his protagonist in *The Foreigner* (1968) is alienated from all humanity; the hero of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) is alienated from his middle class culture, and finally runs away to join an aboriginal tribe. Anita Desai has attempted to bring feminism and the feminist spirit to the centre-stage. *In Cry the
Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer? the usual stereotype of woman as ideal wife and mother is rejected. Representing the urban population, these second-generation novelists, thus successfully experimented with various themes.

FICTION OF THE 80s

Tracing the growth and development of the Indian novel in English, 1980s occupy the most significant position. With the publication of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, the 1980s became a remarkable period in the literary history of the Indian fiction in English. The total literary scenario in India underwent a sea change with the emergence of young talented writers like, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga. These writers called "Rushdie's Children" [The New York Times (16 December 1991)] pumped new blood and life into the fiction writing in India by experimenting with complex themes, incorporating new techniques in narration and in the use of language. As Barucha observes "a time when it finally shook off its imperial baggage, nationalist guilt and linguistic complex, a time when it came of age". (1994:354) These novelists took up issues pertaining to the Indian sub-continent, and in the process came out with themes and techniques, which were highly ambiguous, experimental, interrogative, confessional and polemical (Pathak, 1999:18).
Apart from these “Rushdie’s Children”, there was also a group of novelists who were not directly influenced by Rushdie. Most of these novelists, adopt only the conventional narrative techniques. Novelists like Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Gita Mehta, Dina Mehta, Shashi Deshpande and others, have published many powerful novels that have made significant experiments in fictional form and narrative techniques.

Many of the writers mentioned above are located in the Western countries like Britain, America and Canada, for occupational and strategic reasons. The target audience of these novelists is the west. Having chosen their subjects, characters and themes from India, these novelists have represented India in a broad cultural context of human civilisation, showing a marked advancement of the Indian novel in English. In the process of depicting the Indian society, many of these writers have expounded their concern for the marginalised and the underprivileged.

The first of the new novels to arrive was Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), which heralded a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. Rushdie’s main assets are his vaulting imagination and word play. Amitav Ghosh’s first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is about Alu, the protagonist who is forced to run away from his village, as he is falsely accused as a terrorist. Shashi Tharoor’s first novel, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) attempts a correspondence between the chief characters and events in
The Mahabharata and the leading political figures in modern Indian history. The Memory of Elephants (1988) by Boman Desai is the story of a young Parsi scientist in the USA, who invents a machine which can activate the part of the brain in which memories are stored. Farrukh Dhondy attempts to make fantasy subserve the needs of comic extravaganza in his Bombay Duck (1990). Looking Through Glass (1995) by Mukul Kesavan is about a young photographer, who accidentally falls off a railway bridge and when he gains consciousness, he discovers to his surprise that he is now back in 1940s. Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance (1995) pictures the excesses of Emergency. Allan Sealy’s The Trotter Nama: A Chronicle (1988) is a family chronicle blending history and legend of an Anglo-Indian community. Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy (1993) which won as much attention on its publication as Midnight’s Children is a novel of large dimension in the tradition of Middlemarch. Githa Hariharan is another significant woman writer, whose The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Novel in the Eurasian region. Dina Mehta’s And Some Take a Lover (1992) gives us an insight into Parsi life. Gita Mehta’s Raj (1989) paints an evocative picture of life in an Indian royal family. These novels have reflected the spirit of the age more pervasively and effectively than any other writings. Further they have proved that, the most substantial contribution of a period comes from fiction, and not from poetry and drama.
(RE)-WRITING / (RE)-VISIONING HISTORY/HISTORY AND FICTION

History has always been about telling a story of the past, and whenever the past is narrated in the present, it becomes "histories" constructed at different times according to different power structures. For Michel Foucault, Hayden White and Louis Mivik, history is a political act, for it is created by the historians. History for them is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (White: 1987: IX-X). It has always been argued that, there can be no complete objectivity in history writing. The historian like a novelist selects his material, with which he includes, excludes, stresses a point of his liking, suppresses a fact, which he does not like, or want according to his pre-conceived notions. A novelist does the same with his material, and hence there is not much difference between a historian and a novelist.

Historians mainly emphasise the role of important individuals and institutions in their writings. By giving importance to politically important events, historians usually miss certain historical events that influence the morals and manners of a community. On the other hand, a novelist attempts to fill these gaps with lively characters and events by using his imagination.

One can always establish that, there can be no single authentic history or single perspective of history. As Nila Shah observes, "all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpugnable element of interpretation" (2003:14). Hence the narration of an
historical event depends on the narrator and his perspective.
An example would be, The Revolt of 1857, “This is what the English
call the Sepoy Mutiny, and what the Hindus call the War of
Independence” (Durant, 1931:15).

Hence, re-writing history through fiction has a greater capacity
to reveal the truths of the time. These novels reveal the real
his(her)/story, which has been waiting to be told at the margins.
By presenting an intimate view of life, these novels provide a holistic
picture of perceived reality with the emotions involved in it.

They transport the reader into a particular setting to involve
him/her in the lives and thoughts of a set of characters –
real or fictitious. The backdrop against which the narration
is developed may be fictitious too but it is the society the
novelist thinks ‘is’ or ‘ought to be’/‘ought not to be’.
(Shah, 2003:19).

Thus these narratives often become a critique of the existing
socio-political system.

With the days of positivist history coming to an end, it is argued
that history cannot give us direct access to objective facts. Hence in
recent times, throughout the world, historical fiction has been gaining
currency. In fact, critics have been arguing that, the novel came into
existence by imitating history during the early days. In the Middle
Ages, when fiction was gaining popularity, the novelists used history
to re-write the social, political and cultural events. Till the early twentieth century, these types of fiction were called historical novels.

In the twentieth century novelists have begun to use the resources of fiction to retrieve the history of the marginalised people. While retrieving the history of the marginalised and the subaltern, these novelists not only interrogate history but have also problematised the historical discourse. Critics attempting to study the history-fiction links in these novels examine them within the frame of Post-Modern and Post-Colonial writings and they have also termed them as historiographic Meta-Fiction.

WESTERN/INDIAN PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY

In the West, history originated from myths and fairy tales, and later it was understood as a systematic study of the past. History is also understood as a scientific discipline, with specific importance to reason and evidence, which moves in a linear progression, in which events are arranged in a chronological order.

On the other hand, Indian concept of history differs from the west in many ways. History, for Indians, is a blend of myth, tradition and convention that is closely related to India’s rich cultural heritage, and values. Unlike the west, Indian historiography did not believe in the linear documentation of history.

“History, for India was not a linear progression of events in a chronological order on merely a retelling of great events.
It was a poetic awakening of the people who figure in these events and of gods and goddesses” (Shah, 2003:22).

As part of their colonisation, the British introduced a new perspective to Indian historiography. They made the Indian historians and intellectuals believe and adopt the Western sense of history as the universally valid perception of history. Hence Indian historians have always depended on the Western historiographers for their writing of history.

**HISTORY IN FICTION – EARLY STAGES**

In India the use of history by the fictional writers is not a new phenomenon. There are evidences to show the involvement of history, when the novel was in the process of gaining a distinct identity of its own in India. Tracing the growth and development of the Indian novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee reveals that, the earliest traces of ‘history fiction’ links can be traced to Bankim Chandra who was the master of the romantic as well as the historical novel. Further she reveals that in almost all the Indian languages (including Indian English), the novel first established itself as the historical novel, “almost everywhere the first crop showed a preoccupation with historical romance” (Mukherjee: 2000, 15).

The novels that deal with History-Fiction interface can be classified under four different groups. The first group are the novels written till the 1930s. These novels were British in model, and these
novelists, while reviving and re-narrating the history, have brought in their experiences of caste, class, religion and exposure to colonialism. Apart from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864), some of the novels in this group are Ram Krishna Pant’s *The Boy of Bengal* (1866), Lal Behari Day’s *The History of a Bengal Raiyat* (1874), T. Ramakrishna’s *Padmini* (1903), Romesh Chandra Dutt’s *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909), Sir Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahan* (1909) and A.S.P. Ayyar’s *Baladitya* (1930).

These earliest novelists writing in English used history in their novels only for ornamental purpose. They believed that their romantic tales with a blend of the past (history) would be a suitable form of expression. However in the later stages when the British colonialism had an impact on their political and social lives, these writers understood the importance for the retrieval of their old values and traditions. Hence these novelists have used history as a tool towards social reform and as a protest against colonialism.

**HISTORY IN FICTION – FREEDOM MOVEMENT**

The second group of novels are those that were written between 1930s and 1950s. These novelists were different from the earlier novelists, because these writers attempted to re-write the history of the nation with a specific purpose. As Mukherjee describes, these novels were, “narratives of resistance”, (1971:23) attempting to challenge the imperial powers and the experience of colonialism. The Freedom Movement of Mahatma Gandhi, made these writers look
at India from a new perspective. The Indian struggle for Independence was an epic struggle covering nearly half a century. The unarmed, superstitious and poverty-ridden Indian nation had to shake off the lethargy of centuries, forget its castes, sub-castes, provincial differences and march ahead on the road to progress. The Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi created this miracle. As a man of many sided personality, with his weapon of truth, love and non-violence, Gandhi was able to inspire the entire nation.

Mahatma Gandhi’s struggle had witnessed important milestones in India’s Freedom Movement like the Khilafat Movement (1920 – 21), the Satyagraha against the Salt Laws (1930 – 31), the Quit India Movement (1942) and other struggles till Independence was achieved in 1947. On the other side a similar struggle was fought against the social evils like superstitions, the caste system, widow remarriage, child marriage and untouchability, which were fragmenting the society. As Mukerjee observes, “that under Gandhi’s leadership India’s political movement for freedom was inalienably tied up with social reform” (1971:35). These struggles, which caught the imagination of the entire nation, also inspired the writers of this time, and in many of these novels, the marginalised people became the protagonists.

These novels have tried to fuse form, substance and expression, which can be recognised as Indian. With the freedom movement gaining momentum, the nation was in turmoil. The freedom struggle,
not only engulfed the nation, but also influenced the fiction writers. Emerging under the influence of Gandhi’s political and social programmes, writers like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand began to re-write the social and political history in their novels, which reflected the views of the underprivileged in society. Though some of the novels of this period like Anand’s Coolie, Untouchable, Two Leaves and a Bud, and K.S. Venkatramani’s Kandan the Patriot, deal with the problems faced by the marginalised and the downtrodden in Indian social setup, leading to re-writing of history, the seminal Indian English novel which set out to subvert the coloniser's view of India was Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938), with its ingenious mixing of myth and history. According to Helen Tiffin:

In Kanthapura there is History and this History is presented in a different way, where the author undermines both the official/colonisers’ version of India. The author's main aim is to reiterate the freedom struggle, thus, turning the anti-colonial history of India into itihasa, Raja Rao, beats the 'Western Master narrative of history', at its own game by surrounding and then expelling its intrusive narrativisation (1988: 175).

**NOVELS AFTER INDEPENDENCE – 1950s TO 1980s**

A good number of novels, like Train to Pakistan, The Rape, Azadi, The River with Three Banks and Sunlight on a Broken
Column written after Independence dealt with the partition history, which culminated in a frenzy of Hindu-Muslim riots. Though many historians have recorded the history of partition, the number of novels written on the horrors of the partition is less compared to the novels published after the World War I and World War II, in the west.

All these novelists are of the view that, if not for the power-hungry politicians, the Hindus and the Muslims could have lived together as they had lived for a century and a half under the British rule. Re-writing the partition history, these novelists are impartial and unbiased in their portrayal of the holocaust. According to them, both communities are to be blamed. "The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped" (Singh: 1988, 9). Most of the novelists who wrote on partition were either just born or not born, when the holocausts took place. In these novels written after three decades, one finds a distancing in time and emotion, which has helped these writers to see the past from a new perspective.

The merger of Indian princely states into the Indian union has also been re-written by few novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Malgonkar and Kamala Markandaya. These novelists have traced the court romances, feuds, corruptions and illusions of the rulers, hoping that they would be able to defeat both the British and Nationalists to establish their own Raj.
The Devils Wind: Nana Saheb's Story (1972) written after Independence by Manohar Malgonkar is a landmark novel, attempting to re-write the history of the First Indian War of Independence i.e. the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The primary aim of the novelist is to establish the fact that, the soldiers’ revolt, was a war of Independence and not a Sepoy Mutiny as claimed by Colonial Historians. By re-writing the history of the mutiny after 115 years, the novelist challenges the official British history, and places before the readers, his version of history from the Indian point of view.

RE-WRITING HISTORY/FICTIONS OF THE 1980s

The 1980s occupies the most significant position in the growth and development of Indian novel in English. The most sensational literary event, was the publication of Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children in 1981. Many novelists have taken up history as their theme in their writings. Breaking the traditional narrative technique, with new modes of narration, all these novels challenge the official version with multiple versions of history that question and destabilise the official version. In all these novels the life of the protagonist is intertwined with the history of the nation. Many of these novels are meta-fictional in nature and the protagonists are very much self-conscious about their re-writing a nation’s history from their memory. These novels deconstruct the well-established notion of history, family, tradition and patriarchy for their ideological underpinnings. Many of these authors have fixed their novels in the
background of historical events and have blended historical facts with fiction.


Many of these novels begin with the pre-independence history and move on to the independence and post-independence history of India. These novels end with the contemporary history/events like the imposition of Emergency, the growth of regional and communal organisations, the demolition of Babri Masjid and the communal riots, which followed. These novels by rewriting the nation’s history have politicised and problematised the history of the nation. As Bharucha observes, “these texts have sought to repossess and re-write history and re-chart cultural territory” (1994:357).

Subjecting the Pre-Independence, Post-Independence and contemporary history to scrutiny and critical examination, these
novelists believe that the same oppression experienced during the Pre-Independence is also experienced during the Post-Independence period. The foreign colonial forces have given way to native colonial forces in the form of politicians, officials, regional and religious organisations, poverty, corruption, unemployment, to name a few. After Independence, nothing changed in India as expected by the people. “After all, the mere replacement of the white sahib by the brown sahib cannot effect a radical cure for the besetting ills of India” (Iyengar: 1990, 320).

Many of these Indian novelists, differ from their Western counter parts in that they not only contest and challenge the history written by their erstwhile colonial masters, but also the history written by native (Indian) historians, before and after independence, which is subjected to a critical evaluation and examination. These novelists undermine the official version of history by offering a new version to show that the earlier version is unreliable. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, Gita Mehta’s *Raj*, Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* or Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass*, provide multiple versions of the history that subvert the official version. These novels share certain literary conventions, like the protagonist’s self-conscious feeling that s/he is writing fiction, lapsed memory used as a device to destabilise meaning, words seen as capable of falsification and the well established notion of history being deconstructed.
POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY

The complicity between the historical discourse and the strategies of cultural, social and political domination and self-legitimation of the colonisers has emerged as an important preoccupation in post-colonial studies. This domination and restructuring were largely legitimised and sustained by the versions of history offered by colonial historians and historiographers. Hence, all post-colonial writings are concerned with resistance to the colonial authority and its exploitative ideology. As Tiffin observes:

it has been the project of post-colonial writing to re-enter, from its ‘peripheral’ position between, and thus within, two worlds, to interrogate and deconstruct European discourse and discursive strategies; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in non-European environment. (1987:27)

Hence these post-colonial novels, by re-writing history, challenge the Euro-centric history and have rejected the “historical objectivity” made by the colonial masters. For them, history is governed by institutions and power-structures, determined by the dominant groups and dominant ideologies. By challenging the ideologically determined paradigms of power relationships, these post-colonial writers in India have not only questioned the validity of
the imperial version of history but have also challenged the Indian version of history.

In India the post-independent Indian historians have complicated and misrepresented history due to their ideological and religious preoccupations. Hence, in post-colonial India, the past appears to be largely misconstrued. These novels involving history have attempted to draw attention to the inherited problems of historical misrepresentations by re-writing and re-presenting history. They have also invested it with new meaning and have also attempted to create a space in order to provide alternative/multiple ways to understand their past.

These post-colonial fictional writers provide us with an image of the past, which they claim contains the truth. Their response to history:

is inter-jection, in which the basic premises of historical narrative are accepted, but a contrary narrative, which claims to offer a more immediate or ‘truer’ picture of post-colonial life, a record of those experiences omitted from imperial history, is inserted into the historical record (Ashcroft, 2001:101).

Hence, preoccupation with the colonial past is a persisting phenomenon in all post-colonial narratives. The tendency to remap the cartography of the nation’s political and cultural past is a vital
concern in these novels. The aim of these writers is to retrieve and regroup the voices, spaces and identities, silenced, suppressed or marginalised, and also to empower and privilege those who have been sentenced to history, to subjugation and displacement.

These post-colonial fictional writers using history in their fiction can be studied under three different categories. Novelists like Raja Rao, Gita Mehta, and Rohinton Mistry had attempted to write 'Against History', through realistic modes using conventional narrative techniques. Novelists like Salman Rushdie and Mukul Kesavan have dis/mantled history through their narratives, using techniques like magic realism, parody and allegory, while Shashi Tharoor has re-written a tradition through allegory using The Mahabharata in his novel. As Ashcroft observes:

**The Mahabharata** which forms the counter-discursive allegorical frame through which the scientific pre-tensions of the colonial history may be dismantled. Tharoor’s novel is consciously counter-discursive in its reproduction of history through a Hindu lens, reversing the historical gaze by putting the reader in the place of the Indian consumer of a dominant but culturally alien discourse. (2001:106)

**POST-MODERN PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY**

Post-modernism popularised in the 1960s and 70s, opposes the universal and privileges the local, opposes similarities and welcomes
differences, looks for resistance rather than conformity, and the temporal rather than permanence. Post-modern fictional writers have challenged the master-narratives or the grand narratives written in earlier times. Instead, these writers believe that the dominating meta-discourse should lead to small and multiple narratives. Post-modernists also claim that there is no such thing as reality, but only versions of reality. Hence post-modernism maintains that everything is fiction, history is fiction, science is fiction, and psychology is fiction. "So they give us metafiction: self-conscious fiction which draws attention to the fact that its fiction" (Colin, 1989:4).

These self-conscious novels are termed as 'historiographic metafiction' by Hutcheon. They problematise the making of fiction and history self-consciously. Post-modern fiction claims that the past is always ideologically and discursively constructed. Hence, in these novels, techniques like irony, parody, magic realism, dualities, etc., are used to, install and subvert conventions.

These historiographic metafictional works, problematise history, by portraying historical personalities and events only to subvert them. By re-writing and re-presenting the past in the present, these fictional writers prevent the past from becoming conclusive and teleological. They claim that, there can be no single "truth", but "truths" in the plural. The entire notion of subjectivity is problematised in post-modern historiographic metafiction, because historical
events/truths are narrated either from multiple points of view or by self-conscious and overtly controlled narrator. These novels always desire to rewrite the past again and again in a new context. Another significant aspect of postmodernist metafiction is the constant use of parody, by means of which the past is questioned or interrogated.

These post-modern metafiction writers believe that, the past which is not available to us in the present, can be inferred only through circumstantial evidence.

The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, it's often complex and indirect representations in the present: documents, archives, but also photographs, paintings, architecture, films and literature” (Hutcheon, 1989:78).

That is why Rushdie uses, newspaper cuttings, photographs, documentary evidences in his Midnight’s Children. Hence, the primary objective of post-modern historiographic-metafiction writers, (by re-writing/re-presenting the past) is to establish the fact that history and fiction have emerged from the same branch and hence both are inconclusive. As Linda Hutcheon observes, “Post-modern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (1988:110).
WHAT CAUSED SO MANY WRITERS TO TURN TO HISTORY?

Since Independence, the historians and their histories are identified as imperialist, Marxist, nationalist, Muslim communalist and the Hindu communalist. Hence the process of history-writing has attained a greater complexity and controversy in India than ever before. These controversies have paved the way for a more serious and purposeful engagement of the novelist with history to represent the unrepresented. These novelists have tried to create a space for the marginalised groups, and other underprivileged sections of the society to provide alternative ways to understand the past, which the professional historians have neglected, due to their ideologies.

Twenty years after Independence, since 1970s, various socio-economic pressures led to the end of the Nehruvite era in India. The idea of unity, communal harmony and secular status in India began to develop cracks and these led to an urgent need to question the nature of that unity. After 50 years of independence, it is sad to see the sorry state of affairs prevailing in the country. There has been a precipitous fall in the standards of public life and cynical distrust of persons in authority and of the institutions that once enjoyed sanctity. Democracy has been defiled by: Domination of the electoral process by money, muscle and mafias, Criminalisation of politics, Corruption, Self before service, and Non-fulfilment of people's expectations. The issue of the fate of the children of the midnight hour of independence has been a pressing one throughout India, of
late. The writers of this period were also worried about the excesses of
the Emergency, which had affected the creative sensibilities of the
writers. Having passed the crucial years of Indian History
(1975 – 1977) when Emergency was imposed, the writers and the
people of India saw Emergency as the return of the repressive
'colonial' rule and opposed it vehemently. This became one of the
main reasons why many novelists turned to history, as they had done
during the 1920s and the 1930s during the colonial rule. The author
of MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act), Mrs. Gandhi, was
identified with the colonial power, and she was metaphosed in the
Emergency, and became the protagonist in many of these new novels.
Speaking of the curtailment of civil liberties, with the imposition of
Emergency (1975-1977), Kirpal sees the post-Emergency phase as one
which gave the Indian nation a new lease of life with which to make a
second beginning. The Emergency highlighted the reality of history
and the individuals in it, and this “sudden realization is reflected in
the Indian novel of the 1980s” (1990:XX). Beginning with the
suspension of the democratic processes during the national
Emergency from June 1975 to March 1977, there has been a steady
decline and weakening of the well-established institutions with the
increase of diverse political groups on communal and regional lines.

With the precipitous fall in the standards of public life,
institutions and the excess of Emergency, these novelists are also
concerned with the fact that modern man is moving away from
(his)story/history due to his too much involvement in science and
technology. As Chaudhuri observes: “Because of modernity and consequent mobility, we have all been, ‘loosened from history’.” (1992:21). Of late we have developed an aversion towards history books, with a criticism that it is full of dates and names to remember. Hence one way to revive our interest in history is to get back to it through fiction. This is also one of the reasons why many novelists have endeavoured to rewrite history through fiction. Having understood the issues pertaining to the Indian subcontinent, these novelists by placing before us the past, want us to relate the past and the present and draw our own inference, in the context of demands for regional and religious identities. The growth of violent Sikh, Muslim and other separatist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and North Eastern States, the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister (October 1984) and her son Rajiv Gandhi (May 1991), and the brutal confrontations over religious and communal issues, before and after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, have inspired many writers to respond to the happenings around them by turning to history.

The thinking of these writers converged in such a way that Allan Sealy accounts for the origins of his first novel, The Trotter Nama (1988), written but not published before Midnight’s Children. Sealy’s novel, like Rushdie’s, originally had a narrator born on the midnight hour of Indian Independence. Although Sealy felt that he had to drop this specific idea when he read Rushdie’s novel, in the published versions of both stories the fate of the narrator still mirrors
the fate of the nation. Sealy's view of the convergence is that it represents “two writers responding to the same historical moment. They have read the same book, but the book is India. India is dictating the country is doing the “thinking”. We do not write but are written” (1993:30).

Thus, these novels have tried to explore the untouched layers of life and portrayed the life’s experiences as they had known them at first hand. With a fall in the social and personal life, and a disregard for moral and ethical values, these writers believe that the imagination of the people had to be stirred and the seeds for the social and political reform sown. Hence these contemporary writers have understood the importance towards re-visioning and re-writing the nation’s history in order to explain the contemporary issues.

The Great Indian Novel, rewrites the contemporary Indian history from a mythical perspective and stresses the point of Dharma (upholding moral and ethical values). Gita Mehta's Raj wants the rulers to adopt the concept of Rajniti (welfare of the people), while Midnight's Children celebrates the plenitude of Pre and Post-independent India. Allan Sealy tries to examine one’s root; Nayantara Sahgal looks at the stress and strain of living in an urban setting, while Anita Desai studies the confrontation with one’s gender status.
The present thesis attempts to make a study on how history has been (re)-written and (re)-visioned in the novels of Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor and Gita Mehta.

All the above-mentioned novelists do not live in India, due to political, and other occupational reasons. It is interesting to note that these novelists have taken up the task of re-writing the nation's history during the 80s. They have turned to the past, in order to trace the Indians' encounter with the British, along with the disillusionment, and the growth of nationalism, to cherish the memories of the bygone days. These writers, by depicting the past or by (re)treating some events of national importance, have tried to feed the interest of the contemporary Indians (to know and understand their past).

By using history in fiction, these writers have justified the claim of the text on actuality. These types of literary texts have exploited a variety of literary devices such as irony, satire, farce and parody to the maximum as never before to enrich their literariness. Most of these writers, looking at India from an historical perspective, are disturbed and worried as to how the politicians and religious fanatics, after independence, have tried to change the history of India. As Sharmila Guha Majumdar points out:

The barriers of nations, country and time dissolve in the consciousness of the author, and he reaches a tragic

**SALMAN RUSHDIE**

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay, to a businessman Anis Ahmed Rushdie and Negin Rushdie in the year of India’s Independence. Born and brought up in Bombay, after his early schooling for fourteen years, he went to England for higher education. Having lived there ever since, his childhood and adolescence played a major role in shaping him as a writer, and gaining a firm foothold in both India and the West. This has evidently been reinforced by his study of history at Cambridge. Further, though a Muslim by faith, he has himself said, “My writings and thoughts have (...) been as deeply influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones” (Rushdie, 1991:404). G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatter* has shown him the immense possibilities of word-play in English and Lawrence Sterne, Gunter Grass and Gabriel Garcia Marquez have shown him the technique.

With the publication of *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, Rushdie’s novels have won awards in one country or another. In 1993 *Midnight’s Children* won the “Booker of Bookers” award for the best novel to have won the Booker Prize in its first twenty-five years. *Shame* bagged the Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger in Paris; *The Satanic Verses* was given the “Author of the Year” award in Germany, and the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel; *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* qualified for the Writers Guild Award in England;
The Moor's Last Sigh was adjudged "The Novel of the Year" in 1996, while The Ground Beneath Her Feet was considered the best book in the Eurasia region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Midnight’s Children is a novel about India’s independence, the partition and their aftermath. The novel encapsulates the experiences of three generations of the Sinai’s family. It is a panoramic book spanning over a period of seventy years in India's modern history. The novel’s narrator-hero, Saleem Sinai, is one of the midnight’s children of the title. Midnight is the point of time when the past and the future join in the present and there is a liberation from the clock time. The narrator Saleem is very much conscious of his historical ‘centrality’. Having been, ‘mysteriously handcuffed to history’, his destiny is ‘indissolubly chained’ to the destiny of his country. From the time of his birth, his influence is felt on incidents and people around him. He not only influences private lives but also national events. This interplay of the private histories and the nation’s histories is the most significant feature of the novel. Thus the novel has captured the comedy and tragedy of the subcontinent more effectively than many formal and conventional historical narrations.

If Midnight’s Children is concerned with India, Shame is with Pakistan. This novel, a three dimensional fiction, is the story of the rise and fall of three families of a fictional country. Though Rushdie has defended himself that this novel is not about Pakistan, a parallel can be drawn to the historical events of Pakistan from the novel such
as - the overthrow of Ayub Khan, the General Elections in Pakistan, the Bangladesh War, Bhutto’s rise and fall, Zia-ul-Haq’s becoming the President of Pakistan and the invasion of the Russian army into Afghanistan. The blending of the real with fictitious makes the real more convincing and acceptable.

Salman Rushdie has captured the astonishing energy of novel form by combining the elements of magic and fantasy, the grimmest realism, farce and the multi-mirrored analogy in his novels. Cultural and identity displacement are important pre-occupations in Rushdie’s novels, which emerge as important themes in Midnight’s Children, Shame and The Moor’s Last Sigh. His charm is not only found in his language rhythms, exploited to his advantage, but also in his use of irony, parody and allegory which are the hallmarks of his writings. Beneath the deliberate fantasised world created by him, he remains a serious novelist, who not only attempts to understand himself through his writings, but also captures the comedy and tragedy of the world very effectively.

SHASHI THAROOR

Shashi Tharoor was born in London in 1956, to his parents from Kerala, Palakkad Dist. While his father was working for The Statesman, Tharoor had his school education in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. Graduated from St. Stephen’s College in history and got his Ph.D. at the age of 22 from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Since 1978, he has been working for the United Nations, in various capacities. Presently he is the
Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of the United Nations. Shashi Tharoor is also an established novelist, columnist and non-fiction author, a familiar by-line in many of the world’s top publications, he is also the winner of several journalism and literary awards, including a Commonwealth Writers Prize.

His books include **Reasons of State** (1982), a scholarly study of Indian Foreign Policy; **The Great Indian Novel** (1989), a Political Satire; **The Five-Dollar Smile and Other Stories** (1990); a second novel, **Show Business** (1992), which received a front-page accolade from The New York Times Book Review and was made into a motion picture titled **Bollywood**; and **India: From Midnight to the Millennium** (1997), published on the 50th anniversary of India’s independence. On August 13, 2001 Penguin Books (India) published Tharoor’s latest novel **Riot**.

Shashi Tharoor’s **The Great Indian Novel** published in 1989, styled and based on the great Indian book **Mahabharata**, is an allegory on the contemporary Indian politics. The complete life history of the narrator Ved Vyas interwoven with the history of ancient and modern India is retold to Ganapathi, who is a scribe and silent bystander. This novel a masterful parody leading to “a comic epic in prose, describes the history and society of Mahaguru Gangaji’s India”, who is none other than Mahatma Gandhi. Almost all the important characters and incidents, from the pre-independence to post-independence period of India are included in the novel.
Tharoor is identified as the successful challenger, of literary tradition, next to Salman Rushdie. One can identify the rebellious irony, in all his novels, which is used as a mode of perception. This is evident in the parodic nature of the tone and attitude that is adopted by the author. Parody is thus present in form and theme in *The Great Indian Novel* and *The Show Business*. A polished sophisticated English, which the author moulds and bends to his will, is a distinctive achievement of Tharoor. Apart from his creative manipulation of the English language, his novels are also suffused with puns, alliteration, comic verse and literary jokes. These literary techniques and devices are used by the novelist, to bring out the amorphous reality of India.

**GITA MEHTA**

Her first novel *Karma Cola* published in 1979 is a satirical account of the Westerners (hippies) who visit India with the spiritual quest and with little knowledge of India’s religion and civilization. *Raj*, Mehta’s second novel, is a thorough and colourful historical story that follows the transformation of a young woman Jaya Devi born into Indian nobility under the British Raj. The novel portrays British India’s early struggle for Independence and how it affected the Royal India. Through her story, Mehta not only weaves together elegant language and colourful picture of Indian culture, but also the contributions made by the royals towards the freedom movement, from a woman’s perspective. Mehta offers a complete story without bias and leaves the reader to formulate an independent position from the history she tells. Historical facts are presented in a beautifully woven tapestry based upon her female protagonist’s strength of character.

The novel *The River Sutra* published in 1993 is an attempt to present the river “Narmada” as an external source of the flow of life. The novel written in the backdrop of Narmada Bachao Andolan and the activities of Medha Patkar is a celebration of life and life affirming impulses struggling against death and life negating forces. The novel is also a story of the battle between Desire and Renunciation and the triumph of Desire over Renunciation.

In addition to writing, Mehta has also spent time as a journalist and directed several documentaries about India for BBC. She has also made films on elections in the former Indian princely states.
Her books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined and shaped modern India. Her works also, expose the hypocrisy and the shallowness of the spiritual, political and secular lives of the people in the modern society. Using a realistic narrative mode, the novelist writes about the enclosed domestic space and woman's perception of experience through her position in it.

**LITERATURE SURVEY**

There have appeared a number of books and articles dealing with the fictions of these writers. However, very few scholars have attempted a detailed study on the relationship between history and fiction in the Indian context.


Nila Shah's *Novel as History* (2003) deals with the engagement of history in select fictional writings of Rushdie, Tharoor, Mistry, Seth and Kesavan. There have also appeared a few research articles like: “History as Gossip in *Midnight's Children*” by Rukmani Nair, History and the individual in the novels of Salman Rushdie by R.S. Pathak, “History and Myth in *The Great Indian Novel*” by P.K. Rajan, and
"Myth, History and Fiction" by Shashi Tharoor – dealing with individual writers on History-Fiction interface.

This thesis makes a slight departure from the earlier attempts, in that a detailed examination of history fiction interface along with a woman’s version of recording of history has been attempted here with reference to three specific works like, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* and Gita Mehta’s *Raj*. This study also examines the various ways by which history has been re-written/re-visioned/problematised/interrogated in these novels.

**AIM AND OBJECTIVE**

Recent fiction writers have shown a keen interest in history and the line between the two disciplines history and fiction is continuously being blurred by the novelist’s preoccupation with history. The aim of this thesis is not only to demonstrate the unreliability of the official version of history, but also investigate the multiple ways by which history has been, problematised in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, (re)-written and (re)-visioned in Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* besides providing a woman’s perspective of the royal history through *Raj* as done by Gita Mehta.

The main objective of the study is to establish the fact that, the use of history in fiction can provide different layers of signification, which is worthy of investigation, because of their manifold implication to the society at large. This study also tries to find out in what manner
these novelists have invoked the past in their novels and how these novelists have incorporated the marginalised histories in their novels, neglected by the professional historians. The study also attempts to investigate the multiple variance of history along with the power structures that have attempted to influence the historical events.

ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS

The first chapter, Introduction traces the growth of Indian fiction in English in a historical context, besides focussing on the major developments that have taken place in the recent fictional writings in English especially in the 80's and 90's. This study examines the changes the fictional writings have undergone from the conventional modes of realism employed by the earlier novelists to the Post-Modern/Post-Colonial representations of fictional realities as presented by writers like Rushdie, Tharoor, Gita and others. This section also tries to focus on the use of history as portrayed during the pre-independence, independence and post-independence periods to show the close connections between history and the freedom movement in India. This chapter concludes with a brief examination of the major features found in the works of Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor and Gita Mehta.

The second chapter titled Problematizing History sketches the way history is re-written and re-visioned in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children by using Post-Modern techniques like allegory, parody, duality, fantasy and magic realism. This chapter examines
the ways by which the novel has attempted to give a comprehensive form of documentary history and the means by which it offers itself as a supplement to the incomplete and denied official histories. The study tries to corroborate the view that *Midnight’s Children* is the story of India growing from promising childhood to its corrupt manhood, and in order to substantiate that, the novelist rejects the history constructed by the authorities, by breaking the boundaries between history and fiction to reinforce a real revision of history.

**The third chapter** titled *Re-visioning and Re-writing History* investigates how Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, attempts to retell the nation’s history through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the epic *Mahabharata*, through the modes of satire, parody and allegory. The study brings out the novelist’s attempt to contest the imperial/colonial historiography which in the process creates an independent identity, by way of decolonisation, retrieval and creation. This study demonstrates how the narrator Ved Vyas, a direct participant, provides a firsthand version of the fall of the British Empire and the emergence of Independent India under the leadership of Gandhi through the allegorical frame of *The Mahabharata*.

**The fourth chapter** titled, *A Woman’s Perspective of History*, examines Gita Mehta’s *Raj* in an attempt to show the way Royal and British India’s history is re-written and re-visioned from a woman’s perspective. This chapter investigates how the novelist uses
conventional narrative technique to bend the existing form of the novel into a vehicle for intervening into the very process of history in order to respond to the historiographical moment of time. The study focuses on the transformation of the protagonist, Jaya Devi who moves from submission to strength to claim her right in the backdrop of the Indian history. The study examines how the novelist, by re-writing the turbulent period of the royal history, provides an authentic account about the place and position of princes in the Indian polity and subjects the institution of royalty to a critical scrutiny by blending real-life and fictional characters.

The concluding chapter is a summing up of the arguments of the earlier chapters to prove how these novelists have recaptured the history of India along with their multiple versions presented through their unique fictional modes of writing. The study comes to terms with different answers, every citizen of India has posed as to what constitutes a nation, and the varied ways by which the writers have looked at the nation during the pre-independence and the post-independence periods, and the motivations and temptations of these novelists to re-write and re-vision the history of the nation. The study establishes the fact that there is a close interface between history and fiction, thereby substantiating the view that fictional representations of the socio-political happenings in India seem to be more real and authentic than the actual historical representations made by different power structures which proves the dictum that fiction seems to be more real than life itself.