Every experience, consciously or unconsciously contributes to the formation of an individual’s perspectives and outlook. Postcoloniality entails certain ‘commitments’ upon its ‘subjects’ - in the sense that no one can break out of, or neglect the state of postcoloniality - since colonization has had a tremendous impact upon the colonized. It is generally said that human subject is a prisoner of experience. No experience has imprisoned the postcolonial peoples more devastatingly than colonialism.

It would be apt at the outset to mention the significance of the title of this thesis. ‘The Stories People Tell: Reading (Hi)Stories of the Indian Diaspora’ focuses on how and why the postcolonial, post-independence, postmodern, cosmopolitan Indian diasporic writers re/deconstruct Indian history through their fictions, which serve as personal parallel histories and at the same time afford the pleasure of stories. Paul Hamilton states that “history becomes nothing but the stories people tell to keep themselves in power” (Historicism 144). Hence ‘(Hi)Stories’ which can be read both as ‘histories’ and ‘stories’. However, in spite of the now popular feminist notion that hi(stories) are patriarchal territories, no gendering is intended in the title, and it is to be noted that despite the phonetic ambiguity of ‘his’ in ‘(hi)stories’, the bracketing is effected before ‘s’, so that it stops short of the word ‘his’, and forms only the ‘hi’ of ‘history’. The role and significance of history writing, the strategies and the objectives of
colonial and postcolonial historiography and the New Historicist analysis of the postmodern idiom in the fictions of the cosmopolitan Indian diaspora are attempted in this study. The list of terms used to qualify the works under study (postcolonial, postmodern, post-independence, cosmopolitan, Indian diasporic) indeed is pretty long, but paradoxically, it is an attempt to zoom in on the area of study.

It was Bernard Bergonzi who first labeled the trend in fiction in the 1960’s and 70’s which focused on history as ‘fictions of history’. History writing is now recognized as an incessant process which can be manipulated in terms of the politics of the narrating voice and shifts in perspectives determined by the socio-cultural milieu. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnights Children* (1981), Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) and Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) set examples for the fictionalization of histories. These writers who ‘live in the mass market’ put on trial the claim of authenticity of canonical histories. The contesting parallel histories endorse the Foucauldian notion that power is ‘exercised’ and not ‘possessed’. Just as ‘erasure’ in the Derridaen scheme reveals ‘traces’ of ‘signified(s)’ which assert the presence of a figure, competing histories succeed only in bringing out the constructedness of histories.

Each version of history is an erasure of the contested version, which in turn is also an assertion of the traces of history the contested text accommodates. These three expatriate writers with their conspicuous
cosmopolitan identities resort to histories which they parodically revive to the effect that they become ‘grotesque’ as Milan Kundera describes such histories, and position themselves as historiographic metafictions, a genre which exhibits various attributes of postmodernism as Mark Currie and Linda Hutcheon have explained in detail.

Some of the colonial historiographers attempted to legitimize the colonial interventions as redemptive and civilizing, whereas a few remained indifferent to the imperialist motives of the colonizers. However it is found that colonization has served as a springboard for the launching of New Histories. The exuberance of alternative histories with their contrasting and even comical versions necessitates the employment of their dialogic potential for a marked visibility. Investigation of the strategies employed by imperialism for the making of colonial histories could be facilitated by the use of the strategies of New Historicism as New Historicism is concerned with the way ‘discursive practices’ operate in society. Such a reading of fictions of history would also clarify that they are characterized by certain features of postmodernism.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion. The second chapter attempts to analyze from a postcolonial perspective, how Indian history has been employed by colonial (hi)storiographers with imperial motives. The third chapter intends to figure out the strategies and politics of Indian cosmopolitan diasporic
writing, focusing on the chosen fictions of Salman Rushdie, Shashi Thaoor
and Vikram Seth. Since the ‘fictions of history’ of these writers are broadly
identified as postmodern, a tangential reference is made to the postmodern
idiom and techniques in them, viz, Midnight’s Children(1980), The Great
Indian Novel(1989) and A Suitable Boy(1993), in the fourth chapter.
However these fictions are picked up for the representative nature of the
total oeuvre of these writers. “Postmodernism teaches that all cultural
practices have an ideological subtext which determines the conditions of
the very possibility of their production of meaning” (Hutcheon, A Poetics of
Postmodernism xii). Any study of fictions of history would be incomplete
without invoking the theoretical paradigms of New Historicist
perspectives, and hence the use of the same. The fifth chapter, which is the
conclusion, recapitulates the major impressions and insights that inform this study.

Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Shashi Tharoor - three expatriate
Indian writers - employ the post-independence history of India for the
narration of their personal stories14. Their attitude to the colonial history
of India is ambivalent as they use similar techniques and tools employed
by the colonial historiographers for the narration of their tales. They often
adhere to the official versions of history and also depart liberally from
them. Their fictions of history evince a sensibility unique to the diaspora
that is heavily coloured by globalization, neo-colonialism and postmodernism.

Foremost of the projects of postcolonial theory is to question and deconstruct the authenticity of colonial histories which imperialism has programmatically offered as correct and valid. Fictions of history participate in interrogating the canonical versions of history. They reveal the moral authority of individuals for narrating personal stories as national epics. Each history is a fiction, the construction of which is the result of the deployment of the writer’s politics. After independence there has been an unprecedented growth in ‘history industry’ in India, and writers have been exploring history from diverse vantage points. Rather than sticking to nationalist politics alone, they also negotiate issues of power, gender, allegiances, language, and modes of narration and representation which call for thorough investigation. Rushdie, Tharoor and Seth have made remarkable contribution to the genre, and the plurality of the issues their works address is exacting. The postcolonial hybridity\textsuperscript{15} or syncretism\textsuperscript{16} that characterizes these texts also calls for an examination of Fredric Jameson’s sweeping generalization of third world novels as allegories of nationhood\textsuperscript{17} and Aijas Ahmad’s critique of it\textsuperscript{18}. The strategies of New Historicism facilitate the examination of the politics of colonial histories. Besides, this study of the fictions of history also shows how they share certain features of postmodernism.
It is hoped that the politics and strategies behind the making of colonial histories will be clarified by the study of a representative cross-section of postcolonial theory. The chosen fictions of history are read in postcolonial and New Historicist perspectives, bringing out the tropes from history, the problems and politics of language and representation, and the impact of the programmatic fictionalization of historical events. Reading colonial histories along with their fictionalized versions brings out the degree to which the latter conform to and differ from the former in representations and techniques. Contemporary perspectives in the field of theory, diaspora studies, historiographic metafictions, and studies on the writers chosen have informed this study.
Commitment is an idea/idea that is antithetical to the spirit (if any) of postmodernity which coexists with, and is a characteristic of, postcolonial period. But, a contradiction of this kind is integral to individual experiences.

“In the two decades after the Second World War, around a hundred new states emerged (some fifty in Africa alone), having won independence from colonial rule. The largest number of these decolonizations occurred in what had been the British Empire, which at its zenith in 1914, extended to some 12,700,000 square miles of the earth’s surface” (Lazarus, The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies 41).

The use of the term ‘post-independence’ after ‘postcolonial’ is intentional and is made for clarity. The term ‘postcolonial’ need not always refer to a period after the colonizers left the land, or after independence. This issue is discussed in detail in the second chapter.

Many Feminists are of the opinion that historiography is a tool in the hands of men to keep women to their places. Right from Mary Wollstonecraft, many feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Virginia Woolf, Judith Bennett, Judith Butler, Bell Hooks and others have kept this claim alive. Judith Bennett’s History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) wherein she discusses the concept of ‘instrumental misogyny’ - that is accusations about women being used strategically in competitions between men - is interesting.

Bergonzi, Bernard. ”Fictions of History”. The Contemporary English Novel. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (New York: Holmes. 1980) 43-65. Bergonzi discusses the variety of fiction in the sixties and seventies that began to dwell deep on history which he categorizes under the genre ‘Fictions of History’.

This typical expression which qualifies the contemporary cosmopolitan writers is used by John Roosa and Ayu Ratih (2001), p. 2681.

Derrida contributed terms like 'writing', 'erasure', 'trace' and 'signified' with unique meanings in his study of language. 'Writing' for Derrida means both reading and writing, any act of linguistic expression. Following Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida also upheld that language functions not by naming things but by indicating differences between them. But the process of indicating differences is an endless one. Meaning is always deferred in the process. So each indication of difference becomes an 'erasure', suspending its possibility to be the final meaning. What is left for further signification is the 'trace', which again is deferred in the attempt for discovering meaning. So, there is no 'absolute signified' in language.

Kundera's works testify that the practice of fiction representing stark realities of life at times become 'grotesque' by its sheer power of representation. The attitudes and perceptions of the characters toward reality create a grotesque image of the contemporary world in his works. The idea of grotesque realism also has its roots in Michail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World [1941, 1965] (Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).


The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's terms 'dialogic' and 'dialogism' occur in his work of literary theory, The Dialogic Imagination (written during 1930s; published in 1981). Bakhtin contrasts the dialogic and the "monologic" works of literature. The dialogic work
carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. It does not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend a previous work, but informs and is continually informed by the previous work. Dialogic literature is in communication with multiple works. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogic.)

12 The concept of discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, refers to the “controlling, positioning, and productive capacities of signifying practices” (Threadgold, 1997, p.58). In this sense, a discourse is a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 2001, p.72). Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate exclusions and choices (Foucault, 1977, p.199). The discursive rules are linked to the exercise of power; how the forms of discourse are both constituted by, and ensure reproduction of the social system, through forms of selection, exclusion and domination. “In every society”, Foucault writes, “The production of discourse is controlled, organised, redistributed, by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its materiality” (Young, R. 1981). See the introduction to “The order of discourse” by Michel Foucault in R. Young (Ed). Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. pp. 48-51.

13 Intertextuality, parody, pastiche, magic realism, self conscious narration, mixing of genres, flouting of conventional narrative patterns etc. are a few of the features attempted to focus in this study.

14 Tharoor’ professional life has had cataclysmic shifts in the recent past. When this study began he was working in the UN as High Commissioner for Refugees. After his resignation
from the UN, he was Minister of State for External Affairs in the UPA led union government. He resigned from his post but continues as a Member of Parliament.

Hybridity is fundamentally associated with postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. It is characterized by literature and theory that focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and culture. Key theorists in this realm are Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak and Paul Gilroy, whose works respond to the increasing multicultural awareness of the early nineteen nineties. Often the literature of postcolonial and magical realist authors such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera and J. M. Coetzee recur in their discussions. A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994) which analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power. Bhabha’s arguments have become central in the discussion of hybridity. While he originally developed his thesis with respect to narratives of cultural imperialism, his work also develops the concept with respect to the cultural politics of migrancy in the contemporary metropolis. Another key component of hybridity theory is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concept of polyphony is employed by many analysts of hybrid discourses in folklore and anthropology.

Syncretism refers to the effort to reconcile divergent or opposing beliefs, often amalgamating practices of various schools of thought. The term may refer to attempts to mix and analyze many originally diverse traditions and thus ascribe an underlying unity giving way for an inclusive approach. Syncretism also occurs commonly in literature, music, the representational arts and other expressions of culture.

See Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (*New Left Review* 146. 1984) 53-92.
18 See Ahmed’s *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (Cultural Studies)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) wherein he strongly criticizes Jameson’s perspectives from a Marxist point of view.