Chapter 1
Introduction

I
Re-configuring History

History is not just a record of past in narrative sequence, it is as much an enterprise of its critical reinterpretation and revision. Increasingly we have come to realize that any act aimed at the re-construction of past cannot be left with professional historian alone. As creative writers, hagiographers, folk singers and artists dig past to cull out their plots, metaphors and tropes, multiple layers of the past begin to unfold. The past which is often taken as a settled aspect of life, suddenly appears diverse and discursive. Contemporary Indian writers make a resourceful use of the past, questioning its orthodox representations. Thus, the ‘past’ that we seek to understand involves complexity and ambiguity, carrying little authenticity. The concept of truth has become immeasurably more complex in the course of recent critical thought. The postmodernist and postcolonial studies endeavour to unravel the contours of ‘authentic’ Indian past by a sustained process of multiple narrations privileged through an array of diverse narrative modes.

It is still a popular misgiving that Indians were ahistorical as they kept no records of history. Though academic history writing in India, with its methodological procedures, its search for practical orientation and its conceptualisation of temporal change did not differ much from the west, however post-1970’s the quest for specific Indian approach to history intensified. There is a qualitative change between traditional writing of history and history as we know it today. The approach to the writing history is influenced by the new post-structuralist thought process, according to which past need not be continuous, linear or sequential. The awareness of subversive post-structural practices of writing history impel the contemporary historian to free the past from erstwhile colonial controls, thereby dismantling hegemonic assumptions of ‘Euro-centric’ historical discourse.

History is a way of ordering, recording and retaining the past. It has morphed enormously from a mere reconstruction of battles and icons into a social science with
multi-dimensional tropes. As no writing can be objective because the subjectivity of the writer is bound to appear in whatever he writes, be it history; in postmodern era, the political positions of historians have been questioned while studying the element of objectivity. C.H.Carr points out: “In the first place, the facts of history never come to us ‘pure’, since they don’t exist in a pure form: they are always refracted through the mirror of the recorder” (16). Hans Keller also argues, “History therefore is not ‘about’ the past as such but rather about our way of creating meanings from the scattered, and profoundly meaningless debris that we find around us” (qtd. in McCulagh 63). Keller holds that any claim by historians to represent reality on the authority of documentary sources must be seen as essentially rhetorical in character.

Furthermore Keith Jenkins argues that the discipline of history which is widely held tantamount to the category of ‘past’ only carries a section of it. Like other versions, history’s object of enquiry is also the ‘past’. The subject matter of history is not the past as such but a portion of it for which we possess historical evidence. History as a discourse is thus a different category to that it discourses about. ‘Past’ has occurred and gone and is brought back by historians in a form different from what it originally existed in. Therefore it becomes an intertextual and linguistic construct. Jenkins further argues that though many events/people have made the past but only few of them appear in history. Thus “the sheer bulk of past precludes total history” (14). Because history cannot possibly embrace the whole of the past, the totality of what happened, so it becomes necessary for historians to choose, serve and carve up the past in such a way as to make it coherent and manageable. This further implies leaving out certain things. For such reasons history has been called an “enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts” (Carr 7). Since history is less than the ‘past’, and a historian can only recover fragments therefore it inevitably remains partial and incomplete. Herein we find that our identities are consequently constructed and confirmed on the foundation of a history as we want it to be. It makes us aware of only the big strokes that are manifested by the power of circumstances, and does not make us penetrate into the intimate impressions which by exerting influence of the will of certain individuals, has determined the fate of everyone. In context of this argument, the historian’s way of knowing the past is seen crucial in determining the possibilities of what history is and can be.
In postcolonial India where the ‘past’ now appears to be largely an orientalist mis-
construction) appropriated by discursive ideological formations, history has become
problematic both in itself and in terms of the past it constructs for the nation. Legitimised
histories coexist and often collide with non-historiographic, overtly fictional forms of
historical writing and performance. It performs complex epistemological functions and
intervenes significantly in the discourse of history. Because bias seems an essential
element in the writing of history, several problems have been faced in interpreting the
Indian history of the past centuries. The historian has to deal with the scarcity of parish
registers, individually written artefacts and in addition has to question the reliability of
other quasi-official documents. There are ways in which history can be biased. One,
when the evidence is misinterpreted or the historian’s reliance on evidence is necessarily
incomplete as the account might omit significant facts about the subject making it
imbalanced. Another is when the evidence itself is false or is supported by providing
causal explanation to historical events where only some and not all important causes are
mentioned.

Because history as a representation of events carries impression of the person
narrating the event, therefore it is considered closer to fiction by many critics and
scholars. They consider historiography (the process of writing history) as a way of
fictionalising the facts. Carr holds, “study the historian before you begin to study the
facts” (17). He further states that “facts of history are nothing, interpretation is
everything” (21). History writing is thus understood primarily as a form of ideology.
According to Keith Jenkins, “no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or
checkable, history inevitably remains a personal construct, a manifestation of the
historian’s perspective as a ‘narrator’” (14). The process of selection and omission of
events in historical narratives is tacitly guided by the general principles of inclusion and
exclusion sanctioned by the community for which and within which the narrative is being
constructed. Further, the narrative is conditioned by the conscious or the unconscious
ideology of race, class and gender within which the historian’s intellectual sympathies are
engaged. To some extent historiography of an epoch is regarded as a political factor
where the historians reflect on the embeddedness of their own work in social, political
contexts. A postmodern historian here attempts to identify and criticize certain residues
of ideology in contemporary historical imagination, questioning the very validity of established standards.

In postmodern times all history is deemed as contemporary history i.e. history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in light of its problems. The main work of the historian is not to record but to evaluate, for, if he does not evaluate, how can he know what is worth recording. For Keith Jenkins, “history is a shifting discourse constructed by historians and that from the existence of the past no one reading is entailed” (16).

W.H.Walsh too finds ambiguity in the word ‘history’ on the grounds that language which constructs history is itself ambiguous and involves complexities. The problem with historical narrative as Hayden White and other recent theorists of history have pointed out is that while history proceeds from empirically validated facts/events; it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story. This further enables the entry of fictional elements in all historical discourses. Hayden White thus concentrating on the rhetoric of historical writing offers certain relevant claims. He argues that history writing must be understood as a poetic art. The adoption of a particular mode of emplotment is neither a technical decision, nor it is imposed by nature of material with which the historian is dealing. According to him, a narrative infact already possesses content, prior to any actualization of it in speech or writing. Therefore rhetoric is concerned particularly with the effect of a discourse on its audience. White's analysis thus displaces attention from the question of how well a historian succeeds in representing the past to that of the nature and role of historical narrative. Furthermore, because a historical narrative reveals to us a world that is putatively finished, done with, and not yet dissolved, therefore the fullness of this history can only be imagined and never experienced. Rightly articulates Homi.K.Bhabha, “history may be half-made because it is always being made” (3).

We need to re-examine our epistemological assumptions and biases if we are to expand the range of our history and deepen our understanding of its implications. Modern history begins when more and more people enter into social and political consciousness becoming aware of their respective groups as historical entities and enter completely into the process of history. The problem with historical narrative as Roland Barthes and
Hayden White and other recent theorists of history have pointed out that while it proceeds from empirically validated facts/events; it necessarily requires imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story. Therefore fictional elements enter into all historical discourse. A serious historical ‘fiction’ both emerges from and returns to history, making all historical narratives fundamentally intertextual. Intertextual connection has important interpretive implication because fictionalised histories always stand in determinable ideological relation to the textualised history – confirming, repudiating or radically reshaping its message. In many ways the scope of historical writing has expanded enormously in the past few years. The newer histories indeed challenged the traditional ones which have concentrated on political and social elites, and demanded the inclusion of those segments of the population that have long been neglected.

Attending to this hybridity of historical consciousness raises questions about the relation among history, memory, myth and fantasy. History because of its nature of ambiguity is also understood as a mythic perception of reality. Myth too represents people’s memories of past events. When myth becomes common to all cultures it converts into history. However, the past that constitutes history for one may be untrue for another in view of lack of empirical facts. In this sense, myth may or may not be related to historical truth, though those who rely on the narrative generally believe that it is. Myth and history are close kins in as much as both explain how things got to be the way they are by telling some sort of story. But our common sense parlance reckons myth to be false while history is or aspires to be true; the two are generally considered antithetical mode of explanation, one distrusting the data of the other. Some even suggest that there can be no real distinction between the discourses of myth and history, as between fact and fiction. According to Claude Levi Strauss:

The gap that exists in our mind between mythology and history can probably be reached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from myth but as a continuation of mythology. (37)

However, such turning of history into an ideology of communalism and mythification of the historical accounts at times becomes a shortcoming in the process of accounting for a consistent and reliable history. Like myths; religion and theology too has used history to confirm some of its most central tenets as herein the historians try drawing right lessons
from the past and show its proper relevance. History can turn into theology by making the
meaning of the past depend on some extra historical and super rational power or one can
turn it into literature – a collection of stories and legends about the past. While
acknowledging the importance of reviving our past in more empirical terms, Romila
Thapar in her work *The Past and Prejudice* pointed out that the Indian past is
unavoidable preface to an understanding of the present.

II
History and Hagiography

Since a substantial part of our past memories and identities remain open to
reinterpretation and reworking, it is here that the figuring of hagiographies (a popular
genre form of writing the past) takes place. Despite something of a hiatus in life-histories,
recent years, especially since mid 1990’s, have seen the publication of a number of
person-centered studies or to be more specific, hagiographies. Hagiography, as yet
another form of adaptation of our past is too important to be dismissed lightly or ignored.
Such narratives reveal insights not just into the attitudes and experiences of an individual
but also of wider society, or social segment of which they are part of. This genre is seen
as historically persistent and socially pervasive form of cultural expression. One can
define hagiography as the writings on the subject of revered persons in society whom we
accord the status of being holy or saints. The term is derived from greek roots; ‘hagios’
meaning ‘holy’ and ‘graphe’ meaning writing. It refers to the concept of sanctity and to
the practise of the cult of saints formed by and in turn helped to form the history of the
changing ideals of sanctity. The tradition of hagiography dates back centuries in India³,
with hagiographical accounts not just from Hinduism, but also Buddhism including
Jataka tales (stories on Budhha’s past lives), Jainism, Sikhism and Islam. The genre
continues to thrive both in regional languages of India as well as in English, from comic
book accounts of saints lives geared towards children (such as the popular *Amar Chitra
Katha* series) to lengthy studies of the lives of the saints past and present, and
hagiographical collections recounting the lives of many saints. The term has also come to
be used as affirmative of the works of contemporary biographies and historians whom critics perceive to be uncritical and even reverential in their writing.

For many, hagiography constituted an important literary genre, providing informational history as well as inspirational stories and legends coming from the popular culture. When we question as to why texts and narratives use life-histories as a vehicle for storytelling, we realise that it is natural to choose life histories to narrate stories because they closely resemble our personal experiences. Imitation of the lives of the saints was the benchmark against which the general population measured itself. Nearly all of us at some stage have been fascinated by other people’s lives. Life stories have been told to us from childhood and we have heard them or read them for ourselves or seen them enacted on stage or screen. They may have been life of historical men and women, or no less influential characters in folktales, novels and myths intended to entertain or admonish us, to encourage emulation or inspire repugnance and fear. Narratives of hagiography embrace acts of martyrs with the accounts of their trials and deaths, biographies of saintly monks, princes, bishops and accounts of miracles related to saints and icons. Indeed in popular usage, hagiography has come to refer to a glowing, completely uncritical description of a person. Due to this, many critics argue that the hagiographies intend to convey a moral message rather than historically accurate information. Each hagiographer adapts a traditional pool of somewhat standardised stories to the needs of a narrative at hand and that the use of such modes aided the moral and didactic purpose of hagiography. Nevertheless one reason for the broad appeal of life-histories to the scholars as to the wider public is precisely that they straddle the elusive divide between personal narrative and objective truth.

The recent upsurge of interests in hagiographical form of history-writing seems to follow from a growing distrust of metanarratives, a new-found scepticism towards sweeping generalisations and grand theories of social change. Contemporary thinkers move towards a more nuanced, multi-stranded understanding of society and a greater recognition of heterogeneity of human lives and lived experience. A majority of premodern life-histories were hagiographical – oral and written accounts of the lives of the deities, kings, cultural heroes and saints. These hagiographies are characterised by a tendency to praise their subjects and to place the narrative within a culture of orality or
popular imagination. Here events related to life of a hero/saint are even explained by
reference to supernatural events, drama’s, predictions, vows and divine intercession. The
lives of kings, heroes and saints form no small part of the Indian life histories and
tradition, and provide important exemplars for others. A variety of hagiographical works
both literary and non literary have been witnessed until now. It includes works written on
the lives of many saintly figures, as Buddha, Jesus, Raidas, Ramananda; Kabir, Surdas
and Mira – the medieval bhakti poets; also on the greatness of several figures of heroic
display as Asoka, Akbar, Tipu and Rani Lakshmibai. In the postmodernist phase
however, the critical analysis of such hagiographical writings produced in the past and
practised even today is attempted by various scholars and writers as Robin Rinehart,
W.I.Smith, David Arnold and Staurt Blackburn. Tracing the development of
hagiographical tradition allows us to investigate the dynamics of this blending of the real
and the imaginary with a precision not always possible for earlier traditions.

For many subordinated and marginalised groups, telling through the singing of
devotional songs or the recounting of the legends – the lives of those who defied feudal
or patriarchal authority might serve as a weapon of the weak. Staurt Blackburn in Telling
Lives in India discusses life-histories possessing some bewildering variety of forms.
Either they are imbued with the veracity of spoken word or chronicle the experiences of
the marginalised, or are seen as expressions of new emerging individual self. However
biased and incomplete these personal reflections may be, such hagiographies open up an
experience of self in society unrecorded elsewhere and are a means of negotiating,
expressing and imagining an individual’s existence. Life histories are generally governed
by local social practices and literary conventions. Since 1920’s anthropologists have
acknowledged life stories as powerful and riveting data for personalising cultural,
historical and social forces. These various classes of hagiographic works – historical
memoirs, literary compositions and liturgical texts existed first as monographs.

Values that inspired the writing of the Indian past were more spiritual than
material. Within such leaps and gaps in the model of historiography, hagiography
dropped in conveniently. Like histories, many Indian hagiographies too owe more to
ongoing social processes, to popular reinterpretation or the cultural accretions of
generations, than to an actual life lived or an ontological and rational account of past
events. However when India entered the colonial era, the earlier hagiographical tradition was beginning to be supplemented and supplanted by a new form of biography in which greater attention was paid to complexity of character and personal motivation and to their role in shaping and explaining individual lives than to the specific places and events. Callewart and Rupert Snell’s work on the subject observes that while hagiographies have a slight historical basis, it incorporate a large proportion of traditional material drawn from Hindu epics and puranas. Though hagiographies are seen as the writing of the holy; it is essentially about experiencing the holy in memory and text.

Robert Rinehart in his work *One Lifetime, Many Lives* posits three basic phases in the hagiographical form of narrating the past. First is of the earliest hagiographies which were written by eye witnesses and acquaintances of historical figure displaying a clear and overriding concern for facts. Second is a stage of scepticism and reassessment which challenges the earlier conclusions of earliest hagiographies, balancing all the while the need for both an accurate bios and an inspiring and developing mythos. Third is the mythicization phase in which the process of mythos clearly takes precedence over the construction of bios. In this phase no further historical research into a life is attempted. Instead the hagiographers rely on the previous lives to construct an increasingly elaborate and grand vision of a saint. Rinehart demonstrates the mythicization process that transformed Swami Rama Thirtha into a modern avatar. She depicts how the later hagiographers took some thread of historical truth to weave an elaborate text of myth and ideology and to suit their own institutional needs. She writes: “Thus when hagiographical traditions record mythical or legendary information, they nonetheless reveal what are indeed historical facts – not necessarily about the historical figure of the saint, but about the situation of the community the hagiographer addresses” (Rinehart, 8). She clearly and convincingly separates historical probability from mythical and ideological processes.

Hagiographies are often frustrating for scholars seeking historical facts. Despite their mutual concern on such figures, the hagiographer’s aim is much different from that of the scholars seeking the facts that constitute a critical historical biography. Where some scholars seek the facts constituting true-life account of the saint’s life, the hagiographer often blend those facts into an intricate mix of myth and legend. The primary function of hagiography as the historian’s belief is instrumental and not
historiographical – it rather aims for religious edification and not historical documentation. Some scholars argue that there is no historical value at the basis of tradition; that the heroes and narratives of tradition are purely hagiographical, not based either upon historical facts or imaginative fiction but upon ritual acted out in the form of drama. They try emphasising that the tales are imaginative and mythical; structure is also of myth but given historical form and therefore the content we receive is a constructed narration. Although the challenging task of separating the historical elements from the hagiographical one has been the goal of many scholars yet the elements of legend in history seems to them as central to the purposes of hagiography. It reveals its readers a great deal about how the followers of a saint or legendary hero construct and preserve his/her memory.

Despite scholars attempt to separate the two, hagiography is at times seen as a mix of history and myth. The role of hagiographical narrative as a form of social and cultural argumentation is an issue worth analysing. Historians in India are generally inclined to consider life-histories as sources and they seldom pause to consider them as genres worthy of systematic analysis. And it is only through postmodernist techniques of new historicism that we are obliged to do this. My study here intends to look at a variety of life-histories that sheds fresh light on the way we perceive and analyse the past. It is clearly not the purpose to present these life-histories as self evident accounts of social or historical truth. They are too subjected to the same level of editorial strategies as other cultural and historical representations. The question that arises is whether there are significant differences in the ways in which scholars from different disciplines approach life historical material, and that whether they can profitably learn from each others’ techniques. Undoubtedly there are some worries involved in collecting and textualising life-histories; as that of contemporaneity, another of intellectual’s suspicion of popular orality and also against the third party or the intermediator between the narrator and the reader. Furthermore, whether these traditions have any historicity have been hotly debated. The truth has been challenged by scholars on the grounds that the dates are far too remote in time to be evaluated with precision.

Due to this complexity involved in understanding a single, authentic past, the contemporary writers and artists go for a rewriting/restaging of the past. By recognising
the loopholes of all versions of the recorded past – history, hagiography, myth or any other representational discourse, the present critical thinking attempts to revise and re-examine the facts of the past intending to give due recognition to all these adaptations. The endeavour of the study too is to unravel the narrative constructions of our multifaceted past acknowledging both the official, documented history as well as the unofficial, popular hagiographies, as equally important sources in the understanding of an Indian past. The idea is to counter the limited structures of history writing in India; the dichotomy between the oriental and the occidental, as Indian history is a constant interaction and negotiation between the two modes. The process of rewriting our historical past need to assume a methodological approach as departure from such norms tends to erase the distinction between hagiography and history. Conflict in narratives arises when proponents of hagiographies use empirical structures and techniques of history writing or institutions to force acceptance of their claims on others as historical truth. A historical narrative uses hagiographical devices to create version of past that is more meaningful to many people than a critical assemblage of facts. Hagiographies too, slowly and gradually develop into legendary tradition and family-histories thereby becoming highly repetitive histories. The distinction is important despite the undeniable connection between the two. The constant intermixing of the secular and the sacred histories is one major problem that pre-empts any empirical account of the past.

III
Re-writing the Past

The practice of rewriting has become a pressing urge of the times and could be understood as a special form of cultural recycling and refashioning within discursive formulations using postmodern narratives. Our culture moving through an agonising revision of rewriting everything for readers or say re-readers observes textual transformation through rewriting, highlighting the cultural mechanism operating through ideologies. This contemporary polemical retelling operates to ‘un-settle things’ by calling for an oppositional design. The process is intended to transvalue the values of the past and thereby exposing the ideology behind the language of the precursor text. It is this
ideological discursive formulation motivating the contemporary re-writes that is appreciated better by critical re-readers. To describe in words of Christian Moraru:

Rewriting determines not only a remoulding of a certain literary matrix, but, by mean of this very re-exualizations, also a revision – critical retelling – of those cultural tales. (xiii)

Rewriting involves reproduction of originals, it entails by a complex critical rereading of the narratives. Being an intertextual form, a re-written narrative carry traces to the prior work which is discernable in text and is marked by the author as an intentional presence and not as an elusive echo. Rewriting of historical narratives is also seen as an attempt to study the present and how the present writes the past to justify or rebuff the present. The postmodern revisionist rewriting thus practices a counterwriting approach by rupturing the past. It does not recycle the archives arbitrarily, rather its aim is to creatively exploit the missing links. Conveying an acute sense of the past and examining it critically, it depicts how the past and its texts shape the present and history in general.

Newly emergent concepts and radical re-thinking severely challenge the traditional view of history as a compilation of facts; a linear narration of events. The validity of an objective, impartial account of past presented by a disinterested historian has been questioned. The past is not fixed or monological but dynamically recovered by the subjective self, the historian. Narratives in all disciplines involve a process of selection and omission. There is no depiction without interpretation and there is no interpretation without bias – the subjective consciousness. This revisionist strategy prompts cultural rewriting and is seen as a part of the process for restoring the marginalised voice; a history or an identity of the erstwhile oppressed. Philosopher George Santayana once remarked; “History is always written wrong; it needs always to be re-written” (online “Rewriting History is not ‘Saffronisation’”). There exists a continuous interactive process between the historian and the material before him – an unending dialogue between the past and the present. A historian studies the individual not in vacumm but in their active contexts, the society they belong to. Through the strategy of rewriting a narrative of the past is examined in the light of this dialectical interaction, the various influences that work upon it, and above all the role of operating ideology. Interpretation, incorporation and examination in the reconstruction of the past are major
keys in understanding the past and the writer’s re-presentation. A historian is not only inseparable from the history he writes, but is also firmly rooted in specific historical time and ideological construct. The values of his age, his class origins and political orientations are all brought to bear upon the way he examines the past. This idea is the central creed of new historicism; a concept given by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 and the school of thought that gradually gains currency among other theoreticians. New historicism brings in radical change in perceptions by recommending a dialogic approach to history, encompassing a critical dialogue among various accounts of the past events.

Thus, an attempt to rethink and rewrite the past that accommodates the histories as well as the hagiographies is made possible using the contemporary postmodern theories such as new historicism. Postmodernist challenge makes a significant impact on historical thought and writing. It demonstrates that the notion of a unitary history is marked not only by continuity but also by ruptures. Postmodern historicism undertakes a re-examination of past historical facts with an eye towards updating historical narratives with newly discovered, more accurate and less biased information. It emphasises on how history of an event as it has been traditionally told, may not be entirely accurate. Another valid issue taken up by new historicists is the recognition that societies and cultures separated in time have differing values and beliefs, then how can a historian ‘know’ the past? Any historian operates within the horizon of his/her own world view; a certain broad set of assumptions and beliefs, so how can one overcome these to achieve an empathetic understanding of a distant culture? Holding its own approach itself as only an interpretation, the theory of new historicism thus questions its own methodological assumptions and is “less concerned to establish the organic unity of literary works and more open to such works as fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses.” (Payne, Michael 2).

According to new historicists historical narratives are also literary artefacts. Greenblatt’s analytical approach offers a view of history as a site of potential conflict between a culture and it’s so called representatives; a site which represents a culture as a dynamic, structural system with rules of inclusion and exclusion. As such it allows the historian to interpret historical materials as simultaneously representative and non
representative. This approach reduces the historical to literary and literary to historical
denying human agency any authority. Defining the term in words of Stephen Greenblatt:

The new historicist project is not about “demoting” art or discrediting aesthetic
pleasure; rather it is concerned with finding the creative powers that shapes
literary works outside the narrow boundaries in which it has hitherto been located,
as well as within those boundaries. (Gallagher and Greenblatt 12)

New historicists are often more interested in how different kinds of discourse intersect,
contradict, destabilise, cancel or modify each other. Adapting a materialist approach
towards literature means that imaginative works are thought to issue not from universal
or individual genius, but from material circumstances and from economic, political and
gender attitudes. Such factors pervaded society when the work was written, read or
performed. To read in words of Greenblatt: “Social actions are themselves always
embedded in systems of public signification, always grasped, even by their makers, in
acts of interpretation” (Payne 4). It stresses that the readers and the critics work in their
own social circumstances which means they unavoidably imprint their own underlying
ideologies onto the text and even appropriate it for their own purposes. New historicists
holds that texts or phenomenon cannot be somehow torn from history and analysed in
isolation, outside the historical process. Montrose’s much acknowledged phrase the
‘historicity of texts and texuality of history’ is central to our understanding of the
ambiguity underlying the past. The former refers to the social and material embedding of
all modes of writing and reading, and the latter suggests that we can have no access to
full and authentic past, to a lived material existence (Wolfreys 539). Thus Montrose finds
limited space for the individual to shape his world and allows text a limited ability to
shape social and cultural codes.

Drawn from new historicism, history itself is a text, an interpretation where there
is no single history and this allows us to simultaneously consider all versions of past as
equally reliable and essential. New historicists tend to read literary texts as material
products of specific historical conditions. They approach a text with an urgent attention to
the political ramifications of literary interpretation. History for them is not an objective
knowledge which can be used to explain literary texts, rather they examine the degrees to
which the writer participates in forming the dominant ideological assumptions of a
particular time. The element of interpretation in history subverts its claim to objectivity. The postmodern critique of textualised history thus reduces all representation to the same basic model of power relations by subjecting the texts to a superficial and generalised reading. It locates the ostensible position of texts in the grid of discursive formations by interrogating upon the interpretability of those texts. Expansion of new historicism and cultural studies since late 1980's has reinforced the perception of intertextuality and subsequently positioned a text as site of ideological contestation, seeking to uncover the politics of culture and power relations in the recording of the past.

Amidst a fragmented scenario, the theories of postcolonial studies such as new historicism thus become helpful in offering discourses and foregrounding the margins. It provides useful ways of constructing exchanges between diverse texts in a given historical time. The present restructures the perceptions of the past, as much as it is itself born out of the past. And this reconstruction of the past becomes not only an end in itself but also a means of contestation of the present. A disjunction between any two histories of the same past is an indication of the wider, political and ideological chasm separating the individual historians. The rewritten narratives of Indian historiography is either seen as an attempt to identify and criticize certain residues of colonialism in contemporary historical imagination, or as a call for Indian frameworks of interpretation, questioning the very validity of established standards.

In light of above discussion we need to scrutinize how writings in a postmodernist phase have reflected, shaped and represented the past with its dialectical and contesting notions. Restructuring of the past is not only singular to historical discourse, but is also appropriated by other genres. In contemporary literature plots are interweaved with secular, sacred histories. Contemporary postmodern literature is increasingly marked by retelling the past to bring about its relevance in present contexts. As history could be found embodied in various forms including literature, it also suggests of the longstanding problem of relation between history and language. This relation continues to appear problematic in recent discussions of new historicism. Past and literature are correlated where literature serves as a tool of representation. Literature is seen as a tool of social investigation where fiction not only represents social reality but also performs a necessary functional part of social control, and also paradoxically an important element
in social change. From a postmodernist perspective both history and literature enable society’s understanding of its present by becoming functions of narrative. As forms of discourse both emphasise memory, loss, compositions of characters and events, human actions and plots. The postmodern writers look at the discursive elements in historiography. And such literary discourses help us in offering a double discourse which evinces an essentialist position along with building up awareness of the loopholes of such a position. It enables us to look at both the aspects and avoid mistaking history for permanent ‘truth’.

Amartya Sen in his essay on “History and the Enterprise of Knowledge” tries to develop and defend a view of history as an area of knowledge which further involves histories of other enterprises of knowledge. According to him, past is not just for the historians, as it affects the lives of public at large. Consequently, the non-historians do not have to establish their entitlements to talk about or write about the past. Rather there are some motivations that influence the public interest in the subject. First is the epistemic interest that depicts the curiosity to know ones past. Then the historical connection evoked in context of contemporary politics and policies also interests people. Furthermore our sense of identity is strongly influenced by our understanding of the past. Thus any writer is also a contemporary historian, a ‘scriptor’ as in Roland Barthes terms who engages in the production process through the act of reading and re-reading. Infact, the artistic licence of the writer allows them to transcend the linear chronological narrative mandatory of a historian. However a literary artist too like a historian cannot escape the ideology inevitably functioning in his work of art. He also is conditioned and contextualised with his work and does not exist outside it. His work is also examined in terms of his class origins, political ideology and values by the new historicists who study all texts as co-texts using a synchronic approach to literature and all other works of art. Contemporary critics reduce history to a simulated reality having counterparts in literature. By implication, history like a literary text is a functional narrative involving the use of formal literary devices in its writing process. The process thus involves fictionalising the fact and historicising the fiction, i.e the reconstruction of the past as in literature is also a work of imagination, a creative process.
IV
Poetics of Dialectics

In the light of above discussion, the thrust of the present study is to explore some of the elements underpinning our national, regional identities carrying ambiguity about the past. Entering the postmodernist phase of re-narrating the past with its polyphonic voices – historical as well as hagiographical, the study intends to consider the relationship between these two traditions of our Indian past that remain parallel and responsive to each other. These two versions of our Indian past are seen in a frame of juxtaposition. Each version claims to be an equally potent form of record and enunciation of the past. The contemporary writer accommodates these narrative forms, and thus explores a dialectical relationship between the two modes. But before we move further, it becomes imperative to discuss the usage of the term ‘dialectical’.

The Greek term ‘dialectic’ derived from dialogue/discourse between equal partners is used here to mean a unity of opposites. In a dialectical relation the poles opposing poles is incomplete without the other and degenerates if it is abstractly isolated. Since there are many set of opposites, one may also speak of ‘dialectic’ in plural. It is a method of argumentation and is rooted in the ordinary practise of a dialogue between two people holding different ideas and trying to persuade each other. The aim of dialectical method is to bring a resolution of a disagreement through a rational discussion. The concept of dialectics was given a new life by Hegel and developed more significantly by Karl Marx. It is a forward and backward moving notion of history. Hegel gave the idea of a thesis, which develops an antithesis for itself, resulting in a synthesis of the two. Hence the two contradictories synthesize. According to him, dialectic is the method by which human history unfolds, that is to say, history progresses as a dialectical process. It has three stages of development: a thesis, giving rise to reaction, an antithesis, which contradicts or negates the thesis and the tension between the two resolved by means of a synthesis (Popper, Karl). Hegel holds that mankind is merely a series of constant philosophical conflicts and the opposites that are bound to exist are synthesised.

Dialectic, especially in the sense in which Hegel used is a theory which maintain that an idea/thought develop in a way characterised by what is called the dialectic triad of
thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Thus Hegel’s theory of dialectic “describes the way in which any concept stands in a necessary relation to its own opposite, generating it at first and then negating it, so that the way in which the concept lives is by creating and overcoming oppositions” (Collingwood, 118). One of the most important laws of this theory is the law of unity and struggle of opposites. Opposites are the inner aspects, tendencies or forces of an object or phenomenon. Unity of opposites means that they cannot exist without each other and are mutually dependent. But their struggle leads to emergence of a new object, with a new unity of opposites. Dialectic sees everything in motion, and this development explain the general direction of social progress and make it possible to formulate on scientific lines the socio-political ideals, goals and interests. Dialectics for some is the most rigorous procedure for exact and cogent thinking; while for others, a way of getting outside the established rules. In the case of dialectical thought, to be sure one cannot indefinitely separate the political from the ideological or the cultural. It opens the way to a rational understanding of all the non rational aspects of total existence. It is beyond idealism and materialism because it discovers the material and the ideal world as complementary opposites. Formulating unity of opposites on many levels, here the opposite dimensions of reality are united in discourse. Because dialectical thinking embraces the subject-object polarity with the scientific-practical tension it helps us in understanding the opposition between history and hagiography as well. Due to the presence of dialectics, thus everything surrounding the past narrative is changeable. Since everything is in motion striving for development therefore change is the essence of all things. The dialectical approach becomes the key in understanding the ambiguities, ironies, paradoxes and contradictions in the re-staging of the past. Therefore dialectics between the two versions of the past – history and hagiography provides an inner structure to creative re-rendering of the past.

However a forum or genre is needed for this dialectical representation between the narratives of the past – the official history and the popular hagiography. Literature hence becomes an effective tool in bringing out this dialogue. Recent years have seen a revival of historical novel, a vogue for personal memoirs, revitalization of historical drama and the rise of oral history. Attending to the hybridity of historical consciousness that problematizes the contemporary understanding of culture, recent literary writings
attempt to raise questions about the relationship between myth, history and fantasy. It allows scope for the marginalised to revisit the historical events along with awareness about its sporadic and unsettled nature. A mutual influence of historical research and literature has long been observed. However, the question arises; can literature legitimately serve as historical archive? When handled judiciously and in answer to appropriate questions, literature can provide a reliable window to the past. Used carefully and remembering that reality is never pure, simple or linear – literature and other arts can bring fresh light to our perception of past. The large scale use of historical material for writing fiction is correlated with the restructuring of empirical material through new literary forms. Reading from Bhaktin’s concept of dialogism, a literary work is a text that provides a site for this dialogic interaction of multiple voices or modes of discourse. Each text is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon and as such a product of manifold determinants – linguistic, economic and cultural, specific to class, social group and speech. Within this idea, the study intends to encounter the heterogeneity and multiplicity involved while locating the narratives of Indian past. To evaluate history and bring about an explicit relation of the past to practical purposes, it is vital to depict a dialogue between yesterday and today.

Now the question arises as to what form or genre is best suited for this dialogic counterwriting that would bring about a relevance of past along with its polyphonic voices further involving an active reception? Here arises the need and acceptability of drama as befitting and natural form of representation and renarrativization of palimpsest past. This genre involves the analyses of the responses of active audiences in contemporary cultures which is further associated with the field of reception theory. Performance becomes important for an active reception especially for the popular culture and audience. Postcolonial theorist demands interaction and activist writing to bring it across to the public who can intervene, participate and discourse upon it. Therefore this need for dialogic interaction and inviting the interceptors for direct contact with the re-narrating process is best fulfilled by the genre of drama. Dramatic performances can introduce or highlight ideas, values, codes of social conduct that are particular to traditions and histories. Drama becomes arguably the chief carrier of historical message in our culture. It is further useful in opening a dialogue among diverse producers of
history. However writing a historical drama may bestow certain advantages but it also imposes particular responsibilities. The concomitant responsibility is to acknowledge the ‘uneasy’ facts or ideas and not to defer from them. The purpose of converting historical events to dramatic format is to interest the widest possible audience, and also to engage them critically with the past. However the effect of drama as a means of moulding public opinion ought to be carefully measured. Being both a vital link to an ancient indigenous tradition and a form of representation uniquely capable of embodying contemporary national life, theatre could be helpful in the task of cultural reconstruction, its critical evaluation and re-mapping.

V

‘Indianness’ of Modern Indian Drama

Within the emerging corpus of modern Indian drama, attempts have been made to harmonise the conflicting claims of ideology, history, mythology and aesthetics. The achievement of political Independence signalled a break from the experience of cultural subjection and the beginning of a new revisionary phase in literary and cultural production. With this some postcolonial aesthetic reorientations engendered new theoretical and modern frameworks capable of elucidating and interpreting the evolving cultural forms. Accommodation of the aesthetic and political paradigms of modernity and modernism has brought about some of the definitive post-Independence transformations. The emergent new standards of artistry applied to drama and performance across the spectrum of genres, modes and languages, locations, and socio-political intentions constitute the heterogeneous field of contemporary Indian theatre.

Since 1950’s new forms of literary drama and experimental performance have appeared on an unprecedented scale in more than a dozen of Indian languages. Along with its daunting plurality of languages, locations and representational conventions, contemporary Indian theatre appears an arena in which historical boundaries have become radically permeable and a large number of texts and performances have existed simultaneously. The modern Indian theatre that has emerged in India since Independence has no parallel in earlier cultural formations and constitutes a new national tradition.
Postcolonial writings have been shaped in important ways by the politics of nationalism as well as the themes of the long period of cultural assertion and opposition that was part of the context of political Independence. The practitioners of modern Indian drama have forged a reactive cultural identity for themselves and initially they began with by disclaiming colonial practices and by seeking to reclaim classical and other pre-colonial Indian traditions of performance as the only visible media of effective decolonisation. The return to tradition re-establishes form and conventions that the colonialism had disrupted. The urge to learn and unlearn alien habits and relearn those intrinsic to one’s own culture seems to be a distinctly political urge. Drama thus assumed a pivotal political role and intervened in colonial contests of power. In reproducing and acting out histories of colonial exploitation and domination, modern Indian drama became an invigorating arena for the interplay of anti-colonial struggles and change. Aparna.B.Dharwadkar attempts to define “Indian theatre of post-Independence period as a historically demarcated, linguistically and generically diverse field of postcolonial practice”. Modern Indian drama for her “is a product of new theoretical, textual, material, institutional and cultural conditions created by the experience of political Independence, cultural autonomy and new nationhood” (2). Therefore this field becomes multidimensional based on specific theoretical, interpretive and performative procedures and practices.

It is largely in the postcolonial times that the structures, theories and patterns of drama have emerged in the past decade as important areas of enquiry. There existed many fragmented approaches to theatre but none of them is systematic. Indian theatre remained largely outside the theoretical/critical constructs and continues to appear on the margins of contemporary world theatre. One of the reasons for this obscurity lies in the linguistic plurality of Indian theatrical practice, the difficulties that attend any rigorous historicization of Indian theatre. There is no single theatrical concept in India and no single linguistic entity that all Indians can understand. Still in some frameworks Indian theatre disappear completely under the weight of linguistic heterogeneity. In one multilingual approach the term modern Indian theatre remains operative but denotes the simple sum of theatre in fourteen or more Indian languages. It does not distinguish clearly between the colonial and postcolonial periods unless there is specific need for chronological delimitation. This is deemed to be a reductive form of contemporary
theatre criticism in India. Comprehensive descriptive accounts of Indian drama that regard theatre from classical times to present as a continuous tradition does not give attention to the post Independence drama (distinguished by antiquity and rich diversity), as some indigenous histories focus on continuities and ignore postcolonial disjunctions.

Multilingual nature of Indian theatre imposes obvious limitations on the scope of any individual work of criticism. The problem of linguistic heterogeneity thus characterises the attempts to create a national framework for modern Indian drama. The dominant nineteenth century European model cannot be translated to Indian conditions for several reasons. One is the irreducible plurality of Indian theatrical forms in terms of language, class, location, genre and modes of reception that precludes the selection of any one kind of theatre that is representative of the nation. The diverse theatrical forms enact the diversity of the nation itself. The other hindrance is the need to establish a relation between the ‘regional’ and the ‘national’, between the individual and national identity to maintain any culturally relevant conception of Indianess. G.P.Deshpande too holds the primacy of regional theatre over the national one as for him the regeneration of provincial is the precondition of the emergence of a national theatre. (Dharwedkar 24). Thus the mechanisms by which playwrights and directors from one region and language become available to Indian audience elsewhere are central to the workings of a multilingual tradition. It offers concrete rather than abstract evidence of the existence of national theatre. In multilingual theatre tradition as of India, dramatic texts and performances derive their first and strongest level of support from the culture of the original language and composition. In contrast to other print genres as poetry and fiction, drama and theatre offer radical variations on the idea of a national tradition because individual plays can become both text and performance vehicles in multiple languages through interlingual translation. Active interest in translation has fostered a vital multilingual theatrical culture in post independence India. Recognition of new plays depends much on their publication and performance in other languages than in original. Such proliferation keeps a play in constant circulation among readers/viewers. This method of dissemination also generates a body of nationally circulated texts and performance vehicles that offers a more convincing evidence of the existence of a national theatre. For example Girish Karnad has translated Badal Sircar’s Evam Indrajit into English, and Vijay Tendulkar translated
Kamad’s *Tughlaq* and Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* into Marathi. Kamad has also translated and published all his own major plays into English demonstrating the importance of English translation and making drama as text potentially available to national and international audiences. Consequently, interlingual and interregional circulation is an intrinsic condition of the existence of contemporary Indian plays.

Additionally, in respect to the importance of the translation of contemporary plays into English, one has observed that this activity too has gradually acquired momentum since 1970’s because of several special initiatives of playwrights and translators. Within drama, English has so far proved to be more important as the lingua franca for the translation of Indian language plays, than as the language of original composition. The plays of Mahesh Dattani are perhaps the first to defy the assumption that Indian drama in English represents the disjunction between language and sensibility, material and medium. For him English is not an arbitrary choice rather a medium to express in the manner that he wishes to convey. Girish Karnad too projecting similar view comments ironically in a 1993 interview, “writing in English about characters who are presumably speaking in an Indian language for audiences for whom English is a second language is not a situation conducive to great drama” (365). Playwrights thus create a framework for contemporary Indian drama and theatre in which regional theatrical traditions interact with each other and are available for use beyond the borders of their languages and provinces. Marked by a complex interrelation of languages, Indian theatre has now become an interconnected field with well established channels of publication and performance.

Modern Indian theatre has evolved in conjunction with fully developed competing theories regarding the forms and functions of drama. There existed two formative theoretical influences on modern Indian theatre – Indian and western, with an endless debate between the two. The playwrights such as Habib Tanvir, K.N.Panikkar and Ratan Thiyam have experimented most rigorously with indigenous forms and cultivated a more nuanced view of western influences on contemporary theatrical practice. Since 1960’s the strongest ideological disagreements over dramatic forms have appeared between proponents and opponents of indigenousness and westernised modernity resulting in opposing conceptions of Indian theatre. The counter-arguments of these positions of
indigenous traditionalism and cultural nationalism have come from playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Elkunchwar and Dattani who choose realist representation of contemporary urban social experience as appropriate subject of drama and theatre. They invoke the legacy of realism and naturalism in modern western theatre and the strong traditions of social realism in India. For them the 'content' that satisfies the needs of its immediate audience is important than 'form' which may be borrowed. Traditionalist critique of westernised modernity dismisses as 'un-Indian' the composite body of new social realist, existentialist and absurdist drama that reflects contemporary urban theatre in India.

The critique of westernised modernity from the perspective of cultural or native nationalism is however not new to Indian theatre. Nativists argue that modem westernised theatre was an alien imposition that did not and cannot flourish in India. Further, for them the end of colonialism represents moment of restitution and it offers an opportunity for the renewal of Indian theatre through the revival of indigenous, culturally authentic traditions. Thus for them the western style theatre was different in all aspects because it took shape in imitation of an alien theatre and fundamentally different in world view and aesthetic approach. However, to this critique the proponents of western influence question as to how active were traditional/popular forms of theatre when modern theatre practices emerged. To what extent do traditional and modern practices compete directly? Refuting the traditionalists' arguments the modernists (here it means, the ones who import their models from the west) point out all modern theatre in India is necessarily trans-cultural with its history being intertwined with western theatre for two centuries in all important areas of theory, aesthetic form, institutional organisation, economy and translation, first in colonial and then in postcolonial context.

Furthermore, problems in existing Indian, western approaches demand the exploration of new directions where there should be no monolithic category as resistance to colonialism, rather a multifaceted engagement is seen that deals with plurality of indigenous languages. Indian theatre with its multilingual feature is qualitatively different from and inherently more complex than most contemporary (and largely monolingual) national traditions. Formation of new multilingual contemporary dramatic canon is needed that involves self reflexivity. In modern Indian drama of post-1950's the hunt has
been for a significant theatre linked intra-nationally by complex commonalities and mutual self differentiations. As Rustom Bharucha suggests that to surmount the creative and critical standoff in which theatre presently finds itself, “what needs to be invented is a re-newed imagery of ‘Indian’ theatre, not a metaphysical essence but as a network of interactive possibilities” (qtd. in Dharwedkar 24). Despite these critical difficulties it is possible to maintain that the modern Indian theatre is both an Indian and national tradition. The challenge is to discover those modes of Indianess and nationality that are descriptive and constructive rather than coercive.

VI
Survey of Works Done

Aparna.B.Dharwedkar in her seminal work *Theatres of Independence* (2005) juxtaposes three moments that mark the different stages in the evolution of an idea of a modern Indian theatre and its concomitant formation. For her, these three discrete events demarcate a segment of time during which the historicity of modern drama becomes fully manifest – the inception of a theatre association in 1943, an all-India conference in 1956, and a multilingual drama festival in 1989. The formation of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) that took place in 1943 described the drama of the previous half century as relapsed because of its inane middle class conventionality or escape into bad history and senseless mythology by making frequent recourse to distant past or mysticism. It presented the IPTA’s commitment to national perspective where all cosmopolitan tendencies having no relevance to our living conditions and social struggles must be opposed. Social realism in this period emerged as the dominant mode of people’s theatre. A critique of class ideology emerged most clearly in plays aimed at peasants and urban industrial workers. However, despite the fact that the IPTA has done much to stimulate, encourage and foster the cultural work all over the country, it failed to have a real comprehensive grasp of the new possibilities in our Indian drama and evolve a new drama.

To advance further, the all-India conference held in 1956 recognised the need to dissociate theatre from a specific political program and rethink it comprehensively in relation to the remote and proximate past. They anticipated a future theatre radically
unrelated to its colonial past with the perception that they were imperialist impositions, destructive of indigenous aesthetic and performance traditions. The object of this event was to relate this complex legacy in theatre to aesthetic, social and political needs of a new Independent nation and to develop a program for future Indian drama. Having dismissed the naturalist, spectacular and populist forms that together constituted Indian theatre until Independence, they turned to the task of debating what shape we want to give our future drama and theatre. Their proposals were directed on questions of language, audience, institutional organisation and above all form. They held that in relation to the dramatic form the key term for future theatre is ‘synthesis’ – the middle ground between revivalism and imitative westernisation, which would reconcile postcolonial traditions with socio-cultural formations of an Independent nation.

The third phase in the development of a concrete Indian theatre witnessed during 1989 drama festival that avoided sweeping claims about canonicity, representativeness and inclusiveness. It suggested the centrality of language to the politics of inclusion and exclusion in Indian theatre and offered a cross-sectional view of multilingual, formally diverse and geographically dispersed theatrical practices. In form and content the plays conducted were suggestively heterogeneous and this heterogeneity of contemporary practice stood in ironic relation to the vehement 1956 critique of naturalism. It brought out a thematic range suggesting modern Indian playwright’s engagement with wide range of genres – history, myth, folklore, tradition as the contemporary Indian playwrights created an inventive and syncretised theatre from the resources of Indian traditional, folk and intermediary forms while several others continued to follow western models of historical, social, realist, allegorical, absurdist and political theatre as best suited to their objective. This juxtaposition of the populist movement of 1940’s, prospective and prescriptive drama seminar of 1956 and the retrospective Nehru festival of 1989 reveal a gap between idea and actuality that was inevitable in a theatrical culture so decisively disrupted by the movement from colonial to postcolonial.

Thus, modern Indian theatre has undergone structural changes as it seeks to experiment beyond its generic boundaries. It derives its energies from across the spectrum of genres, modes, languages, locations and socio-political intentions that Indian culture perennially offers. One of the principal collaborative study on Indian theatre is
done by Richmond, Swann and Zarilli in their work *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance* (1990). This work of western scholarship seeks to communicate the complexities of performative field that constitute the panorama of Indian theatre – the rituals, folklore, devotional and dance dramas. It introduces the reader to multiple dimensions of Indian theatre by presenting a representative sample of major traditions and genres of performance. Indian theatre being an experimental one, shows assimilation of native and foreign elements, motifs and tropes, concerned with multitude of themes. Further, Ralph Yarrow’s *Indian Theatre* (2001) is seen as the first major Western effort to draw contemporary Indian theatre extensively into discussions of established critical categories as text, performance and theory. Modern Indian drama seems attaining global recognition as Brian Crow and Chris Banefield’s *Introduction to Postcolonial Theatre* (1996) is bolder in placing such Indian language playwrights as Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad who write primarily in their respective regional languages – Bengali and Kannada, alongside major western playwrights. Their discussion of Sircar’s and Karnad’s works that are more clearly concerned with the precolonial past and the postcolonial present rather than the experience of colonialism, the writers too circumvents their assumed issue of cultural subordination recognising the playwrights’ move beyond the colonial into modernity.

Another major study on modern Indian Drama is made by Urmil Talwar and Bandana Chakrabarty in their work *Contemporary Indian Drama: Astride Two Traditions* (2005), that brings in a large variety of issues related to dramatic experimentation. It includes the focus on historical perspectives contextualised with reference to contemporary Indian drama in English and English translations. In an interpretive mode it covers plays by several dramatists such as Mahashweta Devi, Vijay Tendulkar and Gurcharan Das with their use of history, myth and folk forms. Similarly, *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English* (1977) by M.K.Naik and S.Mokashi Punekar, by discussing the contribution made to Indian drama by some major Indian dramatists documents the works of diverse authors, themes and trends. Rustom Bharucha’s *Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theatre of Bengal* (1983) and Jacob Srampickal’s *Voice to the Voiceless: The Power of People Theatre in India* (1995) are more sophisticated analysis of revolutionary and protest theatre concerning specific forms. Besides this several anthologies of Indian
drama in English have come up demonstrating the growing interest in the field. For instance *Modern Indian Plays* edited by Chandrashekhar Kamble, *Modern Indian Drama* by G.P. Deshpande, Modern Indian Literature, an Anthology by K.M. George are among some recent comprehensive anthologies bringing together a collection of modern Indian plays in different Indian languages. While some plays in collection address profound socio-political concerns, other address the fundamental issue of human life through the representation of myths and folktales bringing in a full range of form and content practised in modern Indian drama. Another collection of contemporary plays both Indian and western was published by Helen Gilbert titled *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology* demonstrating an extraordinary vitality of the body of work that is further influencing the shape of contemporary world theatre.

Consequently, the theatre that has come into existence since Independence in India is a postcolonial cultural formation shaped by historically new conditions of writing, perception and reception. Modern Indian dramatists as Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Utpal Dutt, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and G.P. Deshpande are systematic critics who reflect in varying degrees on the state of writing, culture and politics in national and international contexts, and who relate their own practice to general theories of literature and theatre as cultural forms. Consequently, the idea of a modern Indian theatre as a historically distinguished category depends upon the critical expansion of these constitutive modes of writing, staging, circulation and reception. Earlier drama and theatre remained peripheral to the emergence of print culture. Colonial theatre was inhospitable to language-centered literary drama because of its heavy reliance on the verbal semiotics of dance, music and spectacle. Postcolonial playwrights are therefore historically the first group of modern dramatic authors in India who belong simultaneously to the economies of print and performance. The effect of modern print culture in India was not to destroy traditional literary forms and practices but to create a range of new poetic, fictional, non-fictional and discursive genres that had no identifiable precursors in pre-colonial writing. Thus, the fundamental difference between premodern and postmodern Indian theatre lies not in the disappearance of western oriented drama but in multidimensional assimilation of drama to literature and of literary drama to performance. The text of postcolonial drama and theatre is in significant
measure an unwriting or rewriting of the earlier texts. Therefore literary readings of drama and theatrical concentrations on performance are only appropriate in contexts in which drama's literary, theatrical and institutional modes of existence have equal and adequate recognition. Literariness conferred legitimacy and currency on plays as printed texts that make the play as text available for analysis, commentary and interpretation outside the boundaries of performance. The significant culture of theatre in contemporary India is an amalgam of both print and performance modes: recovering the literary does not marginalise the theatrical and vice versa and both the means together account for the resonance of the plays in performance.

The role that theatre ought to play in contemporary society has been debated among the artists the world over where changing social, political conditions have resulted in diverse attempts to exploit theatre as a means of reaching vast audience for purpose of education, publicity and propaganda. Contemporary Indian drama participates in modern, postmodern and postcolonial discourses on myth and history, class and gender, home and family, centre and periphery, while also attending to the performance practices that have successfully communicated this thematic density to national audiences over time. The thematics of post-Independence dramatic genres reveal how contemporary plays draw on myth, history, folklore, socio-political experience and the resources of earlier texts to reflect on culture, nation, gender, class, identity, experience and modern citizenship in a postcolonial state. The modern Indian theatre is therefore a cumulative effect of theoretical, generic and thematic emphases. Theatre has taken a new life and energy in modern Indian drama, seeking new outlets and fresh means of expression for the enormous drama of creating a relevant and meaningful dramatic canon. Practitioners and policy makers see theatre as one of the most important arts for remoulding our society and for achieving such values as may help to keep it in some state of equilibrium.

VII

Range of Modern Indian Plays

Without dismissing or minimising the efforts and contribution made by playwrights, we need to recognise the broad range of modern Indian plays that have been written and equally staged with extensive variety of themes. Modern Indian dramatists
rely heavily on received narratives of myth, legend, history and folklore. Dharwedkar herein points out how the postcolonial playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Dharamvir Bharati have embraced narratives of myth, history, legend and folklore to re-appraise the past. Nandi Bhatia in *Acts of Authority Acts of Resistance* (2004) gives focussed attention on how theatre has become an invigorating arena for anti-colonial cultural resistance and furthermore how modern playwrights returning to history, as Utpal Dutt in *The Great Rebellion 1857* (1986) and Tripurari Sharma in *A Tale from the Year 1857: Azizun Nisa* (2005), aim at scrutinizing and destabilising the colonial myths of the past. Vasudha Dalmia in *Poetics, Plays and Performance* (2006) while addressing the political, aesthetic concerns, traces the genealogies and looks particularly into the appropriation of folk theatre. The genre of folk form brings into play the most complex range of ideological, political, socio-cultural, aesthetic polarities in contemporary India. From one historical standpoint, the folk-based drama of Kambar, Tanvir, Panikkar, Thiyam and Karnad is paradoxically the only new postcolonial genre, exemplifying the successful assimilation of indigenous material and conventions of contemporary theatre. Among some classics are Karnad’s *Hayavadana* that draws on twelfth century folktale and reflexively employ the conventions of *yakshagana* folk forms of theatre of Karnataka. Tendulkar’s *Ghasiram Kotwal* too for its corrosive fictionalisation relies extensively on the *tamasha* and *dashavtar* forms of Maharashtra. Such plays establish radically new relations between the textual and the performative and between the traditional and the contemporary. Additionally, the proscenium theatre of domestic drama too has unquestionably dominated contemporary plays. Keeping in with the legacy of realist theatre in modern India, a number of playwrights such as Tendulkar, Rakesh, Sircar, Elkuchwar, Satish Alekar and Dattani among others have produced works reinforcing the significance of the physical, material and the effective space in the staging and reception of contemporary Indian drama. For instance Mohan Rakesh’s *Adhe adhure*, depicts the collapse of a nuclear family in the modern metropolis, establishing an intimate connection between economic decline, emotional disintegration and the space of home. Sircar’s *Evam Indrajit* too represents its thrust of action mainly against the constraints of domesticity. Social realism of Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, Rakesh and Dattani has created radically modern perspective on caste, class, sexuality, gender, family relationships,
home and nation. Thus we locate a culture of serious and sustained dramatic writing that makes visible the otherwise diverse and complex thematic engagements in modern dramatic writing, enabling theatre to become embodiment of contemporary life of the nation.

Since Independence, the ideological resistance to orientalist positions and a move towards a revisionist history of our Indian past have become increasingly evident in the works of Indian dramatists and artists. By locating novel ways of representation and countering claims of authenticity, they restage the past employing themselves beneath conventional autonomist histories and other myth-making narratives. Within such narratives there is an array of complimentary discourses challenging the profound versions of history. Postmodern/postcolonial dramatists undertake dialogue with history, questioning rather than confirming its process. It has successfully revisioned history as both narrative and text, and problematised its status as a coherent, unmediated and authoritative form of knowledge about the past by arguing of its inherent fragmentation, rupture and discontinuity as being the conditions of historical writing. Since its appearance, the postcolonial and subaltern studies have questioned the idea of history as an autonomous and self-authenticating mode of thought. It has also stressed the connivance between historical discourse and colonialist strategies of cultural domination and self-legitimisation. The first significant thematic formation to appear in Indian theatre after Independence consists of a succession of major plays that invoke the nation’s ancient, pre-modern and pre-colonial past through two major modes of retrospective representation – myth and history. Myth and history is used by many as interchangeable categories because together they constitute the text of the past in colonial and postcolonial Indian cultural forms. But beyond this common function of invoking the past, myth and history diverge significantly in their modes of composition, transmission or reception. Myth in India is aligned with poetry, symbol, ritual, oral recitation and performance. History whereas involves the conflict between institutionalised and revisionary historiography, the interpenetration of true and fictive forms, the processes of ideological mediation and the manipulation of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. In short history may be mythologized and myth may be historicised, but in modern context they are distinct narrative modes.
In the theatre-culture of last five decades, this varied body of historical drama represents a powerful fusion of textual complexity and performative effect and a wide range of aesthetic, dramaturgical and theatrical initiatives that has determined it’s pre-eminence in the contemporary repertoire. Dharwedkar puts in:

If such colonial era playwrights as D.L Roy, Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar and Jaishankar Prasad have turned to Indian myth, legend, and history to recover an ideal past that could counteract the effects of colonial subjection, such postcolonial playwrights as Dharamvir Bharti, Vijay Tendulkar, and Karnad have embraced similar narratives to reappraise and deidealize the past. (71)

Where the major fiction of colonial period is romantic and naturalistic, that of postcolonial period is modernist and postmodernist - the product of more, not less aggressive modernity. Invoked in the major plays of some of the modern Indian playwrights such as Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Dharamvir Bharti is the nation’s past. Perhaps the inaugural work of this first dramatic phase is Dharamvir Bharati’s *Andha Yug* (1954), a verse play which subjects the main history of the epic, the Mahabharata. His condensed epic was followed by two major history plays by Mohan Rakesh also set in antiquity. The first play, *Asad Ka Ek Din* (1958) places the historical figure of the Sanskrit poet and playwright Kalidasa within a largely invented action to create an ironic portrait of the artist as a young and then middle aged man, caught between the provincial sources of its poetic inspiration and the hazy attractions of metropolitan benefaction. Rakesh’s second play *Lahron Ke Rajhans* (1963) centres on Buddha’s younger brother, Nanad, who loses interest in life of marriage ease and princely luxury almost against his own will and sets out at the end to seek the eight fold path of enlightenment. Rakesh’s plays overlap chronologically with Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq* (1964), which moves to a radically different phase in history – the period of Muslim dominance as it deals with a brilliant but spectacularly unsuccessful fourteenth century Muslim sultan of Delhi. Similarly Badal Sircar’s *Baki Itihas* (1965) brings in another interface of history by concerning himself with history not as his source rather as his subject. Where Rakesh in *Asad Ka Ek Din* and Karnad in *Tughlaq* deconstruct the invention of heroes and villains in cultural and political history, Sircar deconstructs history itself. Thus in the first active decade in Indian drama after Independence, the new
major playwrights seemed concerned primarily with establishing and debating the
relation of the new nations present to its remote past through the narratives of history. It
is only after 1960's that the field of Indian theatre diversifies considerably with the
arrival of realist, existentialist, absurdist, political modes in Indian drama and the
development of syncretic, experimental and performance centered theatre in urban and
non urban locations.

The absorption in past narratives and practices not only continues but expands
over four decades into a multifaceted movement. The line of literary plays that use
history as occasions for philosophical, moral, political and cultural exploration runs from
the early plays of Bharati, Rakesh and Karnad to Tendulkar's *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1973), a
play set during the corrupt reign of the eighteen century Peshwa rulers of Pune. Karnad's
*Tale Danda* (1989), deals with the destruction of a twelfth century anti-caste movement
in Karnataka. Tracing the past seems one of the prominent engagement with the
playwrights as there exists an array of such plays; *Begum Barve* (1979) by Satish Alekar
dealing with history of Marathi theatre where a female impersonator is exploited by his
employer, another is *Chakravyuhu* (1984) by Ratan Thiyam representing ancient Indian
past, and yet another is *Mahachaitra: the Great Spring* (1986) by Shivaprakash based on
the life and times of twelth century Veerashaiva saint Basavanna that narrated the
struggles of the artisan saints of the city of Kalyana. Such evocation of one's own past is
received in diverse religious, social, political and economic environment. These
playwrights thus represent the past not to assert any particular identity but to scrutinise
the dominant tradition in the context of a pluralistic nation. The cumulative effect of this
engagement with the past has been to keep Indian past constantly in view before national
audiences.

However, the dependence on history and historical figures does not turn literature
into history as history gathers facts and present them chronologically which has never
been the object of literature. Historical drama works precisely to neutralise or repudiate
the figurations of institutional history and serves as alternative source of historical
knowledge for audiences ideologically resistant to dominant narratives. When the
dominant texts of history are subjected to critique, historical dramatic fictions then
inevitably draw attention towards the inherited problems of historical representation even
as they re-present history and invest it with new and often ambivalent meanings. Looking through a wider lens offered by postcolonial studies, we can acknowledge different versions of histories and their meanings in the present. Modern Indian drama has acted almost as a corrective alternative site to the ideological and orientalist formations of Indian histories. However, its relationship with hagiographical past still begs an extended exploration. The playwright’s return to the past events is marked by the need to comment on the profound divisions in postcolonial India that challenge the myth of Indian unity sustained by both alternative (hagiographies) and official versions (histories). By evoking past memories, the playwright teases out the relatedness of historical/hagiographical sources of the past. The attempt to restage the true history of their nation’s past in consequence becomes one of the leading preoccupations with the creative artists and dramatists. Modern Indian dramatists as vanguard of critical rationalism have relentlessly challenged such claims of absolutism. History is restored to its former significance within theatrical reconstructions, where the mythical core can be deconstructed into a set of proportion that underlines all elaborated historiographies. The contemporary playwrights while restaging the past engage themselves underneath traditional dominant histories where there is a range of related discourses, as that of literature, oral narratives, hagiographies which contest the rarefied versions of history. And using the genre of drama this dialectical interface is enacted out on the stage where it is directly related to its receptors.

Thus, theatrical imagination in postcolonial times offers a spot for intercession and interference that seeks to release us from the monolithic category of past by testing its absolutist claims. The present study too shall focus on the narratives of history and hagiography examining how the modern Indian playwrights have employed history to unravel the politics behind the exposition of the past. It takes up three acknowledged Indian histories re-presented in contemporary Indian theatre – done of Tipu Sultan, second of Mahatma Gandhi and third of a saint-poet Mirabai. Through them is explored the complex, discursive, cultural, theatrical intertexture of history plays in postcolonial India. The object is not to fit their history plays to a deterministic theory of historical drama but to demarcate the textual traditions and cultural and political contexts in which they are implicated through their dual existence in official institutionalised histories as
well as figures of great reverence. The study takes up the issue looking at the multiple ways of producing the past and their effects on historical consciousness in order to stimulate reflection on the relationship between academic histories and other genres of historical representation. The role of fictionalised histories is seen epitomising the analogical and ideological force of past-present relations. In this representative context drama has priority over other fictional genres as the recognition is especially powerful when the stage seeks to enact the history of the nations past itself. The drama of one’s nation’s past is one of the strongest expressions, a summoning of representative audience that will in turn recognise itself as nation on stage. The development of the national history play in an emergent political theatre offers perhaps the most powerful instance of the interrelations between the matter of history, the form of drama and particular socio-political conditions of reception. The playwright consequently attempts to establish an integral relation between the nation’s past and the forging of a formative national consciousness in the present. However it also implies that dramatising the national histories on the stage subjects it to particularly acute scrutiny. The issue is not whether the past is real outside its modem construction but that how it comes to be re-imagined during the modern period and what role these reconstructions play in evolving ideas of a national history.

This study thus intends to look at the problems and challenges of re-staging the past in modern Indian drama. Indian past, particularly the pre-colonial and the colonial past, is yet to be retrieved in rigorous empirical terms. Each historical event/persona is as real as it is imagined or constructed. The focus shall be on two sources of Indian past – official historical accounts and unofficial hagiographical ones – and to analyse their play in the making of modern Indian ‘historical’ drama. It is primarily these two sources that a contemporary playwright negotiates to stage his/her national past and in the process forges a third transversal creative discourse that inheres the two and yet has its own artistic autonomy. Early oriental scholarship sets up a dichotomy between the native hagiographical propensities and the colonial historical imperatives. The concern of this study is to understand the dialectics of history and hagiography and its continuous re-configuration in modern Indian drama. Using the matrix of drama which enables multiple
voices to interact, the study would reveal the dialectical process that evolves through the 
co-mingling of the historical and the hagiographical discourses in the staging of the past.

As the modern Indian playwrights re-write the legends of Mirabai, Mahatma 
Gandhi and Tipu Sultan, they evince a rare critical vision in which both history and 
hagiography provide a dialectical frame of construction and deconstruction. Both history 
and hagiography provide inter-textual pulls to modern Indian theatre lest it is overtaken 
by the patently ahistorical existential themes, patterns and tropes. Everyday intermixing 
of the historical and the hagiographical in our nationalist imagination thereby informs our 
dramatic/performative space. Consequently the study will involve an exploration of the 
poetics of this interplay through a close analysis of three modern Indian plays: Mira 
Word that Broke an Empire (2005) by Partap Sharma. The plays as the very titles suggest 
are pronouncedly biographical wherein the life-history of the each one of the historical 
figure is re-constructed through the sources and structures outside the limits of history. 
The playwrights’ purpose in writing these history plays was not to engage with any 
specific historical or biographical intertexts relating to his subject, but to take up the 
construction of their historical figures as important cultural icons in orientalist and 
cultural-nationalist discourses. They look at the hagiographic tendencies within traditional Indian culture, the history/hagiography dichotomy that largely exemplifies their life-histories. The plays in study thus offers a (de)romanticised portrait of some provincial/national figures extricated from the past and brought back into new framework 
where their counterpart narratives are equally recognised.

Gurcharan Das, an eminent modern Indian playwright through his play Mira has 
tried looking at such perplexing historical-hagiographical formations on Mira’s mystical 
figure. Through the act of restaging he explores her life story and focuses on her journey 
which makes her a saint among people. The spiritual aspect of Mira’s personality 
constituting her love and bhakti for Krishna has been until now the primary concern for 
several writers, but Das in his play harps more on her human side, her wild passion and 
deep love for the lord considering it to be very human emotions. The playwright seems to 
highlight how any human being under such circumstances and experiences would 
undergo a similar transformation as Mira has gone through. The divinity often related to
Mira’s figure is attained only after a series of very human experiences of love, passion, jealously, anger and struggle against the societal norms. Several portrayals on Mirabai overlook her human side that exemplifies her strengths and weaknesses and in face of certain assumptions outrightly assume her to be a born saint. The divine and the human are not separate dimensions that do not touch each other; on the contrary, the transcendent is brought right into the human world by Das through the love of the bhakta for the figure of God.

The second figure of the present study is the warrior king Tipu Sultan, the sixteenth century Muslim ruler of Mysore. For almost 200 years since his death Tipu Sultan continues to be a subject of the historical-hagiographical constructions. He is seen as a man of vision, foresight and wisdom and the one who stood past between the imperialist ambitions of the British and the realisation of his objective. Tipu is also disliked by some who held him to be a Muslim fanatic and bigot committing atrocities upon his Hindu subjects. Chapter 3 of this study draws upon Tipu’s historical-hagiographical dialectics, and how H.S.Shivaprakash negotiates this dialectics in restaging Tipu’s persona. As during his rule and even today Tipu has been a subject of much curiosity and controversy, the narrative accounts on his life history are so laden with presumptions and biases that his persona remains a matter of interest and perplexity. For this reason, this heroic figure is portrayed by Shivaprakash too in light of multiple roles, where history stands creatively negotiated, as Tipu is not mysticized, nor spiritualised and yet again, not fully empiricized or too objectively presented, rather is located among the in-between spaces, which is the space of the dramatists’ creativity. Thus, H.S.Shivaprakash endeavours to co-mingle this textualised history with legend, lore and memory considering all these forms of transmission vital in the making of the story of Tipu, and to the negotiated construction of history and hagiography.

Another persona well-preserved in our histories and traditions, is that of Mohandas Gandhi who although not so remote in historical time yet remains masked in his historical-hagiographical configurations. Seen as one of the most contentious figures in Indian past, his persona remains open to an ever reworking and reinterpretation. Being a subject of much heated debate, his character has been loaded more with equally large share of both adoration and criticism than the other two figures of this study. As a result
of Gandhi fascination there has been a plethora of literary writings comprising novel, 
drama, poetry that see him both as a seer and an enchanter who had the skill to influence 
people around him. Partap Sharma too in chapter 4, has attempted to draw out certain 
events of Gandhi’s life history subjecting his chosen figure of past to both historical-
hagiographical reconstructions. Although his re-presentations enables a clearer 
understanding of this otherwise conflicting historical image; yet picturing out a concrete 
image of Gandhi becomes knotty. Rather than accepting the linear, conventional narrative 
structure, the playwright punctures the monolithic claim of history by bringing in an 
alternative category of hagiography. However, while dealing with hagiography too, the 
playwright develops upon the social, cultural and political process through which he 
became a Mahatma. He depicts it not as a sudden happening, rather we learn a series of 
events and situations that enabled a gradual emergence of this image.

Thus, the importance of the study lies in the fact that it seeks to approach modern 
Indian drama as a dialogic site where tradition and modernity, history and hagiography 
forge new combinations, hitherto unexplored in realm of theatre. The playwrights conjure 
up images of the past and interweave them in their creative wholes. They depict this 
blending of history and hagiography by selecting bits from both the narratives of history 
and hagiography and weave them together. Through a dialectical approach towards the 
past, the playwrights restage it by including the versions of marginalised histories as well. 
The heroic and satiric modes of representation that are broad strategies for praising and 
denigrating the historical traditions, religious-philosophical systems, social-political 
institutions and cultural-civic practices that constitute India as subject are employed. The 
interaction of discursive modes involves a range of textual and interpretive practices and 
is especially relevant in the representation of history because competing constructions of 
the past are central to a dialectical and balanced understanding of both colonial and 
postcolonial periods. The plays in study are presented and interpreted both from the 
hagiographical and historical point of view but in a dialectical mode. They pick and 
choose facts, and rearrange them as per their design. By disrupting linearity the 
conventional view of history is overturned.

What is to be identified furthermore is how in his engagement with history, the 
modern Indian playwright excludes, includes and invents facts of the past. Which history
does the Indian playwright settle or rely on to stage the obscure past? Therefore, the present study intends to foreground the process of rewriting and re-staging history, positioning hagiography as one potent frame of dramatic juxtaposition. Hagiography as people’s discourse and history as official nationalist discourse collide and collude, collaborate and contest in modern Indian theatre in ways which are not easy to contain in any theoretical model. The history-hagiography dialectic boils down to many other related dialectics and homological binaries as those of orality-literacy, occident-orient, tradition-modernity etc. Modern Indian theatre seems enriched as well as torn asunder by the play of such polarities. Does history overtake tradition or does one subsume the other? Is modern Indian theatre too existential to by-pass pressures of both history and tradition? What is the nature and content of the so called Indian ‘historical’ drama? Can we, at all, place plays and characters such as Mira, Gandhi and Tipu under the conventional category of historical theatre or should we invent a new category of ‘bio-dramas’/‘bio-plays’/‘bio-theatre’? Questions such as these would inform my study. The past performed on the stage is a mixture of history, folklore, hagiography, literary imagination and also people’s beliefs. Native unofficial histories, available mostly in oral form, combine elements of hagiography, theology and divinity with history also as one of its elements. Latter-day histories written both by the colonial historians and their Indian counterparts tend to take an empirical view of history, almost distancing themselves from the oral hagiographies as non-reliable sources of authentic past. Thus, the latest theories of historiography now seek to re-explore hagiographies and even literary discourses, along with histories to understand and account for the gaps in the reconstruction of the past. The study shall reveal how in any reconstruction of India’s past, a dynamic combination of these three discourses – historical, hagiographical and literary needs to be taken up. The performative space of modern Indian theatre combines history, hagiography and literature in its attempt to represent the past.
End Notes:

1. Roland Barthes, a literary critic views history as a discourse which is structured by language, with no rational or scientific basis, rather it being an ideological elaboration. A historian for him, like a literary artist, is engaged in the craft of language.

2. However, the simple relation and opposition between myth and history which we are accustomed to make is not a clear cut one and that there is an intermediary level. Myth designates fictional narratives involving divine and heroic human agents that belong to the formative stages of Indian culture, embodying powerful qualities with which the culture has identified itself over a period of time, and have maintained a more or less continuous presence in a range of cultural forms. Whereas history denotes the oral and written records of lives and events individual and collective, specific and general whose actuality is documented and empirically verified.

3. The first known biography or hagiography was apparently produced in the second century B.C called the ‘Buddhacharita’ by Asvagosha.

4. Here the historians and the philosophers in postmodern times such as Hayden White, Gyan Prakash Pandey and others disagree with the idea that narrative is a form of accurate, true to life representational discourse. Narratives they argue are only a form of speaking about events whether real or imaginary (Leslie 23).

5. This idea becomes further explicit with Gadamer’s notion of ‘horizonfusion’ where we acknowledge that what we call a text is in fact a tradition of interpretation (with no original meaning) and also that our own perspective is informed by the very past we are seeking to analyse. It views a work of art itself as a product of set of manipulations, a product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with complex, communally shred repertoire of conventions and the institutions and practices of society (764 Habib).

6. Stephen Greenblatt seeking to retrieve underlying attitudes and preoccupations held in Shakespeare’s times, he examines political tracts, diaries and other extra literary documents and then read his plays in that light. In Shakespearean negotiations he argues that theatre was a part in a chain of commodities and a
circulation of money and power and that the dramatists were writing within this economy. To many, Greenblatt is the most important critic writing today. First because he grapples with the local details of plays in their historical context rather than pursuing a new grand narrative of theory, and secondly, because he honours the rich diversity and subtlety of views expresses in Shakespeare’s plays.

7. Bhaktin in his work *The Dialogic Imagination* expounded on the dialogic principle as a mixture of the marginal and the canonical, enabling polyphonic/multiple voices to interact. In essence, all thought became for Bhaktin a matter of dialogue: dialogue that requires the pre-existence of differences, which are then connected by an act of communication to generate new ideas and positions.

8. A concept that was proposed by Hans Robert Jauss, who talks about the changing linguistic, aesthetic acceptations of the receptors and thereby evolving a historical tradition of critical interpretation and evaluations of a given literary work and thus describes this tradition as a dialectic between literary work and the receptors/readers.

9. Drama’s role in liberation struggle in the colonial societies in general and in India in particular is especially distinctive. The power of performance that capture public imagination and sway public opinion, cannot be minimised. Theatre constituted an important part of cultural life in India from pre-colonial times whether in form of puppet theatre, folk drama, mythological drama, street theatre. Theatre in India has indeed become an expression of political struggle against colonial rule and a space for staging scathing critiques of the oppression and atrocities inflicted upon colonial subjects by rulers on indigo planters as demonstrated through a play *Nildarpan* (1860), also the first significant drama of social protest by Dinabandhu Mitra. The play dramatises incidents from the revolution of 1858 in which Bengali indigo cultivators were mercilessly persecuted by British planters for refusing to sow their crops. The play aroused considerable public sentiment in Bengal against British rule and paved way for a host of patriotic works written along similar lines elsewhere in the country. The
publication of Nildarpan in 1860 became a turning point in the history of anticolonial theatre in India.

10. Such engagements with history survives in post-Independence theatre, where the imperial discourses of history receive careful scrutiny by politically committed artists who repeatedly return to the colonial archive to excavate, emplot, and restage historical events. Doing so they rewrite dominant versions of historical truths and accord subaltern subjects of colonial history their proper roles in anticolonial struggles (Bhatia 95).