Right from the beginning, the Britishers in India resorted to the policy of 'divide and rule' and ultimately left behind a 'fractured subcontinent', a divided India in which the tussle between the two countries – India and Pakistan – continues even after a lapse of more than fifty years. The stage for the independence of India was set by the British government on 20 February 1946, when its Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee informed his peers in the House of Commons that his government had a definite intention to transfer power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. In March 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten, great grandson of Queen Victoria was deputed to India as a Viceroy in order to finalize the process of the transfer of power. On 3 June 1947, Mountbatten declared the intention of the British government to leave India in a period of eleven weeks. However, his stunning announcement was followed by another shocking announcement according to which the
freedom was to be accompanied by a partition of India and emergence of a new nation, Pakistan. In order to work out the technicalities of the partition, a Boundary Commission was set up to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab and Bengal on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. Sir Cyril Radcliff, who arrived in New Delhi on 8 July, was made the Chairman of the Commission and Mountbatten pressed him to carry out the onerous task of finalizing the partition plan of the two provinces (the Punjab and Bengal) by 15 August positively, a date only thirty days away. It meant Radcliff would never be able “even to glimpse the lands he was supposed to divide” [Collins 1987 : 109]. Since such a huge task was technically inconceivable in such a short span of time, Radcliff used “a butcher's axe” to perform his vivisection of the Punjab and Bengal. The result was exactly what everyone had predicted: “technically feasible, in practical application a disaster” [Ibid:280]. The task of the Punjab Boundary Commission was rather difficult, because the claims of the three communities – Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs – were much more at variance than in Bengal. The commission had to plod through a maze of facts and contradictory opinions. Even the members of the Commission – Mr. Justice Din Mohammad, Mr. Justice Mohd Munir, Mr. Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan and Mr. Justice Teja Singh – put forward diametrically opposed
viewpoints, although it was ultimately the chairman, Radcliff who had "to make the final award" [Kanitkar 1987:53].

This partition of the country left five million Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan's half of the Punjab and over five million Muslims in India's half. The major controversy created by Radcliff resulted due to the division of a small city, Gurdaspur, near the northern extremity of the Punjab. Here he elected to follow the natural boundary line of the Ravi River, leaving the city and the Muslim villages around it inside India. This hasty division of the borders in the Punjab (and also of Bengal), added to the chaos and turmoil which had already started due to the controversy between the followers of the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. Villages whose Muslim inhabitants had exulted at the birth of Pakistan found themselves in India whereas Sikhs and Hindus who had not yet celebrated the birth of free India had to "flee for their lives towards Radcliff's border across the fields they'd cultivated for years" [Collins : 282]. Consequently, while most of India and Pakistan celebrated the Independence Day with peaceful rejoicing, in the Punjab it was a day of violence and terror. On the very first day, in a town of east Punjab, a mob of Sikhs were reported to have seized Muslim women, and paraded them naked through the streets, some of them being then slaughtered.
and burnt. Across the border, on the night of 15th August a large Muslim mob burnt down a Gurdwara, killing and incinerating its occupants to the number of about a score. [Hudson 1985: 403]. "It was, however, impossible," reported Major General T.W. Rees, "to count the victims properly in the confused heap of rubble and corpses" [Quoted Ibid : 401]. It was a turmoil which was "unforeseen in magnitude, unordered in pattern, unreasoned in savagery" [Collins :282]. The conditions in the Punjab and the brutalities and humiliations that the people had to undergo brought the required psychological change to induce the people to leave all that they held dear and to flee for protection and shelter to the other side where their community was in a majority:

*It remained the only alternative in view of the fact that the agencies established to protect the minorities were themselves guilty of the crime* [Rai 1965:76].

Travelling by train and by road, they were constantly exposed to attack by the opposite community. Airlifting thousands by military and officially hired civil aeroplanes was arranged, but the upheaval was far beyond the capacity of such means.
By September, “it was estimated that the number of refugees in both directions could not have been less than a million and might have been two or three times that number” [Hudson 1985 : 411]. Military units, civil officers, even railway officials, were either in transit or in the opposite country to that which they had opted to serve, which led to the breakdown of civil government, accelerating the deterioration. The fear destitution which this spontaneous and unforeseen upheaval spelt represented more human misery than even the fearsome toll of sudden death. Robert Trumbull, a veteran correspondent of the New York Times, noted:

I have never been as shaken by anything, even by the piled up bodies on the beach head of Tarawa. In India today blood flows oftener than rain falls. I have seen dead by the hundreds and, worst of all, thousands of Indians without eyes, feet or hands. Death by shooting is merciful and uncommon. Men, women and children are commonly beaten to death with clubs and stones and left to die, their death agony intensified by heat and flies [Quoted by Collins 287].

This mass massacre on an unprecedented scale resulted in a deep-rooted communal frenzy which has been the major cause of perpetual ethnic clashes in India, taking every year a heavy toll of lives. Similarly, the uprooted millions, who had been driven from their homes under conditions of
indescribable horror and misery, are still subjected to terrible indignities in Pakistan where they find their future bleak and uncertain. Even the diplomatic relation between the two countries (India and Pakistan) have been the cause of great anxiety not only for the people of the sub-continent but also for the entire international community. Hudson very rightly states:

> When we look now at India and Pakistan, barely restrained from war, wasting their substance in mutual armed hostility which weighs down their economic and social advance like leaden boots, deprived of that immense prestige and physical strength in the world which would have belonged to an independent heir to the whole Indian Empire. [1969, 93 : 525]

In view of these established facts everyone tends to agree with Hudson that “One strong government, one system and rule of law, one network of communications and intercourse, one army and other forces keeping one frontier within which peace and order reigned” [Ibid.] would have been an ideal choice.

Looking back on the story of the partition, one is beset by many questions that admit no confident answer, perhaps no answer at all. Why did the British paramountcy transfer power to two dominions instead of one? How did Hindus and Muslims, who had jointly fought against the British rule,
become two rival forces and even arch enemies? Who were primarily responsible for the partition: the British Government, the Congress leaders or their Muslim League counterparts?

These questions have already been discussed by numerous historians, each interpreting or what Hayden White calls emplotting the events in such a way as would project his own individual perspective. The Indian historians mostly blame the Muslim League leadership, particularly M.A. Jinnah, whereas the Pro-Pak historians blame the influential Indian statesmen like Gandhiji and Nehru; and all of them collectively hold the British policy of “divide and rule” responsible for the partition. The spokesmen of the Muslim League, however, believe that the Muslims were a separate nation and the demand for Pakistan was “the urge of a nation to mould its own ideals and culture” which could not be satisfied “without having full sovereignty” [See Rai: 15]. M.A. Ispahani maintains that “the two societies – Hindu and Muslim – like two streams, sometimes touched, but never merged, each following its separate course” [1970:332]. An influential section of the British statesmen maintain that the perennial conflict between the two communities rendered partition inevitable. Sir John Strachey, followed later by Mr. Churchill and Lord Amery, were of the opinion that there was no unity in India in “European
terms” and the animosity between the two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, led to the division of the country. Hudson asserts:

_It is not possible to divide. The British may have used the Hindu-Muslim rivalry for their own advantage, but they did not invent it. They did not write the annals of India’s history, nor prescribe the conflicting customs of her communities, nor foment the murderous riots that periodically flared between Hindus and Muslims in her villages and cities [15-16]._

To reach at a definite conclusion as to who is to be blamed for partition is a difficult task because the interpretations that we receive from the historians are in the words of Hayden White not ‘transparent’, ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ but are always clouded with personal traumas, individual short-comings and psychological evasiveness. We find that all interpretations which they consign to future generations are the personal reconstructions, subjective interpretations where the events are constructed in a variety of ways.

The British, who initially owned the East India Company, gradually annexed a large portion of Indian territory to the Company and deprived the Indian Maharajas and Kings of power. Their intentions and aims became public when they branded the resistance and rebellion of the Indian public, against their foul means (in 1957), as mutiny. In spite of the British efforts to
crush them, Indians waged an organised revolt against their supremacy as a result of which the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 with its primary goal to struggle for a responsible self government. In order to safeguard the interests of the Muslim community, a number of Muslim leaders worked for the establishment of a Muslim organization and consequently the Muslim League was formed in 1906. Meanwhile, a deputation of Muslims led by Aga Khan went to Lord Minto, the then viceroy, to get a favour of separate electorates which was granted to them in the act of 1909. Most Hindu leaders and scholars have charged the British with imposing on India this system, with all its consequences up to partition in pursuit of the principle of ‘divide and rule’. Otherwise, the Congress and the Muslim League worked jointly for the freedom of India. This political activity had its effect in England, and on 20 August, 1917, Mr. Montagu, the secretary of state for India, made the historic declaration that the policy of the British Government was one of

*increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self governing institution with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire* [Munshi 1967:9].
Again, in July 1925, Lord Birkenhead, the then secretary of state for India challenged the Indians to frame a constitution. The challenge was taken up by an All Party Conference which appointed a committee presided over by Pt. Moti-Lal-Nehru. The committee made a report known as the “Nehru Report” which rejected separate electorates for the Muslims. At a meeting of the Muslim League, amendments to the Report were proposed and at another All Party Conference, at which the Report and the Muslim League Amendments were considered, Jinnah pleaded for acceptance of the amendments if “revolution and civil war” [Bolitho 1954 : 94] were to be avoided. However, all the amendments were rejected and Jinnah is recorded as having said to a friend “this is the parting of the ways” [Ibid:95]. The immediate result of it was that the Muslims of all shades of opinion united in opposition to it and Dr. Mohd Iqbal, the celebrated poet of the Punjab, declared a new goal for the Muslim League and said that since all “attempts to discover such a principle of internal harmony have so far failed ... it would be better to recognise the Indian Muslim's right to full and free development... in his own Indian homeland...” [Shamloo 1948 : 12]. He convinced Jinnah that in this separate Muslim state lay the only hope for a “contented, peaceful India in general and for the bulk of the Indian Muslims in particular” [Ibid : 13]. The tension between the two parties increased and ultimately the resolution to form a
separate state for the Muslims was passed at the Muslim League session in Lahore on 23 March, 1940; and thus the idea which was considered impossible, acquired new meanings and dimensions in the minds of the Muslim masses. A divided India, however, implied various other complications like vivesection of a natural geographical unit, division of the Indian army, assets and liabilities, the problem of provinces like the Punjab and Bengal which though Muslim majority areas, had a great percentage of non-Muslim population. Consequently, several attempts were made by the British government as well as by various parties and personalities to retain the Unity of India. For instance, the British government deputed Sir Stafford Cripps with a draft to be discussed with the party leaders in India. The main objective of what is popularly known as the Cripps Mission was the

creation of a new Indian union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the united kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs [Patil 1984:91].

After the prolonged discussions with Congress leaders, the mission failed. Another attempt in this direction was the Sapru Committee which met in November 1944, and submitted a new scheme of “parity” between the caste
Hindus and Muslims in the central cabinet, in a bid to provide the Muslims with a sense of security in united India [Sapru Committee, No 21, 298]. The parity proposal was later taken up by the parliamentary leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League, Shri Bhulabhai Desai, and Liquat Ali Khan, who reached a provisional agreement in May, 1945, popularly known as Desai-Liquat pact [See Rai : 17]. When the last attempt to retain a united India, which was given in the Cabinet Mission Plan, also proved a failure, the All Party leaders reached to the conclusion that there is no other possibility except the “partition”. Since the failure of these missions ultimately led to the partition of Indian, it would be pertinent to analyse diverse perspectives of historians on any of these missions in the light of the postmodern theory of historiography according to which history itself is only a narrative, and thereby, as fictional as a novel.

Amongst the various attempts, by the British government, to retain the Unity of India, the most important one was the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), 'a glorious event in the history of the freedom movement of India' [Azad 1959:158]. It will be, therefore, worthwhile to analyse and evaluate the narratives of various historians regarding the formation of the plan and the causes of its failure which subsequently led to the partition and disintegration.
Instead of discussing all the historians who have written on the subject—which is neither possible nor even necessary—let us select four passages by four representative historians: M.A.H Ispahani (Muslim), B.R. Nanda (Hindu), K.K. Aziz (Muslim), and H.V. Hudson (English). These four passages provide a good example, in microcosm, as it were, of the essential elements of any historical discourse: the chronicle of events which provide the elements of a story with a discernable beginning, middle and an end. They also vindicate the validity of Hayden White’s argument that “there can be more than one description of the same event or describing it at different levels of generality” because a historian always introduces “a relatively high degree of invention”, “a certain amount of produced meaning”, and even “subjective feelings” while emplotting the events into a narrative structure [1978:61; 1973:7]. It is because the plot structure serves as a kind of secondary elaboration of the events making up the chronicle and their arrangement in a story, by disclosing the latent meaning of the manifest representation of the facts. The four passages narrating the Cabinet Mission Plan, particularly the causes of its failure to accomplish the Unity of India, are:

1. The Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission’s Plan, as it met the substance of the demands for Pakistan and kept the way open for the emergence of a Sovereign Pakistan in case the Union Centre functioned
to the detriment of the Muslim provinces. The Congress, from the beginning, adopted a dubious attitude. While professing to accept the plan, it twisted it by misinterpreting the grouping scheme to mean that a province could, in the first instance, decide whether or not it would belong to a group and also frame its own constitution. The Congress President Nehru, went a step further and declared in a militant tone that it was not a question of the Congress agreeing to any plan, long or short, adding, 'we are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go into the Constituent Assembly', we are entirely and absolutely free to determine. Nehru's assertions were naturally regarded as a clear breach of faith on the part of the Congress, being an outright repudiation of the terms and conditions on which the compromise plan of the cabinet mission rested and was supposed to be worked by the two main parties. ... It was at this stage that the Muslim League felt constrained to withdraw its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's Plan in view of its deliberate mutilation by the Congress and British government's failure to bring the Congress to the path of reason. The strong reaction of the Muslim League seemed to jolt even Congress circles, for the Congress working committee stated that while they did not approve of all the proposals contained in the Cabinet Mission's Plan, they accepted the scheme in its entirety. They, however, immediately qualified the acceptance by asserting that provincial autonomy was a basic provision and each province had the right to decide whether to form or join a group or not. This was in reality a reiteration of their previous stand and was no acceptance at all .... The Congress had never really accepted the long-term plan of the
Torn between their desire for an early end of British rule and their anxiety about being out-manoeuvred by the Muslim League into a wrong decision, the Congress working committee had many an agonizing reappraisal before it passed its resolution on June 25, 1946 accepting the long-term cabinet plan. ... The All-India Congress Committee met at Bombay on July 7, 1946. It was at this meeting that Nehru took charge of the Congress presidency from Abul Kalam Azad and delivered a speech which has been described as a 'serious tactical blunder' and even an act of direct sabotage of the Cabinet Mission Plan. This speech is alleged to have wrecked the Cabinet Mission Plan, and the last hope of preserving the unity of the Indian sub-continent. The charge is based on some of the remarks made by Nehru but without reference to the context in which he spoke. Nehru was replying to the attacks made by socialist speakers. One of them, Achyut Patwardhan, had argued that the 'Cabinet Mission Plan foreboded ill both for Congress integrity and the communal problem,' and suspected the influence of 'Clive Street European Capitalists' in the proposals for grouping the provinces. ... It was this criticism that Nehru attempted to answer in his speech of July 7th. The Oft-quoted sentence from this speech: 'we are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go to the Constituent Assembly,' was not the most important part of it. ... Three days later, on July 10th, Nehru covered the same ground at a press conference in Bombay. Here again, while he
emphasized the sovereign character of the constituent assembly, he affirmed that the Congress was determined to make a success of the constitutional mechanism outlined by the cabinet mission. ‘Once the Congress went into the [Constituent] Assembly,’ Nehru said, ‘its main objective would be to see how to make it a success ... and in so doing the Congress would certainly have to take into consideration the situation created by the cabinet statement of May 16. ... clearly, ‘Nehru had no intention to repudiate the framework of the Cabinet Mission Plan. All the available evidence indeed points to his anxiety to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the minority problem, and of Indo-British relations after the withdrawal of British power. In so far as Nehru was outspoken, even provocative in his utterances at Bombay on July 7th and 10th, his words were directed not to the Muslim League, but to the critics of the Congress policy within the Congress organization or to the British government. ... he was committing neither a breach of faith with the cabinet mission, nor an act of sabotage. Neither in his speech at the All-India Congress committee nor at the press conference did he intend to wreck the Cabinet Mission Plan. ... clearly, the League did not consider the Cabinet Mission Plan, with its three-tier structure, as a final compromise between the Congress ideal of a strong and united India and the League objective of two separate sovereign states. On the contrary, the League made no secret of its hopes and plans that the Cabinet Mission Plan would be a stepping stone to an independent Pakistan [Nanda 1970:178-181].

3) The Muslim League’s acceptance of the plan was generally welcomed in India and Britain, and Jinnah was congratulated for his
farsightedness and statesmanship in sacrificing the demand for Pakistan in the interest of the common progress of the subcontinent. But neither the cabinet mission nor the Congress said a word in recognition of what it had cost the League to abandon its basic and original demand. The only response was a spate of derisive news, articles and cartoons in the Hindu press, gleefully announcing the defeat of the League and the resolve of the Congress to follow up this victory by forcing the mission to yield on all points. ... The Congress press was right when it thought that the acceptance of the plan by the League meant the burial of the chances of Pakistan coming into existence. ... The All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on 6 July and ratified the working committee's resolution of 25 June which had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan. ... In winding up the proceedings of the committee, Nehru, the president of the Congress, declared, "so far as I can see, it is not a question of our accepting any plan, long or short. It is only a question of our agreeing to go into the Constituent Assembly. That is all, and nothing more than that, we will remain in the Assembly so long as we think it is good for India, and we will come out when we think it is injuring our cause and then offer our battle. We are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided for the moment to go to the Constituent Assembly ..." on 10 July, Nehru held a press conference and amplified his statements in the All India Congress Committee. According to him the Congress had agreed to go into the Constituent Assembly and "we have agreed to nothing else." "What we do there, we are entirely and absolutely free to determine. We have committed ourselves on no single matter to anybody." On the grouping
clause he said "there will be no grouping". He also indicated that the Union government would be much stronger than it was contemplated in the mission plan.

All competent observers of the Indian scene of that time are unanimous that these statements of Nehru made nonsense of the Congress acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. They fortified the Muslim suspicion that the Congress was utilizing the mission Plan for creating a fully unitary, strong Congress - dominated government under which the minorities would inevitably be at the mercy of the majority [Aziz 1990:270].

4) It is a matter of historical fact that the Cabinet Mission Plan for attaining constitutional freedom, which would have retained the Unity of India in the shape of a federal centre with limited but vital powers, had in June 1946 been accepted by the Muslim League and rejected, in effect though not in precise from, by the Congress; whereas when Lord Mountbatten negotiated with the leaders in March and April 1947. It was the League which totally repudiated the Cabinet Mission Plan, the congres which would have revived it if they possibly could. The reasons for that change may be apparent from the story of the intervening months. They do not encourage the widely held view that a last chance of securing a peaceful transfer of power to a united India was missed by the accident of a few political mishaps and personal mistakes in the summer of 1946, particularly the schizophrenic policy of the Congress and the unwise utterances of Pandit Nehru. The Congress working committee resolution accepting the Cabinet Mission's Plan subject to
their own destructive interpretation was ratified by the All India Congress Committee at Bombay on 6th July 1946 by a big majority, Pandit Nehru had just taken over the presidency of the Congress from Maulana Azad. ... The decision was fateful both for the events leading to Independence and partition and for those that followed in India; for if Patel had been President of the Congress Lord Wavell’s choice might have fallen on him as Prime Minister in the Interim Government.

At the final session of the All India Committee, and afterwards at a Press Conference, Pandit Nehru declared that 'the Congress had not accepted any plan, long or short; it had committed itself to participation in the proposed Constituent Assembly, but to no more.' Asked at the press conference whether he meant that the Cabinet Mission’s Plan could be modified, Nehru replied that ‘the Congress regarded itself as free to change or modify the plan in the Constituent Assembly as it thought best.’

Whether this public and contemptuous rejection of the whole implied basis of the Cabinet Mission’s Plan, as a delicate compromise between All India nationalism and Muslim separatism, was a hard headed recall to realities or a cross error of political judgement, its outcome was predictable. Mr. Jinnah at once protested against “a complete repudiation of the basic form on which the long term scheme rests,” and demanded that the British Government should make it clear beyond doubt that the Congress had not accepted the scheme. Ministers in London failed to grasp the proffered nettle. In debates in parliament on 18th July Lord Pethick Lawrence emphasised that the parties,
having agreed to the statement of 16th May, could not go outside its terms in the Constituent Assembly. ... Mr. Jinnah and the League were not mollified. The All India Council of the League passed a resolution at a meeting in Bombay on 27th July, proclaiming with chapter and verse that the Congress intended to use its majority to upset the clear intentions of the Cabinet Mission’s Plan in the Constituent Assembly, revoking the League’s acceptance of the statement of 16th May, authorising the working committee to draw up a plan of ‘direction action’, and calling upon all League members to renounce any titles received from the government. Though many a rumour of reprieve was to keep hope alive among the friends of the condemned, this was the death sentence on the Cabinet Mission’s Plan [Hudson:161-164].

All these historians deal with a vital historical event, a ‘literal historical truth’, which is verifiable at least in theory by objective and empirical means. All of them provide the following factual information:

1. In 1946, the Cabinet Mission put forward a compromise plan before the Congress and the Muslim League for the Unity of India.

2. Both the Congress and the Muslim League initially accepted the provisions of the plan but rejected it ultimately.

3. At the final session of the All India Congress Committee Nehru declared that “the Congress had not accepted any plan, long or short; it
had committed itself to participation in the proposed Constituent Assembly, but to no more”.

4. Nehru’s statement was characterized by Jinnah as “a complete repudiation of the basic form upon which the long-term scheme rested”.

5. In the Muslim League Council meet (on 27th July at Bombay) demand for Pakistan was reiterated and the recommendation of the Cabinet Mission Plan rejected.

However, by a specific arrangement of these historical “events”, and without any offense to the truth value of the facts selected, these historians have added a good deal of more ‘subjective flesh to bare bones’ through invention of details, organization and selection of facts, emplotment of the narrative, and so on. Accordingly, what might appear to be other ‘statements of fact’ are in reality judgements of interpretation. For example, Ispahani’s ‘interpretation’ that “the Congress from the beginning adopted a dubious attitude”; and “the Muslim League felt constrained to withdraw” is entirely different from Nanda’s interpretation that “the league made no secret of its hopes and plans; that the Cabinet Mission Plan would be a stepping stone to an independent
Pakistan.” Similarly, Nanda’s inference that Nehru in his speech “was committing neither a breach of faith with the Cabinet Mission nor an act of sabotage” goes totally against Aziz’s conclusion that it “fortified the Muslim suspicions that the Congress was utilizing the Mission Plan for creating a fully unitary, strong Congress-dominated government under which the minorities would inevitably be at the mercy of the majority”. It seems as if Ispahani, Nanda, Aziz and Hudson – like Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar, Attia Hossain, Bapsi Sidhwa, Bala Chandrā Rajan and Salman Rushdie have all taken the same set of events and made out of them the kind of story that each preferred as the image of the way that human life, in its historicity, “really was”. This is why Hayden White differentiates between offering full-blown narrative and merely reporting discrete events, and denies the representational element to narrative history. The non-representational character of narratives, he argues, must be traced to those features which make their contrast with annals and chronicles possible. The feature he specifically emphasizes in this connection, particularly in The Contents of Form, is their displaying “closure”: a beginning-middle-end structure. By contrast, he says, chronicles simply terminate; and annals do not even record continuities capable of termination except in the sense of being structured by a continuous series of dates. Narrative structure – particularly the closure and configuration given to
the sequence of events by a story’s beginning, middle, and end – is a structure devised from the act of telling the story, not from the events themselves. Hence, Louis Mink calls the term “narrative history” an oxymoron:

As historical it claims to represent, through its form, part of the real complexity of the past, but as narrative it is a product of imaginative construction which cannot defend its claim to truth by any accepted procedure of argument or authentication [1978: 557].

Even Hayden White, LaCapra, Paul Ricoeur and the Structuralists, one way or the other, argue that experience of time is characterized essentially by “discordance”. Literature, in narrative form, brings concord to this ‘aporia’ by means of the invention of plot. Narrative is a ‘synthesis’ in which disparate elements of human world – “agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results etc.” [Ricoeur 1983: 1,113] are brought together and harmonized. Ricoeur echoes Mink, White, Foucault, LaCapra and others when he says: “The ideas of beginning, middle, and end are not taken from experience: they are not traits of real action but effects of poetic ordering” [Ibid:67].

This leads us to Hayden White’s major intervention into the practice of history writing: his insistence on the constructivity of the historian’s craft, and
on the textual nature of the object of study: history is, by necessity, rhetorically determined for White since the source material is textual, and, therefore, subject to the ordering of rhetoric, while the historian’s “craft” consists of “writing up” those sources according to “the prevailing dominant order of tropes”. [White 1973 : 7, 17]. In other words, the historical discourse (like any other discourse) can be broken down into two levels of meaning: the facts and their formal explanation or interpretation appear as the manifest or literal “surface” of the discourse, while the figurative language used to characterize the facts points to a deep-structural meaning. In fact, Hayden White, like Paul Ricoeur, emphasizes that past reality should be seen as a text formulated in a foreign language with some lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic dimensions as any other text [1973 : 30]. Even A. C. Danto, while pointing out the intentional nature of statements and texts argues:

*And this is a feature which the literary texts share with historiography; for the nature of the view of the past presented in an historical work is defined exactly by the language used by the historian in his or her work. Because of the relation between the historiographical view and the language used by the historian in order to express this view, historiography possesses the same opacity and intentional dimension as art [1983:188].*
This perspective helps us to understand and evaluate properly the language used by our four historians: ‘dubious attitude’, ‘militant tone’, ‘felt constrained to withdraw’ ‘forced to yield’, ‘a hard-headed recall’, ‘error of political judgement’, ‘alleged to have wrecked’ etc. These words and phrases authenticate LaCapra’s argument that ‘a total history is neither possible, nor even desirable’ because ‘the relation between past and present can be analysed in a number of different ways’ [1985:2]. We are able to enter into dialogue with the past, says LaCapra, in ways that are clearly motivated in relation to the present analysis; and Hayden White goes to the extent of saying:

But on what grounds could a narrative of the real events possibly conclude? When it is a matter of recounting the concourse of real events, what other ‘ending’ could a given sequence of such events have than a ‘moralizing’ ending? What else could narrative closure consist of than the passage from one moral order to another? [1980:22].

White’s insistence upon the ‘ethical basis’ of choice between different narratives and different endings to particular narratives also justifies the validity and authenticity of individual perception in the historical narratives: Ispahani blames the Congress, Nanda blames the Muslim league and Hudson
holds both, the Congress as well as the League, responsible for the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Besides, it prevents us from dubbing any of these narratives as 'a poor history' because of its lacking so many of the conventionally accepted norms of the historian's discipline: documentation of the actual courses of events; recording events with utmost objectivity; and presentation of these events, before the reader, without any emotional involvement.