... [A]ll history is a story, is a narrative. So, the issue of the postcolonial people is to combat that dominant history, the colonial history which is the story of the West civilizing the world.

(Ashcroft, in an interview with Jose Varghese 83)

Right from the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 there have been innumerable attempts to revisit colonial historiography from postcolonial perspectives. Said’s work, in spite of its faults, serves as an index to the systematic and strategic portrayal of the colonial people as politically, culturally and socially inferior to the West, by the Western imperial powers. Said, being located in the ‘interstitial space’ of a diasporic writer, has exercised a ‘contrapuntal reading’ to bring out the hidden ideologies of dominant power structures. An analysis of the colonial historiography of India implies a sound understanding of terms like postcoloniality and Orientalism. Taking off from this premise, this chapter concentrates on the strategies that colonial historiographers employed for the programmatic subjectification of the ‘non-Western other’. This analysis turns out to be imperative since the postcolonial cosmopolitan Indian diasporic writers can
be seen to have indirectly relied on the strategies that the colonizers once depended upon for the construction of their (hi)stories of India, though their motives were different in various ways. Bill Ashcroft holds up the thesis that the “colonized societies engaged and utilized imperial culture for their own purposes. . . The attempt to understand how postcolonial cultures resisted the power of colonial domination in ways so subtle that they transformed both colonizer and colonized lies at the heart of post-colonial studies” (Postcolonial Transformation 2 - 3).

Why is it that colonial histories are explored anew? The reasons are many. The colonial histories described the Orient with a political intent. By narrating the Orient the West asserted power over the narrated. The colonial narratives on Indian history are discourses of power. The whole of Western cultural practices are coloured by strategies of power, as Said has explained in his Orientalism. What the contemporary diasporic writers do through their fictional reconstruction of Indian history is not substantially different from what the colonial historians did, though their motives are different. If the latter was for legitimizing the ‘civilizing mission’ undertaken by the West, the former is part of an exercise to establish or reclaim firm national identities for themselves.

Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies (2004) edited by John C. Hawley states that ‘postcolonialism’ is “dated to the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism in 1978” (359). The term was relatively new to the academia
then, and did not claim disciplinarity. It is said that “before the 1970s, there was no field of academic specialization that went by the name ‘postcolonial studies’” (Neil Lazarus, The Cambridge Companion 1). It has now turned out to be a mature field with affinities to post-structuralism, postmodernism, New Historicism, feminism and gender studies, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, deconstruction, ethnicity studies, Marxism, theories of reading and so on.

There are different typographies for presenting this concept like ‘post colonialism’, ‘post – colonialism’ and postcolonialism. For some theorists like Leela Gandhi, the hyphenated term ‘post – colonialism’ serves as a “decisive temporal marker of the decolonizing process” (Postcolonial Theory 3). Others fiercely question the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. They argue for a typography that does not insist on the hyphenation between the two components of the term.

“Postcolonialism’, according to Leela Gandhi, “is the name of the theory that discusses the condition of the aftermath of colonialism which can be called ‘postcoloniality’” (Postcolonial Theory 3). Helen Tiffin holds that the term postcolonial refers to “reading and writing practices grounded in some form of colonial experience occurring outside Europe but as a consequence of European expansion into and exploitation of the ‘other’ worlds” (“Post-
Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History” 170). Sridhar Rajeswaran says that the entire notion of postcolonial studies is “premised on a position of resistance” (“Postcolonial Repossessions of History and Relocations of Culture: Proposing a Method to Madness?” 5).

In Fanon also one comes across the call for the need for an active “ontological resistance” (Black Skin, White Masks 110). This resistance is to the images, histories and ideas perpetrated by the colonial powers about the colonized as well as to being “overdetermined from without” by them, as Fanon adds (116).

Leela Gandhi holds that postcolonialism can be “seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Postcolonial Theory 4).

Dirlik’s expression of apprehension regarding the prospects of postcolonial theory and practice again focuses on the fundamental characteristic of postcolonial critical enterprise as one of resistance: “The question . . . is not whether this global intelligentsia can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether, in recognition of its own class position in global capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product” (quoted in Lazarus, The Cambridge Companion 6).

The re-writing of history is an important postcolonial project. The literature produced by postcolonial cosmopolitans can be said to belong to
that group of literature called ‘canonical counter-discourse’ or ‘writing back’.

Ashcroft says:

Historiography has been one of the most far-reaching and influential imperial constructions of subjectivity, and postcolonial histories, responding to the power of this discourse, have interpolated the narrativity of history while disrupting it by blurring the boundaries that would seem to separate it from literature. . . How history might be ‘re-written’, how it might be interpolated, is a crucial question for the self-representation of colonized peoples. Ultimately, the transformation of history stands as one of the most strategic and powerfully effective modes of cultural resistance. By interpolating history through literary and other non-empirical texts, postcolonial narratives of historical experience reveal the fundamentally allegorical nature of history itself” (Post-Colonial Transformation 14-15)

It is claimed that postcolonialism originated from the theories of Commonwealth Literatures and Third World Studies. But “post colonial theory breaks with the ideology associated with commonwealth literature’s unthinking claim that the cultural role of Anglophone writers around the world is to enrich English literature, and has successfully demonstrated that the centre periphery relationship is much more complex than such claims
would suggest”, says David Macey (The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory 305).

The label ‘Commonwealth’ subsumes the entire Third World literature under the authority of the colonial masters for its status as literature. The literature of the Third World has to be sanctioned by the former imperial powers, if it is to be recognized to have any value. Rushdie points out how the term ‘Commonwealth’ serves as a containment strategy:

It permits academic institutions, publishers, critics and even readers to dump a large segment of English literature into a box and then more or less ignore it. At best, what is called ‘Commonwealth literature’ is positioned below English literature … or places English literature at the centre and the rest of the world at the periphery (Imaginary Homelands 63-64).

Neil Lazarus notes that the use of the term ‘post colonial’ by Hamza Alavi and John. S. Saul respectively in 1972 and 1974 denoted the ‘period immediately following decolonization’. It was a “periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept”, and “to describe a literary work or a writer as ‘postcolonial’ was to name a period, a discrete historical moment, not a project or a politics” (The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies 2). It is no more a historical category. However, Peter Barry says that ‘postcolonial criticism emerged as a distinct category only in the 1990s’
(Beginning Theory 192). It has emerged as a powerful discipline owing to “the reassertion of imperial dominance beginning in the 1970s, that is, of the global re-imposition and re-consolidation both – economically – of what Samir Amin has called “the logic of unilateral capital” and – politically- of an actively interventionist “New World Order’ headquartered in Washington, DC” (Neil Lazarus, The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies 4).

Kwame Anthony Appiah defined postcoloniality as “the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (quoted by Lazarus, The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies 5). Lazarus states how Arif Dirlik reformulated it: “I think [Appiah] . . . is missing the point because the world situation that justified the term comprador no longer exists. I would suggest instead that postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism” (5).

Postcolonial theory rejects all claims of universalism. It uses irony, allegory and self reflectivity which constitute it as a doubled discourse and which help it subvert from within the dominant order (Pillai, “Postmodernism or Post-colonialism for India? The Great Indian Novel as a Case Study” 164). Often when a work claims global significance, it can be seen that behind such claims are Eurocentric norms and practices. All other claims are
relegated as irrelevant and insignificant in order to project its universal appeal. Franz Fanon in his works reiterated the need for the postcolonial to reclaim the past for the construction of identity, voice and selfhood. Barry avers that “if the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past had been devalued” (Beginning Theory 193). It does not simply mean that the postcolonials should go back to their pre-colonial identities. Annamaria Carusi states that such a project “is evidently contradictory since it would construct identity precisely in the same terms as the bourgeois imperialist subject, cloaked however in the discourse of return and recovery” (“Post, Post and Post. Or, Where is South African Literature in All This?” 95). The “purpose of postcolonial critique is understood as being to dismantle and displace the truth-claims of Eurocentric discourses” says Benita Parry (Lazarus Ed., The Cambridge Companion 67). In The Location of Culture (2003) Bhabha states that the role of postcolonial theory is “to intervene in and interrupt the Western discourses on modernity” (241).

History is one of the most important sites where colonialism has operated to its advantage. The manner in which the colonized are represented in colonial histories was adequate justification for the West to take up its so-called ‘civilizing mission’. The colonized was represented not descriptively but in such a way as to necessitate and to validate the Western interference and implementation of their policies. Edward Said’s Orientalism
(1978) exposes the claims of superiority the West raised to the East which is portrayed as the ‘other’ and inferior to the West. ‘The Orient features in the Western mind’, says Said, “as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (193). Neil Lazarus says that ‘the Orient’ emerges as an effect of Orientalist discourse: representation precedes and produces the reality which it can then claim merely to re-present, having obscured if not obliterated the earlier reality which, as a colonizing discourse, it had begun by misrepresenting. Hence Said’s reference to ‘the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period’” (The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies 10-11). Nishat Zaidi remarks after Helen Tiffin regarding the postcolonial writer’s preoccupation with history, that it is the result of the writer’s deliberate attempt to resist colonial appropriation or rejection in order to rehabilitate or establish the self. Since colonial ideology tends to legitimize colonial exploitation, writers of the postcolonial period are actively engaged with the question of history. Zaidi adds: “Historiography is repressive, partial and incomplete as most of what goes in the name of history is a tale of conquest and the repression of subaltern by the dominant perspectives” (“Fiction, History and Fictionalized History: A Postcolonial Reading of Khushwant Singh’s Delhi: A Novel” 37).
C. Vijaysree comments: “A return to the past, a retrieval of the usable past, and an analysis of the community’s heritage and history emerge as important structural devices in all postcolonial writing” (Quoted by Zaidi, “Fiction, History and Fictionalized History: A Postcolonial Reading of Khushwant Singh’s Delhi: A Novel” 38). So, a postcolonial writer’s task is to demolish the image of one’s nation constructed by the West through history. Most of the ‘official histories’ deliberately misrepresented the colonized for the purpose of keeping them subservient and weak-willed. Summing up what Said has pointed out in Orientalism Barry says:

East becomes the repository or projection of those aspects of themselves which Westerners do not choose to acknowledge (cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness and so on). At the same time, and paradoxically, the East is seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive. It also tends to be seen as homogenous, the people there being anonymous masses, rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury, etc.) rather than by conscious choice or decisions. Their emotions and reactions are always determined by racial considerations (they are like this because they are Asiatics or blacks or Orientals) rather than by aspects of individual status or circumstance (Beginning 193-4).
Said himself defines Orientalism as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views about it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Orientalism 3). Homi K. Bhabha says:

Colonial discourse ...is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/ cultural/ historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited... the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origins, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.

It has been demonstrated that history falls prey to the imperial motives of colonization and exploitation of the ‘non-Western Other’. Whatever version of history is in the limelight is the one that has power, and may be assimilated as an integral part of the history of tomorrow. Besides, history as we have seen in the introductory chapter is a major area of study at all levels of education. It can be seen that no curriculum is prepared without giving adequate representation to history. The manner in which the colonized is
represented in histories remains as true version and is taught in academic institutions and may be accepted unquestioned by learners. Since no history can claim authenticity, versions may proliferate and those versions in tune with the dominant ideology of the society may enjoy societal approval.

G. N. Devy comments that the difficult task of “constructing historical narratives about India was made by European Indologists during the nineteenth century” and the “context for this development was that of colonialism”. He adds that “whether India ever had any sense of literary history of its own before the contact with the modern West’ is a permanently sealed question”. The image of India circulated in the West during the period of colonization was one that represented a static country, because discourses of history are conditioned by conscious or unconscious ideology of race, class and gender within which the historian's intellectual sympathies are engaged (Of Many Heroes 2).

Before the colonial project was well formed, the travel writings of the Westerners about India were descriptive rather than analytical or reflective. They did not find it difficult to appreciate the cultural, literary and architectural heritage of India. T. Acland says about the people of India that “the natives are a fine athletic race of men, with every appearance of possessing talent and intellect” (Popular Account 6). The later colonial historiographers constructed fictions of the Orient to aid and abet colonial
schemes of exploitation. The narrative voice assumed by the narrator is not journalistic or disinterested. Devy further comments:

If colonization gives a boost to historiography in the colonizing cultures, it also creates serious historiographical inversions for the colonized cultures. Colonization adds to the history of the colonizers; it also takes away some history of the colonized (...)

Repression or reversal of history of other societies is an attribute of colonialism because it seeks to make comparable territorial ingression (“Of Many Heroes” 14).

Cohn comments:

…the production of these texts and others which followed them began the establishment of discursive formations, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse (of Orientalism), and had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into European objects (282 - 83).

Cohn’s perceptive comment clarifies how Western historiographers objectified Indian forms of knowledge. Objectification is yet another strategy of subjectification. “Such objectification”, comment Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, “entails the assumption that the Orient is essentially monolithic, with an unchanging history, whilst the Occident is dynamic with an active history” (Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity 70). Edward Said has vehemently criticized Jones, Macaulay and other Orientalists for misrepresenting the colonized. Even Jones’ point of view of India was largely conditioned by Greek legends and histories which had depicted India as having an exotic and intractable culture and the European representations of India as a land ruled by despots in its travel books (Devy, Of Many Heroes 77). According to Thomas Warton’s historiography, the genius of the English people lay in civilizing the barbarous imagination of the natives. Colonial historiography being a product of colonialism deprived a large part of India’s imaginative products of the designation ‘literature’, blatantly denigrating the standards India cherished in literature (Devy, Of Many Heroes 96). Devy also
pointed out that India’s ‘sense of literary history had been badly fractured and amputated during the colonial cultural encounter’ (106).

Among the postcolonial theorists of the day, there are a few who view colonization in a positive light. Harish Trivedi criticizes Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) and Culture and Imperialism (1993), and Gauri Viswanathan’s Masks of Conquest (1989) wherein they “study plans and projections of imperial intervention rather than the reality of the native reaction to imperial intervention” (1995, viii). Trivedi in his significantly titled Colonial Transactions (1995) offers an extended evidence of mutual exchange between the British and the Indian in its various sections. He claims that there had been an exchange of ideas and resources between these two countries and that there is no need to perceive them with as much anxiety and concern. However, Pramod K. Mishra feels that Trivedi “fails to see the imbalance and material nature of this exchange” (“English Language, Postcolonial Subjectivity and Globalization in India” 387).

Tejaswini Niranjana pins down Jones in his attempt to sustain the paradoxical movement of colonial discourse in simultaneously “historicizing (things have become debased) as well as naturalizing (things have remained unchanged)” the degradation of the natives (Siting Translation 15). Jones states that Indian territories were thrown into the arms of Britain for their protection and welfare by providence. To justify the imperial administration
Jones also portrayed the Orientals as being accustomed to a despotic rule (Niranjana 14).

The civilizing mission of the British marked a new stage in the development of colonialism. The natives were brought under administrative control as K. N. panikkar says, presumably for improving their moral and material conditions (Colonialism, Culture, and Resistance 3). Panikkar continues:

The opportunity for liberating the ‘natives’ from the unhappy system of oppression’ of Oriental despotism was considered sufficient justification for conquest. The setting up of administrative structures, creating ideological institutions and transforming cultural practices that followed the conquest were, therefore, approached with a civilizing zeal. (...) [T]hey believed that it was the civilizational logic of history which devolved upon them a moral and ethical duty to emancipate the natives from their cultural degradation, social obscurantism, and intellectual backwardness. (...) The history of conquest as narrated by colonial ideologues and early administrators interpreted the British triumph as a necessary precursor to this civilizing mission (3-4).
Erich Fromm in his preface to Marx’s Concept of Man (1975) asserts the superiority of Western culture over the Orient:

The West has much to offer as a leader of such a development for the former colonial nations; not only capital and technical advice, but also the Western humanist tradition of which Marxist socialism is the upshot; the tradition of man’s freedom, not only from, but his freedom to to develop his own human potentialities, the tradition of human dignity and brotherhood (viii).

The colonial construction of Indian history was shaped by a comparison between the history of the colonized and the colonizer. As Panikkar continues to argue (Colonialism, Culture, and Resistance 122-123), the ‘native’ obviously suffered in the comparison, despite the Orientalists’ admiration for the ancient Indian civilization. Sir William Jones attributed his excitement on approaching the shores of India to its inhabitants being the closest to nature. Colonialism had an overarching view of the native past which in all accounts was inferior to its own. The past was a surrogate for the present. What colonialism did through the construction of the past was to justify and legitimize the present. What was central to the colonial attitude towards the native past however was not appropriation, but the denial of a valid history to the colonized. An example for this willful denial is the myth of a changeless Indian society initially propagated by the colonial
administrators and later authenticated by imperialist historians. Panikkar quotes Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who was the first to propose an agenda for an Indian historiography:

In our opinion there is not a single work in English that is a true history of Bengal. What has been written is not the history of Bengal, not even the merest fragment of it. It has nothing at all to do with the Bengal nation in it. A Bengali who accepts this kind of writing as the history of Bengal is not a true Bengali

(quoted by Panikkar, 122).

But “by the time Bankim warned his countrymen about colonially constructed history”, Panikkar states, “that it had become part of the intellectual makeup of the educated middle class. James Mill’s periodization of Indian history, Marshman’s description of social customs, Henry Beveridge’s account of religious practices, and Robert Orme’s explanation of the British military success had become integral to middle class vocabulary. The Indian intelligentsia thus viewed its own history through the colonial prism” (122).

Panikkar also points out how the Indian intelligentsia’s internalization of colonized history worked out in the Indian context. The concept of ‘divine dispensation’ was one of the obvious fall-outs. According to this, what occasioned God to will British conquest was the pre-colonial past,
characterized by social degradation, religious superstition, and political anarchy. This recurring theme, advanced in colonial historiography as the justification for the conquest, also became the guilt ridden intelligentsia’s rationale for their own subjection (123).

In G. W. F. Hegel’s “Africa” we read: “Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world – shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself – the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (Harlow and Carter Ed., Imperialism 246-7). Hegel’s vocabulary is undoubtedly orientalist as he states that the condition of Africa is incomparable to that of civilized Europe. Rudyard Kipling in his “The White man’s Burden” (1899)\(^9\) refers to the colonized and the new-found people as:

“Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child”.

Kipling here strips the colonized off the human faculties and invests them with diabolism and naivety.

James Mill is another colonial historiographer who has misrepresented India. In his History of British India published in 1817 in three volumes, Mill has tried to shatter the idea that India ever had a history and to insinuate that the people of India had affinities with primitive societies which also
characterized the developmental stages of Britain. He thereby insisted that Indian culture was still at the childhood stage. Mill used words like ‘wild’, ‘barbaric’, ‘savage’, and ‘rude’ in connection with the Hindus (Niranjana, Siting Translation 22).

The impact of Mill’s multi-volume *History of British India* among Indians as well as the British was debilitating. It sweepingly condemned the Hindu and Muslim civilizations. It was used as a textbook at Haileybury College, where the East India Company’s civil servants were trained, and it had an abiding influence on British administrators in India. Panikkar quotes Hayman Wilson, who edited and updated Mill’s work in 1844:

In the effects which Mill’s *History* is likely to exercise upon the connection between the people of England and the people of India... its tendency is evil; it is calculated to destroy all sympathy between the ruler and the ruled; to preoccupy the minds of those who issue annually from Great Britain to monopolize the post of honour and power of Hindustan, with an unfounded aversion towards those over whom they exercise that power. .. There is reason to fear that a harsh and illiberal spirit has of late years prevailed in the conduct and councils of the rising service in India which owes its origin to impressions imbibed in early life from the *History* of Mr. Mill (123).
Panikkar mentions that Mill’s influence was not limited to the company’s administrators. The Indian intelligentsia also succumbed to Mill’s History. For quite some time, the intelligentsia’s notions of pre-colonial political institutions and social organization were derived from Mill. Ram Mohan Roy has used almost the same vocabulary as that of Mill to describe the despotism of Indian rulers. An idea which persisted for long was Mill’s periodization of Indian history in terms of Hindu and Muslim civilizations. The periodization led to a communal view of India’s past, as it assumed that the separateness was innate to Indian society and that it began with the coming of Muslims to India, terminating the earlier glorious period of Hindu rule. It also “encouraged the notion of distinct religious communities which were projected as their units of Indian society for political and socio-legal purpose” (123).

The translations of Christian missionaries like the Serampore Baptists, William Carey and William Ward also reveal their Orientalist perspectives. Niranjana says that for “the missionaries theology arises from a historicist model that sets up a series of oppositions between traditional and modern, undeveloped and developed. This kind of attempt to impose linear historical narratives on different civilizations obviously legitimizes and extends colonial domination” (Siting Translation 20).

Macaulay’s 1835 “Minute on Indian Education” dismissed indigenous Indian learning as outdated and irrelevant and ushered in English education.
He commented that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (Harlow and Carter Ed. Imperialism and Orientalism 58). It would be interesting to look at the other claims raised by Macaulay in his Minute. He says: “It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same” (58). Macaulay is full of praise for English literature: “It stands preeminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us. . . It may safely be said the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together” (58). He continues that “by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own - - - The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors (58-59)”. According to Macaulay, “it is universally felt that the Sanscrit and Arabic are languages the knowledge of which does not compensate for the trouble of acquiring them” (59). About the publication of Oriental literature he says: “The Committee contrive to get rid of some
portion of their vast stock of Oriental Literature by giving books away. But they cannot give so fast as they print. About twenty thousand rupees a year are spent in adding fresh masses of waste paper to a hoard which, I should think, is already ample. We are a board for wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank (62).” Harlow and Carter comment that “eighteenth and nineteenth century orientalist scholarship ... depicts India as a lawless and chaotic land, inhabited by various despotic governments and roving bands of thugs and bandits; it is characterized by a myriad of superstitions and contradictory religious beliefs and troubled by a history of bribery and corruption, which served as poor imitations of civil jurisprudence10 (67).” Trevelyan held the view that Indian literature was ‘worse than useless’, which he dwelled at length on in his *On the Education of the People of India* (1838) (182). Speaking of democracy and representative legislature, Macaulay commented: “Of all the innumerable speculators who have offered their suggestions on Indian politics, not a single one, as far as I know, however democratical his opinions may be, has ever maintained the possibility of giving, at the present time, such institutions to India”11. He also has stated that the possibility of representative government in India is “utterly out of the question” (*Imperialism and Orientalism* 21). In the same speech Macaulay stated: “In what state, then, did we find India? And what have we made India? We found society throughout that vast country in a
state to which history scarcely furnishes a parallel. The nearest parallel
would, perhaps, be the state of Europe during the fifth century” (22).

It is quite ironical that a postcolonial writer like Rushdie himself
affirmed the greatness of literature written in English over the vernacular in
India. In the introduction to a special issue of the *New Yorker*¹², Rushdie
wrote that the “true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has
been made in the language the British left behind (50)”. Pramod K. Mishra
vehemently criticizes the position assumed by Rushdie and also analyzes the
historical moment that generated Rushdie’s comment:

One hundred and sixty-two years separate Rushdie’s 1997
manifesto from Macaulay’s 1835 minute on English education in
India. What also separates them are their forums and locale. It
is symbolic that Macaulay had to use the British Governor’s
Council to present his policy about the use of English in
interpellating the Indians, and Rushdie used The New Yorker to
present his views about the first fifty years of post-independence
Indian literature in English and other Indian languages.
Between 1835 and 1997, the seat of world power had shifted
from London to New York, from the British parliament as the
source of juridical and military action for Britain’s colonies to
the world’s media, finance and publishing capital. The
resonances sound disturbing, because Rushdie in his manifesto
sounds like the direct descendant of Macaulay’s machinations (“English Language, Postcolonial Subjectivity and Globalization in India” 398).

Rushdie’s judgment of the worth of literature written in Indian languages would not hold at all when the comparatively meager literary output in English from India is compared to the vast and divergent genres of literature produced in various Indian languages since independence. But there is a problem inherent in Rushdie’s comment— that a writer of English literature has to be accepted first in the West if he has to be recognized in India. That this principle also applies to persons working in other fields is illustrated by the case of Rasul Pookutty, a sound engineer from Kerala who became well-known in Kerala only when he was awarded the Oscar.

Theorists like Gauri Viswanathan have pointed out how the study of English had a colonial project to carry out. Quoting Macaulay’s notorious words— a “class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”— Viswanathan claims that the colonial project entailed the production of an Indian subjectivity suitable to the governance of the colonized country through the colonizer’s language and literature. The logic of Filtration Theory has far reaching effects according to Pramod K. Mishra:
The Filtration Theory entailed that the biological categories of blood and colour, by which the reference clearly is to the genetic theory of race and colonial ideology of skin colour, became the colluding ground for colonial hierarchy. This is the same ground that makes Rudyard Kipling’s Kim superior to other Indians even though he has learned his English at a local madrasa, because in the logic of colonialism English is his birthright whether he learns it as a second language or first. But language can do many other things: if it does not produce skin colour and blood, it can create taste, opinions, morals and intellect- in other words, culture which could then be taken as a euphemism for race (“English Language, Postcolonial Subjectivity and Globalization in India” 388-89).

The field of education witnessed the most powerful impact of colonial hegemony. Just as Charles Trevelyan proposed that the Indians were desirous of the ‘English book’\textsuperscript{15}, E. M. Forster also privileged English education and its merits in comparison with Eastern education:

Western education is an exotic plant . . . we brought it out from England exactly as we brought out the ink bottles and the patterns for the chairs. We planted it and it grew- monstrous as a banyan. Now we are chocked by the roots of it spreading so thickly in this fat soil of Bengal (\textit{From Sea to Sea} Vol. II, 220).
Tej. N. Dhar points out that ‘history writing ‘was an essential part of colonial engineering’ (“Reconstructing Time and Experience: Variations on the Theme of Dislocation” 80). It is this realization that has given a boost to the project of rethinking history in the postcolonial context. History, as everyone knows, does not mirror reality (if there is one) as such but offers only versions, and needs a critical reader in everyone. It has to be taken with a pinch of salt. There being only versions, rewriting becomes imperative in history. “There are moments in time when history needs to be rewritten. It needs to be cleansed of a certain overwriting so that it may enable a repossession of its significant elided moments”, says Sridhar Rajeswaran cautioning the reader of history about the pitfalls of uncritical acceptance (“Postcolonial Repossessions of History and Relocations of Culture: Proposing a Method to Madness?” 4).

Ashcroft reminds us that by appropriating history as a form, as a genre, appropriating the language in which it is written, by appropriating mediums of publication, distribution, postcolonial readers can interpolate their own history, their story of the past (Varghese, “Theorizing Post-Colonial Transformation: A Dialogue with Bill Ashcroft” 83-4). But this is no easy task because all the norms that one relies on consciously or unconsciously for the narration of histories are what the European colonial masters have offered us. Criticizing the practice of giving undue weight to the colonizer’s values, Said says that “most cultural formations presumed the permanent primacy of
the imperial power” (Culture and Imperialism 199). Referring to the urge of Third World historians to refer to works in European history Dipesh Chakrabarty says, “… “Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian”, “Chinese”, “Kenyan” and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe”. In this sense, “Indian” history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of that history” (“Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?” 342). G. N. Devy says that colonialism creates a cultural demoralization. It creates a false sense of shame in the minds of the colonized about their own history and traditions (After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism 10). Bhabha in ‘Of Mimicry and Men” presents the concept of ‘colonial mimicry’, and defines it as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference” (quoted in Neil Lazarus, “National consciousness and Intellectualism” 217-18). It’s a theory about the constitution of subjectivity under colonialism. It has drastic results too. Chakrabarty comments:
The mode of self representation that the 'Indian' can adopt here is what Homi K. Bhabha has justly called 'mimetic'. Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain 'modern' subject of ‘European’ history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain ‘grievously incomplete’ (360).

The attitude of colonial supremacy is again evident in the travel writings of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster and V.S. Naipaul. To quote David Spur:

Kipling’s gaze identifies itself with the force and contempt of colonial authority, exposing the corruption of native Calcutta life when left to its own devices and finding a spatial metaphor for that life in the image of the deceptive, entrapping mazes. The searching, controlling gaze of the police is Kipling’s as well. The metaphor of predatory violence underwrites the power of that gaze, while it reveals the duplicity of those who are its object (The Rhetoric of Empire 20).

Purabi Panwar critiques Kipling’s Prospero Syndrome which did not allow Kipling to credit native Indians with any degree of intelligence at all. Pinney’s Kipling’s India: Uncollected Sketches 1884-88 states:
A quantity of the largest size of brass garden syringes were at first regarded with suspicion... presently one brilliant genius murmured that they would be the very things for the next holi, and the idea took at once. The richer men (for garden squirts with India rubber pipe are not cheap) have ordered several, and the next holi should be worth witnessing. The British manufacturer should be glad to learn that he has succeeded in adding additional éclat to one of the maddest and most riotous festivals of the East (60).

On another occasion, referring to the administration and control of Calcutta, Kipling says: “What a divine- what a divine place to loot! . . . It seems not only wrong but a criminal thing to allow natives to have any voice in the control of such a city- adorned, docked, wharfed, fronted and reclaimed by Englishmen, existing only because England lives and dependent for its life on England” (From Sea to Sea II 203). Warren Hastings refers with contempt to “the wretched inhabitants of the Carnatic” in his “Memoirs Relative to the State of India (1786)” (Harlow, Barbara and Mia Carter Ed. Imperialism and Orientalism 29).

Naipaul in his India: A wounded Civilization (1977) comments on the intellectual ineptitude of native Indians. “The crisis in India is not only political or economic. The larger crisis is of a wounded civilization that has at
last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead (18).

The instances discussed above amply illustrate how the West has appropriated history for its colonial project. The colonial discourses denigrated Indian practices as uncivilized and barbaric. It was through this sort of binary construction of values - privileging the West and decrying the Orient - that colonial histories attempted to legitimize and justify their practices of subjectification and exploitation of the Orient. The greatest contribution of postcolonial theory is the realization that all narratives are tainted by politics and are effective means for establishing power over the narrated. Postcolonial theory has succeeded in ‘tempting’ the colonized out of the blissful ignorance of Eden, by making the ‘Third World’ question all forms of authority.

However before winding up, it is necessary to subject Said’s work to a ‘contrapuntal’ reading, to consider the problems Ahmad finds with it, in some detail. Ahmad points out a number of errors that have crept into Said’s Orientalism in his essay which is divided into nine sections. Ahmad finds that Said ‘offers mutually incompatible definitions of ‘Orientalism’ so as to deploy these stances, the Foucauldian and the Auerbachian simultaneously” (“Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said” 265). Ahmad says:
These ambivalences about Auerbach and about humanism and Foucault’s discourse theory, which no serious intellectual would want to use simply as a method of reading and classifying canonical books because the theory itself is inseparable from Nietzschean antihumanism and the currently dominant antirealistic theories of representation (264).

Ahmad says that Said located “Marx firmly within the boundaries of what he calls the ‘western episteme’” (264), and “Foucault’s thought was drawn against humanism” (266). On the whole, Ahmad claims that Said’s work is self divided not only between Auerbachian high-humanism and Nietzschean anti-humanism, but also between a host of irreconcilable positions in cultural theory’ (267-8).

Ahmad dwells at length on Said’s subservient attitude towards Western narratives evidenced by the book. He adds:

With the exception of Said’s own voice, the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very Western canonicity, which, Said complaints, has always silenced the Orient. Who is silencing whom, who is refusing to permit a historicized encounter between the voice of the so called ‘Orientalist’ and the many voices that Orientalism is said to so utterly suppress, is a question very hard to determine as we
read this book. It sometime appears that one is transfixed by the power of the very voice that one debunks (271).

If colonial historiographers used history as a tool for legitimizing their interventions in India during the colonial period, the postcolonial diasporic writers of India, in the globalised cosmopolitan world order, use history to serve their own purposes of reclaiming firm identities. Rushdie’s narrator Saleem Sinai reconstructs the story of India placing himself in the central role. In fact, the urge behind the telling of his story is not bringing to light a true version of Indian history but making himself the central figure in the narrative and thereby constructing a strong foundation and significance to his own existence. Just as the colonial powers found out reasons for interfering in the politics and administration of India, Saleem Sinai cooks up occasions that justify his centrality in the post independence history of India. Right from his birth until his gradual disintegration, Saleem consciously or unconsciously assumes centrality in all the major occurrences that define the future of India. He is inevitably handcuffed to history.

Tharoor in the novel questions the representations of India constructed by the West:

This is now the classic picture of India, is it not, and French cinematographers take time off from filming the unclad forms of their women in order to focus with loving pity on the unclad
forms of our children. They could have done this earlier too, they and their pen-wielding equivalents of an earlier day, but somehow all the foreign observers then could only bring themselves to write about the glories of the British Empire. Not of the Indian weavers whose thumbs the British had cut off in order to protect the machines of Lancashire; not of the Indian peasants whose lands had been signed over to zamindars who would guarantee the colonists the social peace they needed to run the country, and not of the destitution and hunger to which these policies reduced Indians (The great Indian Novel 94-95).

The narrator evidently expresses anger at the Western practice of being unfair to India. The West almost always misrepresented India and its people. The narrator in Tharoor’s novel pungently critiques the biased perspective of the colonial historiographers. The postcolonial project of writing back to the empire is superbly accomplished by Tharoor through his narrator in the novel. The narrator continues:

It is difficult for you, living now with the evidence of that poverty around you, taking it for granted as a fact of life, to conceive of an India that was not poor, not unjust, not wretched. But that was how India was before the British came, or why would they have come? Do you think the merchants and adventurers and traders of the East India Company would have
first sailed to a land of poverty and misery? No Ganapathy, they came to an India that was fabulously rich and prosperous, they came in search of wealth and profit, and they took what they could take, leaving Indians to wallow in their leavings. Ganga knew when he trod through the slush and the shit of the factory workers’ slums, that this had not existed before the British came, and that its existence was a negation of the idea of truth in which he so passionately believed (ibid 95).

Tharoor’s narrator also succeeds in placing Indian values above those of the West. He says: “Where a Western woman misses a meal in the interest of her figure, her Indian sister dedicates her starvation to a cause” (103). Speaking about the ‘divide and rule’ policy adopted by the British in Indian administration he says: “They wanted to introduce as many divisive elements as possible in order to be able to say to the world: ‘You see these Indians can never agree amongst themselves, we really have no choice but to continue ruling them indefinitely for their own good’” (115). Regarding the portrayal of the colonial administrators in works of history, Tharoor’s narrator says:

Some of our more Manichaean historians tend to depict the British villains as supremely accomplished – the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent manipulators of the destiny of India. Stuff and nonsense, of course. For every brilliant Briton who came to India, there were at least five who were incapable of
original thought and fifteen who were only capable of original sin. They went from mistake to victory and mistake again with a combination of luck, courage and the Gatling gun, but mistakes they made, all the time. Don’t forget that the British are the only people in history crass enough to make revolutionaries out of Americans. They took insensitivity and stupidity on quite a stupendous scale – qualities they could hardly keep out of their rule over our country (116).

Vikram Seth also has used the ‘history’ of India for the construction of fiction. ‘History’ is to be understood here as versions produced by powerful people which suited their interests. There is no single history anywhere, but only versions. Seth has used history for the narration of his tale, which presents a vast panorama of political leaders and political moves that altered the face of India for ever. It can be seen that Seth did not have an objective beyond his book in terms of his use of history for the telling of his novel. History for Seth is less important than the novel. Historical facts are only tools that serve the purpose of providing required support for the construction of his tale.

It can be seen that the strategies used by colonial historiographers and the diaspora meet at many points as they are analyzed in detail. If the colonial historiographers wanted to justify the colonial projects undertaken in the colonized territory, they presented it in such a way that they could be
convincing. Construction of history being an integral process in maintaining and fostering an identity, the postcolonial diasporic cosmopolitans also mostly move along the lines of the former colonial masters. Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981), Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel (1989) and Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy (1993) are reconstructions of post-independence Indian history. They narrate national histories reserving a position for themselves in the slots of history by way of the narrative power they assume. They offer different versions of history through their fictions, and in return assume power over what is narrated. They narrate the history of the people of a nation, and apparently seem to be speaking for those who are denied the power of narration. Therefore it “involves a post-Foucauldian disavowal of the problematic of representation, that is, speaking for others comes to be viewed as a discredited aspiration, which is secretively authoritarian” (Neil Lazarus, 1994, 211). For Foucault, the desire for representation is a desire for power. Foucault’s treatment of Rene Magritte’s picture ‘This Is Not a Pipe’ reveals how language- the most important tool of history- assumes power in governing the process of signifying and generating meaning. The representability of the picture is made problematic by the verbal intervention which asserts that ‘this is not a pipe’. “Traditional history’s search for origins in great moral truths is entirely misguided; everything is subject to history’s disintegrating gaze. There are no absolutes” comments Lydia Alix Fillingham (Foucault 103). The diasporic writers are
engaged in the construction of meaning through representation of national histories. They construct meaning to their transnational cosmopolitan lives through fictional reconstruction of national histories. The motive behind such efforts is nothing but the search for power. In simple words, diasporic reconstructions of history are exercises of, and for, power.
Notes


3 Edward Said in his Culture and Imperialism (1993) refers to the practice of contrapuntal reading. Interpreting contrapuntally is interpreting different perspectives simultaneously and seeing how a text interacts with itself as well as with historical or biographical contexts. Contrapuntal reading means reading a text "with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England" (66). It is reading with "awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51). In interpreting colonial texts, it takes into consideration the perspectives of both colonizer and colonized.

4 The practice of ‘othering’ is central to colonial discourse as clarified by Said’s Orientalism. There is a deliberate attempt to keep the Orient on the other side of the West and its corollaries, in colonial historiography. What is normal and what is abnormal are decided on the basis of the irrational foundation of the West being the permanently normal agency. The practice of binary construction privileging one term over the other, aided the colonialists in portraying the colonized as inferior, uncultured, uncivilized, feminized and barbaric. On the other side the West claimed to be cultured, civilized, masculine and rational. Also see Sara
Suleri’s *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) wherein she says that “contemporary critical theory names the other in order that it need not be further known” (13).

5 Said considered the term ‘discourse’ very useful to identify Orientalism. He says: “My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period (1978, 3).

6 Tiffin’s proposition that colonialism is an experience grounded on European expansionist ideologies needs to be approached with caution in the context of the contemporary Indian cosmopolitan diaspora. Tiffin’s notion is firmly rooted in nations – First world or Third World- as absolutely definable geographical categories. Colonialism in the ‘postcolonial’ period functions as it always did, and is addressed as neocolonialism. The III chapter contains an examination of the idea of nation as a geographical category.


13 Resul Pookutty bagged an Oscar in the Best Sound Mixing category for his work on *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009) by the British director Danny Boyle.

14 Viswanathan, Gauri. Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India. (New York: Columbia UP, 1989). She explicates the agenda of Macaulay’s Filtration Theory in this regard and states that it purported to filter down to the colonized people the colonial ideology of the supremacy of Western civilization and hence the inferiority of the colonized native population (116, 149). Filtration Theory was “predicated on the notion that cultural values percolate downward from a position of power and by enlisting the cooperation of the intermediate classes representing the native elite” (34).

15 See the prefatory quotation in the first chapter of Tejaswini Niranjana’s *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1995) which is taken from Trevelyan’s *On the Education of the People of India* (1838) which reads:

> The passion for English knowledge has penetrated the most obscure, and extended to the most remote parts of India. The steam boats, passing up and down the Ganges, are boarded by native boys, begging not for money, but for books… Some gentlemen who were coming to Calcutta were astonished at the eagerness with which they were pressed for books by a troop of boys, who boarded the steamer form an obscure place called Comercolly. A Plato was lying on the table, and one of the party asked a boy whether that would serve his purpose. “Oh Yes” he exclaimed, “give me any book; all I want is a book”. The gentle man at last hit upon the expedient of cutting up an old Quarterly Review; and distributing the articles among them.

16 Illustrations to this claim have already been furnished.