Historians have argued that historical evidence restrains their freedom to 'imagine'. Yet it appears that retelling derives from those very 'gaps' in evidence and the aporetic nature of narrative. If actual events had any intrinsic logic in them there would be no conflicting versions of history. Differing interpretations and versions demonstrate how different historians view history differently.

The textual nature of historical knowledge stresses the subjectivity of historical judgement, termed "constructionism". "The central premise of constructionism is... that the process and product of historical inquiry are both functions of the historian's perspective-laden conventions" (Hobart 1989 47). History is a human construct. It is narrativized by reconstructing actively and analytically. It is not merely recounted (Mazlish 1992). It is being repeatedly pointed out that historical truth is like legal truth, true in a particular context. No general laws can be derived, no universal truths arrived at on its basis. Radical contextualism avers that there is no reality outside the text. This research is based on the assertion that our knowledge of reality is derived from the text. The past did exist as an external reality but our access to it
is through the verbal and other mediums of its representation.

The historian's avoidance of "I" in historical narrative is apparently a deliberate attempt to keep out the personal or subjective. In literature, the use of "I" is seen as a way of lending coherence to a narrative. To the historian it is a signpost indicating fictionality and the flaunting of the subjective which according to some of them is the mark of literature. The use of the third-person in historical and literary critical writing seeks to imply impartial judgement, objective view and non-partisan interpretation. J. Clive (1989) draws attention to the different uses that the pronoun "I" was put to by various historians. He finds that Gibbon's footnotes are mostly autobiographical intrusions in which "I" is used frequently to pass moral judgements; the first-person is not used in the text itself. Macaulay uses "I" to indicate first-hand information, a personal testimony intended to enliven and claim authenticity; Francis Parkman uses the first-person for a similar effect while Tocqueville's use of "I", according to Clive, enhances the dramatic quality of his account; Jules Michelet linked his own personal history and the historical period under discussion by using "I". J. Clive argues that the use of the personal singular pronoun would make him less likely to contaminate the data, "simply because there is less pretense that he and it are one" (32).
He finds the prevalent use of "the most disgusting pronoun" - "we" - in the twentieth century guided by the assumption that "objectivity" is fostered by an impersonal mode of writing.

Hutcheon(1988) points to historians like Le Roy Ladurie who have flaunted conventions of traditional historiography. Hutcheon cites Ladurie's *Carnival in Romans* (1979) as an example of new historical writing in which the historian is not a metaphorical witness or imaginary participant but a scholar who relates the story from an explicitly and intensely partisan perspective. The historian's value system is laid out before the readers to judge for themselves (Hutcheon 91). This kind of conflation of two enunciative systems, defined by Emile Benveniste as historical and discursive, is a transgression of conventions of historiography according to Hutcheon. It moves away from that tradition of historical writing in which no reference is made to the historian's discursive situation. In historiographic metafiction assumptions of a historical 'given' is questioned by weaving into the text, discourse which is aimed at challenging what Hutcheon calls "implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation" (92). Grammatically the first-person singular, "I" in any narrative stands for the narrator or the speaker and the narrative as a whole is perceived to be
a product of the consciousness of the narrator. Born out of the cognitive processes of one mind, a text is seen to be integrated by the psychological unity of the person. For a reader the "I" in a narrative becomes a subject within the text and an object whose examination yields meaning and gives significance to the text. In traditional historiography "I" is largely camouflaged by third-person narration while in literature "I" has been interpreted variously. The first-person singular has been viewed as the character/narrator whose 'point of view' shapes the narrative as the 'implied author' or as the author. The use of the first-person in historiographic metafiction works in two ways: it highlights the subjectivity of a historian's point of view and it demonstrates the layers of inscribing the "I". In the twentieth century the increased focus on 'reading' and the advent of interactive fiction and "compunovels" have almost infinitely widened the range of "readings" of a narrative. Interactive media allows the interactor to choose his/her own path out of a number of alternatives. The "reader" creates his/her own texts whose sequence is decided by him/her. Interactive fiction provides for greater reader participation in which the reader may produce the text and read it at the same time.

First Person Singular: "I"

A pattern may be discerned in the distribution of the grammatical marker "I" in IAAL and THOTW. In IAAL the
Prologue has four parts. The first part introduces the reader to the slave of MS H.6 through a letter written in 1148 A.D. which was first discovered in 1942. The second part points out the unusualness of a slave being written about "now, in the summer of 1148". The third part reveals the discovery in 1973 of another letter by Khalaf ibn Ishaq written in 1139 AD. The last part of the Prologue is a brief introduction to "I" as conventionally used. This "I" resembles Amitav Ghosh, the author. It is not till the sixth chapter of the second section of the book, Lataīfa, that the "I" is called 'Amitab'. In the second section, 'Lataīfa', the second, fifth and tenth chapters make no overt reference to "I". The second chapter gives a history of Masr, that is, Cairo or Egypt; the fifth chapter draws a contrast between Cairo as Ben Yijū 'saw' it and as it appears "today" to Amitab; and the tenth chapter accounts for the gradual depletion of the Geniza documents. In the third section, 'Nashāwy', "I" is absent from the seventh, ninth and sixteenth chapters which deal with an examination of the possible causes for Ben Yijū's departure to India, the tracing of the sea route of Ben Yijū's voyage to India and a discussion of Ben Yijū's marriage to Ashu. The sixteenth chapter ends in an ironic sentence that contains the only first person singular in a reference to the relationship between Ben Yijū and Ashu. The first, fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth and tenth chapters of the fourth section,
'Mangalore', make no use of "I". The first chapter is an overview of Mangalore's history; the fourth discloses knowledge of the only incident in Bomma's life referred to in Madmun's letter; the fifth tries to explain how Ben Yijû may have noticed Bomma by re-examining the concept of 'slavery'; the seventh chapter expands on the items which Ben Yijû ordered for his personal use; the ninth tries to comprehend his life in Mangalore with Ashu and the tenth chapter contrasts the peaceful trade of the Middle Ages with the "demonic thirst" that militarized the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century. The last but one section 'Going Back' has the second, fourth and sixth chapters without the first-person singular. The second chapter has Ben Yijû contemplating a return to Aden, in the fourth chapter he moves to Egypt and has unfortunate experiences there; the sixth chapter closes Ben Yijû's story since "as far as I know" no traces of his existence can be found. So the sixth chapter like the sixteenth chapter of the third section, refers to "I" once. All the chapters that refrain from the use of "I" are situated in the Middle Ages. The second chapter of the section 'Lataîfa' and the first chapter of 'Mangalore' recreate for the reader Cairo and Mangalore, during the Middle Ages. These chapters contrast the topography of a place at different points in time. The consistent use of "possibly", "perhaps" and other modals underlines the contingency of historical facts and therefore
of historical interpretation, irrespective of the presence of "I". It precludes the assignment of any enhanced value to third-person narration. The undercurrent of incertitude running through the third-person narration in these chapters undercuts any equation of the third-person historical narrative with objectivity. It highlights the blanks in historical facts and therefore speculative nature of historical deduction. Continuity is imposed on history by the historian's methodology. Thus, even though a distinction can be marked between the third-person narration of the twelfth century and the first-person narration of the twentieth century, this distinction is ironic, mocking at established conventions which assume that it signals the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity.

The reader has access to the information that Amitav Ghosh, the author of IAAL, has much in common with Amitab, the narrator of IAAL. The question whether Amitab is Amitav Ghosh is a non-issue as the narrative is located between the author and narrator positioning the ambiguity of space between the letters. The ambiguous identity of the narrator underlines the problematics of 'authorizing' a narrative. The exhaustive notes at the end, which account for every kind of source used, compounds the problem of authorial identity in the narrative, as it does the distinctions between the real and fictional, the novel and historiography and the fictional and non-fictional processes of writing.
Gerard Genette asserted in *Narrative Discourse* (1972 trans. 1980) that equating the narrator with the author and the narrating instance with "writing" was "a confusion that is perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography, but not when we are dealing with a narrative of fiction, where the role of narrator is itself fictive..." (213). In his sequel to this book *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1983 trans. 1988), Genette admits that the term "historical narrative(of fiction)" is "very indefinite" (80). He then goes on to cover under it every type of narrative that is placed explicitly "(even by only one date)" in a historical past and whose narrator "sets himself up more or less as a historian and therefore... as a subsequent witness" (80). The term is thrown open wider by accepting that "fiction is rarely pure" and few novels are completely devoid of a historical framework. Genette's revised position indicates the change in his perception of "real autobiography" and the demarcations between fiction and history. Texts like *IAAL* and *THOTW* challenge the idea of "I" as reflection of subjectivity and use of the third person pronoun as reflection of objectivity in the manner of historiographic metafiction. The situation of the author and location of the narrator is problematic.

In *THOTW* the grammatical use of "I" does not signal a single identity. A close reading of the text shows that Part
One has one chapter, Part Two has two chapters and Part Three has six chapters that do not have an "I" in them. The narration of the Brookfield siege is in the fifth chapter of Part One. In Part Two the fourth chapter reproduces Hannah Easton's diary entries and the seventh chapter has many baboon stories narrated at drinking sessions by sailors and the recovery of Cephus Prynne's mutilated body. The six chapters in Part Three which have no grammatical marker "I" recount the story of Raja Jadav Singh, his days with Hannah, his defeat in battle and Hannah's imprisonment. The absence of "I" in the narration of seventeenth century life does not make it objective. It is as if Beigh Masters's involvement in the story of Hannah Easton is so intense that the distance between narrator(a figure of the historian) and her subject disappears. Possibly this is why in Part Four, which has only one chapter, Beigh Masters 'enters' the person of Bhagmati whom Hannah called 'Hester' after her friend in Salem, Hester Mannings. In THOTW the absence of "I" is probably the result of the blurring of distinctions between subjectivities.

There are similarities in Beigh Masters's and Bharati Mukherjee's situations - their 'translated' immigrant selves. Perhaps the rerouting was of added interest to Mukherjee "for she[Hannah] was one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway"(THOTW 189). And perhaps the author's identity is implicated in
that of her narrator's. It is one of the few Indian texts that has a white protagonist. D.F. Karaka has written a novel set in England using only British characters (M. Mukherjee 1971). Vikram Seth's The Golden Gate is set wholly in twentieth century America. In Bharati Mukherjee's writings a sense of India is subtly woven. The indeterminate gap between the author and narrator will remain an area which yields various propositions. In the Preface to All About H. Hatterr (1970) Desani writes: "There are two of us writing this book. A fellow called H. Hatterr and I" (17). Flann O'Brien tackles the problem in a different manner: "All the characters represented in this book, including the first person singular, are entirely fictitious and bear no relation to any person living or dead" (At Swim-two-Birds 1939). "[I]ncluding the first person singular" was probably an attempt to preclude a comparison between the author and narrator of the book. Historiographic metafiction does not solve the problem of identity. It foregrounds it.

(Re)constructing the Subject

The object of historical research in IAAL and THOTW is a person and the historian is "doing history" to reproduce that person's self or subjectivity. In their research, Amitab and Beigh Masters are themselves subject to history: their historical methodologies though different are faced with similar twentieth century problems of scepticism and
contingency. The provisional nature of history reiterated overtly and by implication in both narratives undercuts any claims to their being inviolate histories.

The self-consciousness in IAAL and THOTW is layered. Their narrators are aware of the conventions of constructing fictional worlds and at the same time of the discourses on narrating history. IAAL and THOTW weave historical discourse with narration. This is achieved by reconstructing a subject—Bomma in IAAL and Hannah in THOTW—in history.

a. Emphasizing subjectivity in historical investigation

Beigh Masters' interest in Hannah Easton is subjective. "Anything having to do with Mughal India gets my attention"(THOTW 5). The figure of the Salem bibi, an American in Mughal India, intrigued her. Hannah Easton, Salem bibi, Precious-as-Pearl is also linked to the mystery of "the most perfect diamond in the world"—the Emperor's Tear. Beigh Masters also discovers that Rebecca Easton née Walker is part of her genealogy. "Vaguely, then, I'm part of this story, the Salem bibi is part of the tissue of my life"(THOTW 21). Academic, professional and personal interests seem to converge in Beigh Masters's pursuit of the life of Hannah Easton. Beigh Masters in THOTW is gathering "narrative substances" in Ankersmit's terms on a narrative subject named Hannah Easton, the Salem Bibi. The narrative
subject is unravelled by "narrative substances" that include paintings, history books, documents, trinkets, archaeological findings and museological objects. When crates containing the Salem Bibi's "things" are uncovered like "archaeology pits," Beigh Masters points out in the midst of the excitement of her discovery: "Not all that survives has value or meaning; believing that it does screen out real value, real meaning"(13). 'Real' value or 'real' meaning are subjective judgements so that different historians follow different routes to create different realities. Masters in THOTW is aware that her foray into history is but one kind and one route, that different realities and different truths can be arrived at. The focus on Hannah Easton is preconceived; that is, the subject of research is delineated at the beginning so that every subsequent claim to 'objectivity' is based on a personal subjective inclination.

Amitab’s access to the materials necessary for the reconstruction of the lives of Ben Yiju and Bomma, the slave of MS H.6 is discrete and discontinuous. As a historian he attempts to piece together a fairly comprehensible story inspite of the numerous gaps and absences in historical evidence. The resulting reconstruction is both a description and a 'reading', that is, an interpretation, of the subjects in history.
In his analysis of Ben Yiju's move to India Amitab puts forward two reasons to show that it was anomalous. The first is that though merchants in the eastern trade lived for long periods of time, none stayed back as Ben Yiju did in India for two decades. The second reason put forward is the fragment of a letter written by Madmun ibn al-Hasan ibn Bundar of Aden to Ben Yiju. The fragment is quoted in full: "'Concerning what he [my master] mentioned [in his letter]: that he has resolved to return to Aden, but that which prevents him [from returning] is the fear that it would be said that he had acted rashly. His servant spoke to [the king] al-Malik al-Said concerning him... and took from him his guarantee as a safeguard against his return, insha'allah. So he [my master] has nothing to fear: [the king] will resolve everything in his court in the country of India. And if, God forbid, he were to lose... what he has and his children were part of that [loss]..."'" (IAAL 160)(Emphasis added). The passage serves to "establish beyond any doubt" according to the researcher, that Ben Yiju's exit to India was not entirely voluntary. At the same time, unless the rest of the letter is found the exact reason for Ben Yiju's departure can only be conjectured. The "most obvious possibility", financial irregularity, is ruled out as too trivial to warrant the attention of the ruler of Aden. The mystery of the cause for Yiju's departure is compounded by the language used. The Arabic term 'dhimma'
used in the letter could mean that the ruler of Aden had agreed to pardon Ben Yijū for some crime done or accused of, or it could mean that he had pledged to protect Ben Yijū from certain people whose enmity Ben Yijū feared. In the reconstruction of Ben Yijū’s life, his exile from his homeland whether out of fear or necessity, self-imposed or otherwise, is a crucial event. Clues to this event in Ben Yijū’s life provided by the letter already quoted, far from making clear, suggest more than one interpretation. The narrator suggests that the difficulty in language is compounded not only by the evolution of the language used in the letters over the last five or six centuries but also by the "unusual, hybrid language" of the correspondence. The multiple interpretations prevent any totalizing concept of subjectivity. The gaps in historical evidence are bridged by speculations.

Looking back one finds that Amitab has been able to recover very little of the slave of MS H.6's life. At the end of his project he arrives at the name 'Bomma' for the slave. The name indicates the slave's Indian origin. Amitab finds out that Bomma lived with his master Yijū in Aden when the latter returned to Egypt through a note which mentioned a certain sum owed by Yijū to Bomma. There is only one incident in Bomma's life of which Amitab has direct knowledge - Bomma's visit to Aden in 1125, when Aden was raided by pirates, an unusual event. "The expedition was not
perhaps an event that properly deserves to be called 'historic'..."(256). But it is mentioned in a chronicle by Ibn Mujawwir a century and a half later. In a letter to Yijū, Madmum seemed more agitated by Bomma's drunkenness than the raid. Amitab conjures the image of a drunken Bomma on the shore, waving a flask and cheering the soldiers into battle against the pirates. There is unmistakable drama in the prospect. Amitab's reference to the 'historic' is significant. White(1984) observes that the ambiguity of the word 'history' arises more from the equivocation contained in the notion of a past divided into two parts, one that is historical and the other that is not. It emphasizes history as a subjective enterprise, whose reality is textual. History is ultimately constituted in and by language.

Beigh Masters finds that her distance from Hannah in time and the scattered fragments of evidence of Hannah's existence are insufficient indicators of her actual self. "This is the best I can do, pulling it together from a hundred sources. I think of Venn, stitching together an October of four years ago, and realize that the most obscure person on the planet today is, comparatively, like a god: observed, adored, commented upon, celebrated. Hannah, whose 1745 Memoirs forms the basis of much of the early life, and only a bit of the middle, the warrant, if you wish, for the linkages in my earlier investigations, still eludes my net. Time has made her free from me..."(Emphasis added). Venn's
design as Masters views it recalls Andy Warhol's pronouncement of 15-minutes fame for any twentieth century individual.

In IAAL the consistent use of modals conveying probability rather than finality underline the provisional nature of historical facts. In THOTW questions are raised frequently, possibilities are raised, answers not provided. The questions cannot be called rhetorical, as evident from the following excerpts.

"Time-retrieval" for Venn Iyer is a matter of inputting all available data and programming their to create a historical reality. But Masters finds that the question "Why?" has no definite answers. When Hannah Easton agrees to marry Gabriel Legge, Masters can only keep guessing. "Why would a self-possessed, intelligent, desirable woman like Hannah Easton suddenly marry a man she recognized as inappropriate and untrustworthy? Why would she accept Hester Manning's castoff, or betrayer? Guilt, perhaps, a need to punish herself for the secret she was forced to carry? Unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by running off with a treacherous alien? Gabriel Legge with his tales of exotic adventure was as close to the Nipmuc lover as any man in Salem; she sought to neutralize her shame by emulating her mother's behaviour" (THOTW 69). Beigh Masters's lover Venn, looks at
it in another way. His interpretation is: "We do things when it is our time to do them" (70). Unlike Masters who searches for a motive for Hannah's decision, Venn passively accepts the "fact" of Hannah Easton's marriage with Gabriel Legge. Beigh Masters is similarly puzzled when Gabriel does not punish her for her infidelity and when Hannah agrees to sail with Gabriel to India. "What made Hannah abdicate sovereign rule of her fenced, peaceable suburban kingdom and sail with Gabriel on the Fortune, a four-hundred-ton East Indiaman, in May 1694?"

Fear perhaps ... Or simple practicality..."(THOTW 89)

There is no way that Masters can know for sure. Answers are not implied in these questions, they are not rhetorical. The questions are more of a speculative nature and underscores the incompleteness of history.

Amitab and Beigh Masters attempt to 'lay bare' the process by which a subjectivity could be retrieved from history. Both highlight the provisional assumptions that stabilized their 'construction' of a subject. By offering probable representations they underlined the inconclusive nature of historical meaning.

b. Blurred subjectivity

A historian cannot claim to be free of history, or free from being implicated in the process of history. Masters
chooses Hannah as the subject of her investigation. Beigh Masters's cross-cultural experiences gives her some understanding of Hannah Easton's migrant position. Ironically undercutting the notion of objectivity, Beigh Masters points to the isolation in which Hannah Easton wrote her diary in England: "She didn't travel often into the city, saw no plays, had few friends. Her husband was often gone to sea. She was, in other words, an ideal correspondent, the perfect reporter. Seeing no one, going nowhere, doing nothing, she learned to cultivate her own garden" (THOTW 74). The contrast between ideal correspondent and learning to garden is ironic. The historian's imagination supposedly closes the gap between the past and himself/herself and in his/her writing attempts to convey to readers a similar immediacy. Amitab in IAAL finds Nabeel's attempt to understand his loneliness akin to his own attempt to enter Ben Yijū's mind: "I was never able to forget it, for it was the first time that anyone in Lataifa or Nashāwy had attempted an enterprise similar to mine - to enter my imagination and look at my situation as it might appear to me" (IAAL 152). In THOTW entering another person's imagination problematizes the distinctions of subjectivity.

Imagination is indispensable for a historian. It helps him or her to empathize with the historical figures in order to understand and interpret them and their actions. "The historian must put himself inside them...The effort to get
inside is obviously enough, a path to insight" (Tuchman 1981 63). One of the qualities that made Hester Manning, Hannah's special companion was Hester's imagination. Hester could put herself in any other person's situation, real or fictional. In THOTW the identities of Masters and Hannah seem to merge in the process of the reconstruction of Hannah's life by Masters. Masters's knowledge of Hannah is filtered by Hannah's self-inscriptions and the various paintings and trinkets that Masters has come across.

Beigh Masters enters the mind of Hannah Easton. She imagines Hannah lying in the battlefield among the dead listening to the approach of the victor's elephant: "Hannah remembered the Brookfield stories, the sounds of scalps ripping, like pulling up roots. It pleased her that in these last minutes of her life, as the elephant made its implacable approach, these were the thoughts the Lord God had planted in her brain" (THOTW 248) (Emphasis added). Or the time when she is slapped into submissiveness at Aurangzebe's court: "She staggered and would have fallen on the carpet if a veiled attendant had not glided out of line and steadied her. When she regained her balance, she stared— with all the insolence she could summon— at the man who had discarded the only rules of fair play she knew and had guiltlessly imprisoned her" (THOTW 264) (Emphasis added).
Masters "reads" Hannah from the perspective of the present even as she tries to see Hannah through Hannah's eyes. Expressions like "Hannah wondered", "the shape she assumes in Hannah's fantasies", or "she[Hannah] realized suddenly", blur the distinctions between the past and the present and that between Masters, the historian, and Hannah, the subject of her inquiry. Masters is privy to Hannah's "sightings" of the night her mother was lost to her and also writes of "the night Hannah has willed herself not to remember". Seeing similarities between her consciousness and that of Hannah and interpreting Hannah's writings from her present situation, Beigh Masters diminishes any distance that 'objectivity' demands be maintained.

And yet Beigh Masters enters Bhagmati's body rather than Hannah's in virtual reality. The distance is ironic. Like most historians she felt one with her subject but in the final scene remains an onlooker. Another possibility is that Masters got what she wanted: she locates the Emperor's Tear for which it was essential to 'become' Bhagmati. Throughout the narrative Masters finds resemblances between her life and Hannah's. It challenges the notion of objectivity. Historical evidence has to be interpreted by a historian for it to become meaningful.

The transmogrification of Beigh Masters in the last pages of the book has implications in the discourse on the
project of recovering a subject in/of history. It blurs the
distinctions between the historian and her object (in this
case, a subject) in history, the narrator and the subject
of narration and autobiography and biography. Dramatic
personal experience functions in THOTW to convince Masters
of the answer to the puzzle of the Emperor's Tear.
Subjective experience has been skeptically viewed as
evidence. Beigh Masters's vicarious experience implies that
history is a contemporary experience. The past is examined
for present purposes by Beigh Masters. And by making the
past a personal experience Masters seems convinced of its
"truth". The computer, then, persuades her to believe in a
past which is a reconstruction, not totally free from error.
History is not just the past, it includes the present.

The near-death experience of Beigh Masters may be
juxtaposed with the two emotional outbursts by Amitab in
IAAL, when Amitab unleashes his anger. Both these times the
issues are linked to history. The first time Amitab is
engaged in conversation with the Imam. The Imam derides and
chides Amitab in whose country people burn the dead. The
Imam and others find the practice deplorable. The Imam then
points to the "advanced" West who do not burn the dead. The
West, he says, are not ignorant but educated and are
knowledgeable about science and possess guns, tanks and
bombs. At this point Amitab explodes and points out that
India has conducted a nuclear test and has guns and weapons
that far surpass Egypt's. Afterwards Amitab realizes the sad irony of "two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence"(236). By indulging in one-upmanship Amitab feels a "conspirator in the betrayal of the history that had led me to Nashâwy; a witness to the extermination of a world of accommodations..."(237). It signals Amitab's misgivings about power in its contemporary sense and gives the reader a glimpse of his unstated wish to rejuvenate the peaceful culture of the past.

Amitab's second outburst is directed against the Egyptian officials who are suspicious of the intentions behind his visit to the tomb of Sidi Abu-Hasira. The official's disbelief, to Amitab, indicates the success of the imperial dispersal of every document that would have borne out the indistinguishable, intertwined histories of India and Egypt. "I had been caught straddling a border, unaware that the writing of History had predicated its own self-fulfillment"(340). Amitab loses his cool when asked for money for letting him go. It brings to the reader's mind the corruption which alienates Egypt from its own history. The incident shows that history's lessons have not been learnt. While Masters shouts in Venn's language during the interactive programme, a language she doesn't know, Amitab forgets himself in a burst of emotion. There is nothing to distinguish the two 'real' subjective experiences. They blur the boundaries between the vicarious and the direct.
Cybernetics: Chimera of objectivity

Inspite of sophisticated twentieth century cybernetics recreating a human subject remains incomplete. The computer may be viewed as an 'objective' tool for historical analysis. It apparently dehumanizes historical research. But, interactive computer programmes further problematize subjective personal experience.

Beigh Masters "experiences" the past through virtual reality. In the computer programme she enters Bhagmati's body, but she is also Beigh Masters within virtual reality who finds Hannah "more Pre-Raphaelite than I had imagined". Masters is "like a dreamer aware of her dream even as she can't escape it"(THOTW 282). The mystery of the Emperor's Tear is solved as she "feels" Bhagmati plunging a knife and burying the diamond deep within her. While Amitab in IAAL relies heavily on linguistics and philology Beigh Masters solves a historian's puzzle through virtual reality. Their solutions are deductions that are not without revision. This is brought out by an earlier virtual experience. Masters 'visits' 29 October 1989. She walks through streets, people respond to her, she could touch them and she gets winded climbing stairs in virtual reality. But when she exits the programme she asks herself why she intercepted a lady demonstrating faucets in a Kansas City bathroom. She is aware that she could have taken another route and
experienced another sequence in time. It emphasizes her partial knowledge.

Masters "think[s]" that the diamond still lies inside Bhagmati's body in India because if Hannah had taken it to America, "it would have turned up by now"(THOTW 284). If Hannah did not care to take the world's perfect diamond with her why did she trouble herself to steal it at all? Some questions remain unanswered. The possibility of the diamond being elsewhere cannot be totally ruled out. Masters's dramatic "near-death experience" and feeling that "I really am incubating an enormous diamond" seem to have convinced her but does not really tie up the loose ends. The computer's solution is based on the database input, and the algorithm for data analysis fed by the programmer Venn Iyer. Masters's 'first-hand experience' of history, seems to authenticate the cybernetic solution in the narrative until knowledge of Iyer's mediation subverts any such authentication.

Positioning the subject: "Whose Truth?"

In its engagement with subjectivity, historiographic metafiction raises the question "Whose truth?" in any discussion on historical truth and objectivity. It moves away from binary oppositional categories of otherness and uses Derridean "différance". Meaning of a text as of a word is signified by its difference from other words, and
complete meaning is deferred until all differences are unfolded. In history difference was asserted by the "ex-centricics", Hutcheon's term for those off-centre and decentred. The ex-centricics include women, ethnics, gays, blacks, postcolonials and all the "silent" groups excluded by homogeneous systems of power and ideologies. They inhabit the margins, peripheries and edges of discourse and from these off-centre positions, they attempt to decentre dominant discursive practices. The margins asserting their difference in terms of gender, race, ethnicity or nationality expose the dominant biases in canonical texts and history. It destabilizes received notions of history and fiction and parodies conventions of realistic representation. The decentring of discourse has led to a revival of the margins. While 'otherness' suggests binary opposition, difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity and plurality. The challenging of exclusive narratives and cultural practice has made space for the local, the peripheral.

a. Subverting "point of view"

In traditional autobiography the speaking subject is the pivot on which the lens through which the self is revealed, rests. The "I" is the "eye" that frames the narrative and authorizes the point of view. In historiographic metafiction subjectivity is a process that
does not end in the emergence of any unified self or complete consciousness. The "I" and the "eye" do not coincide in historiographic metafiction. The metafictional aspect of historiographic metafiction does not presume a single organic self-reflexive 'point of view'. This is most effectively brought out by Saleem and V.V.'s interactions with Padma and Ganapathi in MC and TGIN respectively. The narrator's situation in the two texts unlike conventional autobiographies is not that of an isolated individual soliloquizing in an attempt to understand the meaning of his or her existence or a monologue with occasional flashes of awareness of an audience. Saleem has Padma not only as a listener but also an active participant in the process of narrating. V.V. has Ganapathi who, though not as vocal as Padma, by his presence influences the narrative, making it continuously aware of the reader for whom the narrative is ultimately meant.

The presence of the reader in the text and the 'play' of memory in the writing of the narrative focus attention on the process of narration. Inspite of a single narrator in these texts, their cohesiveness is not given by a single consciousness. And to look for a binding point of view in the author is made problematic by the constant and frequent refutation of subjectivity as a homogeneous and coherent entity.
(i) Multiple identities

Within texts the figure of the author has often been labelled as "implied author", the "authorial narrator" or the "authorial voice". The incidences of "manipulative narrator" and "unreliable narrator" have challenged the figure of the author in his or her work. Shifting perspectives and characters without a centre that holds them in Forsterian 'roundedness' have problematized notions of 'point of view' and coherent, singular voice. The use of first-person narrative has not alleviated the problem in the four texts under scrutiny. Though "I" is consistently used there is no single, unified character that the first-person singular pronoun indicates. Saleem resembles Oskar of The Tin Drum and the characters of TGIN may be seen to be composed by the Mahabharata, Indian history and the author, Tharoor. The fictional and real ancestors of these characters problematize the notion of the fictional world as a closed subjective world, autonomous and self-referential. IAAL has figures from colonial history and THOTW depicts Aurangzebe the Mughal Emperor granting an audience to Hannah Easton. The interaction of the fictional and the historical problematize the demarcations between the 'real' and the fictive. It also questions the notion of originality.

In Chapter Three intertextuality was discussed as a device that expands the text's referential world, making
connections with other 'fictional' worlds problematizing distinctions made between the world and its literal and literary representation. Intertextuality problematizes notions of originality, creativity and authority of the author in the interpretation of texts. The use and references made of literary and non-literary texts indicate wide "fields" of significance. The 'death of the author' contests not only the authority of the author but also the institutions that legitimize such authority. To the museums and the historian, Hutcheon(1988) adds the publisher, the library and the university who have all taken part in 'this humanist "discourse of authenticity" that has certified the original and repressed the notion of repetition and copy(that gives any idea of originality its force)'(190). The notion of originality has been exposed as a construct which was considered intrinsic to literature. Its economic underpinnings - patents and copyrights - lend it the staying power. Historiographic metafiction uses intertextuality as a device to bring home to the reader the impossibility of originality that bears no trace of history. It refutes the New Critical notion of 'autotelic text'. It changes the image of writing from '"original inscription to parallel script"'(Hutcheon 81).

The autobiographical "I" is not a singular identity. Saleem begins "remaking my life" with the picture of his grandfather Aadam Aziz in 1915: "...visited by this vision
of my grandfather sixty-three years ago..." (MC 14). Saleem does not reveal his source, mystifying the reader by using terms like "vision." In another instance, narrating his childhood, he is "looking back through baby eyes" at "our Bombay" and the neighbourhood he lived in. Saleem finds, "I can reveal most of the secrets of my neighbourhood, because the grown-ups lived their lives in my presence without fear of being observed, not knowing that years later, someone would look back through baby-eyes and decide to let the cats out of their bags" (MC 150-1). This incident parodies objectivity. Saleem is not just recounting his life, he is seeing his past through a new perspective and making new meanings. Overhearing from the washchest and listening to voices in his head Saleem's sources provide an alternative history.

As a man-dog of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities (CUTIA), during the Bangladesh War, Saleem, bereft of family, emptied of "all the Saleems", "emptied of history", lives an unreal life. Unrecognizable to the narrator Saleem, the buddha's life is narrated in third-person singular. The writer Saleem is conscious of amnesia as a common narrative gimmick of the Bombay talkie, a method of achieving rebirth, of remaking or refashioning a self. "...I must doggedly insist that I, he, had begun... he(or I) had been cleansed... I(or he) accepted the fate..." (MC 419) (Emphasis added). The juxtaposition of the
first and third person singular while referring to the buddha from his present implies that the problem of the continuity of a subject's identity remains unresolved. "I" and "he" are not the same because "consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogeneous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and now...." (MC 420), and the buddha by abandoning consciousness and seceding from history forgot his past as Saleem. By making the buddha a part of his life, Saleem debunks his own definition of consciousness.

Amnesia is used as a means of achieving rebirth. Saleem's amnesia allows him to become a citizen of Pakistan, live life on the other side of the political border. It permits him to reinvent himself. At the same time Saleem is aware of amnesia as a technique used by Bombay film makers to give a twist to their tales. Remembering and forgetting have become narrative conventions for lurid film makers. Rushdie's awareness lends his imitation a parodic note.

In MC a unifying 'point of view' which reconciles all issues raised is elusive. Saleem changes so many times in the course of his life that his answer to the question "Who what am I?" is: "...I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything .
done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each "I", every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world" (MC 457-8)(Emphasis added). Saleem by his definition, then, is the product of everything in time and space and despite this all-inclusiveness remains 'Saleem'. His identity is given by the past, present and future and the people who occupy these temporal zones; yet, he is neither wholly representative nor wholly individualistic. His totality is not a closed entity but remains open to future revisions. He keeps one pickle jar empty for the future.

(ii) Interlocutors

Padma's reactions to Saleem's narrative - sorrowful tears when he narrates the tragic death of his entire family or the horror and disgust when he recounts his visit to Tai Bibi, at five hundred and twelve the oldest whore in the world - mock and parody that of a reader's. Padma's impatience at the slow pace of narration caused by Saleem's frequent interruptions and her irritation at his self-consciousness when "like an incompetent puppeteer, I reveal the hands holding the strings", foreground the
metafictional aspect of *MC* and at the same time questions it. Padma does not find it difficult to believe that Reverend Mother, Saleem's grandmother, eavesdropped on her daughters' dreams. But she is dismissive of a photograph telling the story of its subjects. "No audience is without its idiosyncrasies of belief" (*MC* 60). The authority of the speaking subject is challenged. The contradictory responses of Padma reflect that of the reader whose response too can neither be predictable nor homogeneous. The presence of the reader within the text foregrounds the process of narration.

Padma in *MC* speaks up for "what-happened-nextism" of conventional narrative - the linearity of traditional narrative and the cause-and-effect logic of narrative sequence. But by this very act of questioning she interrupts Saleem's narrative, formally disrupting its linear progress. "To me it's a crazy way of telling your life story", she cries, "if you can't even get to where your father met your mother" (*MC* 38). And Saleem, "[b]owing to the ineluctable Padma-pressures of what-happened-nextism", leaps from 1919 to 1942. In a way it seems as though Saleem is being manipulated by his reader. But the confrontation of Saleem's narration with Padma's intrusions also foregrounds the underlying problem of narrating a life, especially one that emerges from memory. When Padma leaves Saleem in a huff, he finds that "[a] balance has been upset" and wonders whether he must become "reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality..."
of a straight line" (MC 177-8). Padma is then not an accidental presence. She adds a dimension to the narrative and is an occasion for metafictional discourse.

Saleem locates himself figurally at the apex of an isosceles triangle supported by the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present, the latter embodied in Padma. Memory turns its "eye" inward and takes his mind back into the past while Padma is the insistent present, to whom the past is projected in narrative. Saleem is thus not just narrating; he is having his narrative read back to him. The overlapping of writing, reading and rewriting problematizes the issue of narrative 'point of view'. In self-reflexive writing, 'point of view' is circumscribed within a single consciousness, that consciousness framing and defining discourse within the text.

In TGIN, Ganapathi's services are engaged to transcribe the "Song of Modern India", dictated by Ved Vyas, "eighty-eight years old and full of irrelevancies". While Padma's namesake is the lotus-goddess, Ganapathi's is the elephant-god. Ganapathi works on the condition that V.V.'s dictation must never pause and V.V.'s condition is that Ganapathi would have to understand every word before writing it down.

In THOTW, Venn Iyer assumes the position of reader within the text, helping Masters's project with technology. Beigh Masters tries to understand how Hannah could suddenly
marry a man, whom she recognized as "inappropriate and untrustworthy". Venn points out that just as it was only by chance that Beigh started on the project of Salem Bibi, Hannah got married to Gabriel Legge "because it was her time to get married". Venn "bristles at Hannah's misconception of Hinduism", at Hannah's view of the Hindu religion as one in which there were more gods than people and which she saw as a "profound form of primitivism". Venn attempts to explain the concepts of Brahman and Atman and how "gods" were "visualizations of the Brahman's aspects and attributes" (THOTW 219). Masters 'translates' these Hindu concepts for her own comprehension into the Cosmic Soul and Individual Soul. It shows how narration and interpretation occur simultaneously in such a way that the two become indistinguishable. It also negates any claim to objectivity and impartial observation. Masters is helped in her final unravelling of the puzzle of the Emperor's Tear by Venn Iyer and his computer programme. Venn Iyer is an input to Masters's narrative at the same time that he inputs Masters's narrative into his computer to solve the mystery of the Emperor's Tear.

b. Appropriating history

When Saleem discovers that he is the son of William Methwold and his Hindu maid Vanita his "world" is displaced just as V.V.'s was. The Sinais learn that they "simply
could not think our way out of our pasts..." (MC 137). Saleem's mixed parentage becomes a metaphor for the children of midnight, "fathered, you understand, by history". When the sun sets over the Empire, the Englishman Methwold leaves his Estate and returns to England leaving behind his illegitimate progeny. The revelation of his parentage gives his autobiography new meaning. Though not the real son, Saleem continues to live like one. His position is an indistinct one in which he is both an insider and an outsider at the same time. Shiva, the real son, who was brought up as a Hindu remains outside his inheritance. Saleem's inheritance is not his in the light of the revelation of his actual parents. His nose which linked him to his Kashmiri grandfather, Aadam Aziz, must now be seen to be inherited from the Englishman Willam Methwold's French grandmother.

Throughout the narrative Saleem's nose had played an important part in sniffing out major historical happenings. He compares his nose to that of Cyrano, the protagonist of the French playwright Bergerac's play. On examining this comparison we find that in the play Cyrano's nose was his most prominent feature, a sign of his ugliness, which made him sacrifice his love. Another literary allusion made is to Pinocchio's nose, a nose that grew with every lie that Pinocchio told. Saleem compares his nose to that of Ganesh, the Hindu God. By a curious mishap Ganesh was beheaded by
his own father. He comes back to life when an elephant's head is transposed. He is considered to be the most auspicious of Gods for the Hindus. Ganesh is recognizable by his elephant's trunk. In all three of these stories the nose and its story are inseparable parts of its owner's identity. They too are stories of belonging and rejection. Saleem's nose is thought to be a prominent feature of his ancestral legacy. It made him a Sinai until his real parentage is discovered.

His blue eyes, which were thought to reflect the blue of the Kashmiri skies, turn out to be an English legacy. He cannot be said to be a Muslim by birth. He cannot be called a Sinai. Yet, throughout his autobiography, he calls himself a Sinai, even though he knows he is not. He is pushed to the peripheries, where his identity is uncertain, his history invented. Saleem seems to have appropriated a history. This appropriation not only seeks to give his life meaning, it parodies the entire exercise of writing personal histories. Ahmed Sinai invents a family curse to give his family a tradition, "to invent a family pedigree". It seems to indicate that the links people forge with history, the connections they make with other lives are not essential or intrinsic. They are "assumed histories" (Bradbury 1977 14).

In IAAI, the Magavîras are shown to have made a similar attempt to rewrite their history. The Magavîras were
fisher-folk who had close links with foreign merchants and traders. Their deity known as the Bobbariya-bhuta, probably the spirit of a Muslim mariner and trader who died at sea, commemorates their foreign link. When Amitab pays a visit to their village in 1990 he finds that they have changed, "discovering a History to replace the past". Unlike other fishing villages this community lives in concrete houses with many TV antennas sticking out, a proof of their prosperity. They now have "proper names", "good Sanskrit names" which give no inkling of their roots at the "bottom edge of orthodox caste society". The walls of the Bhuta shrine are covered with posters of a fundamentalist Hindu political organization, and within the shrine the main place is now occupied by Vishnu, the most Brahminical of gods. The spirit of the Bobbariya-bhuta is placed at a lower level and the old symbols of a mace and a pillar are replaced with an image in keeping with a Hindu identity. Amitab observes that the community had used a "political short-cut to break into the Sanskritic fold". They were laying claim to a future which required them to replace the past. Amitab then points out the "ironies enshrined in that temple". "The past had revenged itself on the present..."(274). The irony is that the spirit of an Arab Muslim trader has been installed by Hindu zealots within the Sanskritic pantheon. Amitab thinks that in Bomma's time the Magaviras would not have needed a temple to claim the future. He cites a
Vachanakara song of Bomma's times as an ironic critique of the present orchestrated revivalist tendencies:

"With a whole temple
in this body
where's the need
for another?
No one asked
for two". (275)

The Magavîras have used Hinduism to break into the centre. They want to forget their past to make their future. Appropriating a particular history has repercussions for the community's future. Rewriting their history enables them to downplay their ex-centric origins. It must be noted that the Magavîras have not completely obliterated the symbols of their past. They have altered the forms and changed their positions.

c. Alternative history

In the process of inscribing lives in history, Amitab and Masters inscribe themselves; they leave their mark on the process of history. The projects of Saleem Sinai in MC and V.V. in TGIN are different. Their narratives are self-inscriptions in which the personal and the private are inextricable from the historical. While Amitab and Beigh Masters are separated by centuries from their subjects,
their clues gleaned from archives, Saleem Sinai and V.V. have memories of their private and public lives. They have lived the lives they narrate which hindsight alters and embellishes.

Saleem Sinai in MC and V.V. in TGIN use more overtly personalized forms - autobiography and memoir, respectively - demonstrating the problem of expressing and investigating subjectivity. The subject of history is as much the object of the researcher's investigation as (s)he becomes part of the historical process. The author of an autobiographical narrative is both the object of historical investigation and the subject that invests the narrative with meaning. Linked inseparably with national history the recounting of Saleem's and V.V.'s lives unfold the problematic "I".

In MC autobiography and historiography are linked by a brazen egotism. MC subverts conventional autobiography in many ways. Autobiography has been likened to Confession, divulging all that happened to its narrator from the beginning of his or her life on earth to the time of narrating (Abbs 1983). The transition from the past "I" to the present "I" is usually done chronologically and is linked by a cause-and-effect logic. The cause-and-effect logic is common to the analysis of historical events and the progression of the plot or story in literature. MC and TGIN, emphasize the inscrutable and unreliable workings of
memory in autobiography. They expose the gaps between the present "I" and the past "I" and lay bare the process of writing an autobiography. If one wishes to look at MC as an autobiography one finds it to be what robyn warhol terms "meta-autobiographies" - that is, more than being about the narrator's life the book is about the process of writing an autobiography (1991 1035).

For Saleem and V.V. memory is a vital informing principle of their stories. The difficulty of a de-centred narrative is compounded by the vagaries of memory. Justifying his version of history Saleem says, "'Memory's truth...creates its own reality...'(MC 253). The interaction of memory and composition makes writing a metadiscursive operation in which what and who is analysed and the analyst participate. It complicates any reading of personal history. The subject in history is a subject of history and is subject to history. A subject's interactions with other subjects of history changes and also defines it, so that even when continuity is broken, different aspects and phases of subjectivity refuse to remain distinct and separate. Memory has its context not only in reality but
one's own interpretative act (Hutcheon 97). Saleem and V.V. are not merely recounting their pasts. They both claim a vital part in the history of their nation.

Saleem and V.V. foreground the vagaries of memory revealing weaknesses in their recounting. Saleem discovers that he had made an error in chronology, specifically the day of Gandhi's assassination. But then he goes on "...in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time" (198). It is an opportunity for Saleem to endorse the importance of Gandhi in Indian history. Rushdie does not seem to be as iconoclastic as Tharoor in TGIN is on Gandhi. Saleem is writing also to remember. His parenthetic comment is: "(We are a nation of forgetters)" (37). He seeks to be different from the rest of the nation, a nation which has been accused by Alberuni of being without a sense of history. But recalling the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, "My own hand, I confess, has begun to wobble..." (36). Saleem's empathy is imaginative, the event having taken place many years before his birth. There is no indication that the emotional response is motivated by nationalist fervour.

Inseparably woven with their personal histories are Saleem's and V.V.'s versions of the history of India. Their autobiographical approach asserts the primacy of their subjective experience of history subverting notions of universal history and transcendental historical
consciousness. Saleem recognizes that his narrative is "my own personal version of history", just as V.V. finds himself circumscribed by the limitations of experience: "...for every tale that I have told you, every perception I have conveyed, there are a hundred equally valid alternatives I have omitted and of which you are unaware. I make no apologies for this. This is my story of the India I know, with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions, all mine. But you cannot derive your cosmogony from a single birth, Ganapathi. Every Indian must for ever carry with him, in his head and heart, his own history of India" (TGIN 373).

Autobiographies and biographies are also part of history's primary investigating material. By laying bare the fallibility of memory and the ways in which it can alter reality as it occurred, Rushdie is striking at the fundamental notion that historical 'traces' are objective. Written records left by history are already invested with the outlook of its inscriber. The metafictional foregrounding of forgetting, recalling and altering lays bare the process of autobiographical writing. It challenges the conventions of autobiography as a literary genre - the organic unified first person singular narrator, a self that grows from ignorance to a full realization of itself and of a linear progression towards full development. The metafictional discourse is also sceptical of objectivity in the writing of history; a narrative cannot totally exclude
mediation. One remembers Ralph Waldo Emerson's view that "there is properly no history: only biography." The position of autobiography within literature and history is problematized. Literary conventions that governed its writing have been subverted and the subjective quality in history has been emphasized.

V.V dictates his memoir to Ganapathi in TGIN. But at the end of the narrative he discovers "that I have told my story so far from a completely mistaken perspective.... I must retell it" (418). It belies all that went before. V.V. was not only dictating his personal story but also that of the country whose events he claims to have influenced. His final disclaimer repudiates both the private and the public. The reader looks back with scepticism at the narration. V.V. wishes to rewrite his memoir from an appropriate perspective; it gives prominence to presentation rather than a commitment to representation of reality; it implies the mutability of meaning and interpretation; and it suggests that reality may be observed from several perspectives. The last paragraphs 'deconstruct' the whole universe of TGIN. It 'decentres' the central position of V.V. in TGIN.

The autobiography of Saleem and the reconstruction of Bomma are exercises in rewriting 'history from below'. The ex-centric has a different window to reality. When news of Gandhi's assassination reaches the theatre where Amina Sinai
was watching the premiere of the film *The Lovers of Kashmir*, the audience goes into a hysteria of grief. In the midst of it Amina Sinai is advised to go home because "if a Muslim did this thing there would be hell to pay". When Nathuram Godse's name is announced Amina Sinai is relieved. "By being Godse he has saved our lives!" Names in the subcontinent are fairly good indicators of a person's religion and the region (s)he comes from. Saleem Sinai is brought up a Muslim in India, a self-proclaimed secular country. A minority is a margin within a margin. Pakistan was created by grouping together regions which had Muslim majority. The Partition was accompanied by Hindu-Muslim communal riots in which thousands lost their lives. It vitiated the relationship between these two communities and evidence of this bitterness is the continual incidence of communal clashes in both countries.

Having lived as a Muslim, Saleem Sinai is privy to many discrepancies between public announcements and personal experiences. Saleem reveals the workings of the Ravana gang, a fanatical anti-Muslim movement which extorted money from Muslim businessmen in return for protection from communal attacks. Posing as a fanatical anti-Muslim movement it ran a "brilliantly conceived commercial enterprise". Attempts to disguise Muslim ownership are found out and as in the case of the 'Arjuna Indiabike' godown which was burnt, punished for trying to escape
payment. As Saleem writes, "Our names contain our fates..." (364). This exposé implies that the divisive lines drawn between communities lack a genuine raison d'être. Vested interests profit from the borderlines.

When Ahmed Sinai's bank accounts are frozen "by order" Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, announces, "We are a secular State" (162). Dr. Narlikar repeats hearsay, floated by the public, that by freezing a Muslim's account the "so-called secular state can make him run to Pakistan". The discrepancies between public posture and private practice are not often discussed in history. The institutions of propaganda being largely controlled by the Government in India there is always scope for manipulation of facts. The much publicized qualities of secularism and tolerance have overwhelmed voices that differ. Saleem does not make sweeping statements accusing the Indian government of discrimination towards Muslims. For example, when Muslims are blackmailed in 1947, he writes: "Most people paid, preferring that to the risky alternative of trusting to[sic] the police. The police, in 1947, were not to be relied upon by Muslims. And it is said (though I can't be sure of this)..." (80). Colonial dominance was perpetuated with the synchronized efforts of all the arms of the government. In free India the law enforcement machinery is shown to be party to unconstitutional and unfair practices.
Amitab is amazed by the reference to the slave made at "a moment in time when the only people for whom we can even begin to imagine properly human, individual, existences are the literate and the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests — the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time" (IAAL 17). An individual is thus limited by his or her historical situation. Though one slave left a 'trace', many others vanished into the anonymity of the past because of their times or because they were not blessed by the serendipity of the slave of MS H.6. The narrator asserts with reference to the slave of MS H.6: "...in his instance it was mere accident that those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world happen to have been preserved. It is nothing less than a miracle that anything is known about him at all" (IAAL 17). It implies traditional history's erasure of the marginal.

As a woman Beigh Masters attempts to understand Hannah Easton's motives for agreeing to sail to India. She sees in Hannah "traits even a modern woman can relate to: her curiosity, the awakening of her mind and her own sense of self and purpose" (THOTW 89). Masters does not appropriate any special privilege or insight into Hannah's life. Her interest in Hannah is as a life at the crossroads of many worlds. At a time when women, it is presumed, led placid domestic lives, Hannah left Puritan America for England,
from where she set sail for India. By Hannah's times America had become the Old World and the East opened a New World. In India, she has an Indian lover and meets the Puritan Mughal Emperor Aurangzebe, the Holder of the World. Hannah's story is unusual because her experiences were uncommon. "...Hannah is a person undreamed of in Puritan society .... She is from a different time, the first person, let alone the first woman, to have had these thoughts and this experience, to have been formed in this particular crucible" (THOTW 59). Masters is convinced that Hannah's is "one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway" (THOTW 189). Hannah Easton's life does not fit the general pattern of Puritan life in seventeenth century America and the distance in time keeps Masters guessing. Beigh Masters' efforts to "deconstruct the barriers of time and geography" is aimed at not just a reconstruction of a time and a place but "also of a person".

History moves from the realm of an objective, academic, monotone into personal felt experiences. The use of the first person gives a shade of intimacy but its multiple identity gives a polyphonic effect. Those who people the four books have lives beyond the particular text. They extend into other discourses. Their metafictional narration connects them to other narratives and comments upon their particular narratives too. Overtly and by implication the texts challenge traditional divisions
between fiction and non-fiction. The texts foreground subjective 'readings' of history, an awareness that the historical subject and the subject of investigation are not the same. They focus on "the subject in process" and are a "working through" of the premises on subjectivity, its location and its inscription (Hutcheon 170). The four texts demonstrate the problematics of the subject within language, within discourse. The next chapter examines how the four texts are located across discourses.