This dissertation attempts to analyse some of the recurrent themes and concerns in the novels about India written by British and other Western writers during the period 1939-1989. Anglo-Indian fiction written during the heyday of colonial rule—e.g., the works of Meadows Taylor, Kipling, Forster etc.—have often been critically studied. But Britain’s relationship with India did not come to an abrupt halt with the end of the empire, and novels about India continued to be written. These more recent novels written during the past half century are yet to be properly assessed. What I have attempted here is not a chronological survey of the period, but a selective scrutiny of certain motifs that appear repeatedly in the texts written during these fifty years.

The year 1939, rather than 1947 has been chosen as the starting point of the period because in a way the fissures in the empire began to appear during the Second World War. The last few years of British rule in India were marked by turbulence, unrest and political agitation, part of which has been captured in the novels examined here. English novels by Indians have also dealt with these themes and also with the encounter between two cultures, but those have not been studied here, though occasional references have been made. Our purpose here is to see how post-colonial India and Western literature, imagination and for the purpose five separate strands are picked up for the detailed study here.
In this dissertation, I have turned my attention mainly on British writers although some other western writers are also briefly mentioned. India's relationship with Britain both during colonial times and after that has been very intimate; it is an experience not comparable with the relationships India had with any other western country. Anglo-Indian fiction, in the post-colonial era, has been conditioned by a cultural dialectic which becomes difficult for other western authors to enter.

References to Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's texts appear frequently in the following pages although non-British by birth, but by virtue of her education and years of stay during an impressionable period she may be seen as sharing the British experience of India. Her treatment of British characters reveals an intimate knowledge about India and its people, matching that of native British writers like Paul Scott, Gerald Hanley or Rumer Godden. Her sensibility, just in these terms, may be regarded as British in relationship to India. In her refusal to be totally merged with India she retains a part of British identity. She writes mainly about post-colonial India but when she does deal with India's colonial past (as in Heat and Dust), her attitude is as detached and objective as many other British writers of late twentieth century who are reinterpreting from a distance the Indo-British imperial encounter.

What I have tried to show in this dissertation that terms like liberalism, critical detachment are relative. In comparison to Kipling, Forster appears liberal but Paul Scott's liberal attitudes might make Forster appear almost a conservative. Each writer is shaped to a large extent by his own historical circumstances and the ideological ethos of the time.