Conclusion

Since the 1980s, the narrative has occupied central place in the Indian English novel. It is more so in the case of the postcolonial writer's pre-occupation with history, which issues from resisting colonial appropriation or rejection in order to rehabilitate or establish the self. Since all colonial ideology tends to legitimize colonial exploitation, postcolonial writers are actively engaged with the question of history in their fictional discourse. Postcolonial Indian English writers, therefore, attempt to reread the history of India and give the nonconformist treatment of history in their fictional writings. For these writers, historiography is repressive, partial and incomplete as most of what goes in the name of history is a tale of conquest and the repression of subaltern by the dominant perspectives. Fictionally narrativised history, on the contrary, is more human and comprehensive as it accommodates multiple, at times even contradictory, voices within the same discourse thereby allowing subaltern perspectives the scope to surface and assert themselves. History of a place or nation, hence, needs to be narrativised because it presents heterogeneous views which cumulatively constitute identity.

Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and Qurrutulain Hyder use the counter culture of imagination to de-centre the dominant representation of history. For this purpose, they exploit a number of fictional strategies, which range from polyphony, teleological shifts, indeterminacy, slippage, Rabelaisian bawdy humour to an interrogation of history and textuality. These writers are unique

in their fascination for history, because they are perennially faced with the quest for the pre-colonial past and questions of origin. Their writings have been engaged with both national and personal histories. In their fictional tales, they deal with the history of institutions, family sagas, the freedom struggle, gender discriminations, and so on. Their accounts are motivated by the need to place the past in different perspectives and the need to review happenings and roles so as to free them from imposed positions and to deconstruct the knowledge structures legitimised by the imperial discourse. Behind this historical impulse, there is also the search for causes to find out what went wrong in the course of Indian history. For this reason, there is a reviewing and re-telling of the past events. At the same time, it is a search for the hidden layers of meaning, for the little narratives which, if placed together, may yield a new meaning. Cartography is a fairly prominent feature in their narratives right from Rushdie through Ghosh to Mukul Kesavan, because maps are of significance in problematizing the nation and national identity as also in examining spaces of individual memory.

Furthermore, these narratives of history and family sagas facilitate the analysis of institutions like family and marriage which are linked to the question of gender and the ground realities. As far as narrative forms are concerned, their history writing/rewriting has also experimental tendency. Their historical narratives hence acquire the freedom to be speculative and infinitive rather than documentary and authentic. There are several ways in which their narratives arrive at the reality of an earlier age-for instance, by imaging and imagination as legitimate methods. Their little narratives bespeak

of family stories which become a concern with lineage and heredity, with genealogical histories. By placing the individual within generational kinship patterns, as it happens in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, there is scope for social history to filter through and for grandmothers' perspectives to be centrestaged and for the marginalized categories to surface on the national scene.

Indian English novelists' preoccupations with history lead to a lot of researching – about the theories –educational, medicinal and social. It is a research about the absences in history, and the personal perspectives of those who were not articulate in the past. In rewriting history, therefore, these writers are looking for the missing links. There are novels about the partition and about the emergency by several writers like Rushdie, Ghosh, Mistry, Sahgal and Hyder which may be regarded as a turning point in political stances. Mistry dwells upon the Emergency in great detail in *A Fine Balance*, as do Rushdie and Sahgal in their novels *Midnight's Children* and *Rich Like Us*, respectively. Likewise Hyder articulates the trauma of partition in *River of Fire*, as does Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*. In addition, like other postmodern writers, they see identity as a composite of many identities and debunk the idea of an exclusively Indian identity. In *The Moor's Last Sigh,* for instance, it is difficult to conclude whether Moraes Zogoiby is Spanish, Portuguese, Indian, Christian, Jew or a mix, because the blood of many races courses through his veins. A number of Indian English novels, thus, reflect an urgency to re-write received Indian history and expose the untruths of political versions. The postmodern technique of double readings and writing

against the grain obtains free expression in the novels of post-Rushdie era, particularly since it enables novelists to challenge and re-write received truths.

Such rewriting of history is not necessarily other directed nor always a questioning or displacement of the western version of facts, but a search for answers to India's current problems like communalism, casteism, linguistic divides, fundamentalism, and so on. This return to the past is not only an attempt to construct a new identity, but also a desire to establish continuities and cease being a vulnerable postcolonial subject. The new historical novel written by these writers is both interpretative and investigative for it blurs the boundaries between history and politics. Even if its basis is founded on an earlier knowledge, yet it is a questioning of that knowledge. Through such questioning, Indian English novelists attempt to answer the perplexities and dilemmas of typical Indian problems. These novels therefore articulate the interface between postcolonial writing and the pluralistic, non-linear drift of postmodern theory. Their non-linear narratives may be seen to be emblematic of a non-western mode of discourse that is at once postcolonial and inescapably Indian. They have leapt out of their earlier limits to take up position to contemporary events. They are no longer a mere recording or an exoticism of the past. Instead, they interrogate, self-introspect and come face to face with the past and lay bare both the pain of suffering and the consciousness of the guilt of the nation.

These new historical novels are thus concerned with the nation state as well as with the nation space with identities and relationships. Their

engagement with the past is a self-reflexive exercise, undertaken partly in guilt and partly in sorrow. They seek to probe the psyche of the nation and the forces of division. The writers of these novels, however, turn to the past to trace the genesis of these divisions. These novelists re-examine the past to draw solutions to the questions and reflect on the wrong turns taken and the wasted opportunities. In short, they attempt to build up a new humanistic discourse which can sustain itself through empathy, a crossing over and a sharing. For them, the writing of history is a process of self-questioning and nation-building- it looks both to the past and the future. Their novels hence present a counter discourse to the tirades of hatred, anger, revenge and prod one's narrowing memories and shrinking humanity. In that sense, their novels constitute a dialogue with the self, with the past, even with the future and also bring up dissent with official historiography. They finally give suggestions about the lessons of history which people hardly learn.

Despite their typical postcolonial Indianness, these writers still bear resemblance to the other revisionist novelists in the global context. For instance, in American novelist Thomas Pynchon's novel *V*, the writing of history is seen as an ultimately futile attempt to form experience into meaning. The multiple and peripheral perspectives offered in the novel's eye–witness accounts resist any final meaningful closure. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, in a similar way, is an attempt, though abortive, to give form and meaning to the personal history of Saleem on the one hand and the history of the nation, on the other. In such novels there is an attempt to establish the relation between the past and the present. For example, in E.L. Doctorow's

novel *The Book of Daniel*, the protagonist tries to sort out the past in order to understand his present. In Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, the narrator makes a thorough research of the past with a view to understanding the enigmatic present of the Egyptian culture.

In the western literature revisionist novels undertake the questioning of the documentary official history. For example, in the novels like Berger's *G* or Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* or D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*, there is such a questioning of official accounts. In Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, too, there is a questioning and challenging of the official account about the Emergency. More generally, western revisionist novelists make use of paratextual conventions like footnotes, illustrations, subtitles, prefaces, epilogues, epigraphs to incorporate documentary material. For example, in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, in Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*, there are ample uses of newspaper accounts. Likewise, in Hyder's *River of Fire*, there is ample reference to colonial history of British Empire, focussing on Macaulay's minutes on education in India. In Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, the author has used the newspaper account of the famous Nagarwala fraud case in the context of the imposition of Emergency in India. In Coover's *The Public Burning*, the *Time* magazine and the *New York Times* are revealed as the documents- or docu-fictions-of twentieth-century America- the very creators and manipulators of ideology. Likewise, Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* skillfully interweaves some snippets from newspapers about the activities of the revolutionaries and their hangings with the fictive structure of the story. The function of all these paratextual insertions with the imaginary structure of

the novel is to pose the question - how exactly is it that one comes to know the past ? In these novels one can see therefore the use of all these documents and how they are transformed into the narrativized representation of the revisionist fiction. They throw light on the similarities, albeit with a few differences, between historical writing and fictional one.

Apart from de-doxifying the documentary part of official historiography, such revisionist novels are also engaged with the question of race and ethnicity. Postmodern writers who describe the experience of racism and segregation in America include Doctorow, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, among others. In Indian writing in English writers like Rushdie, Ghosh, Mistry, Sahgal and Hyder, among others, are committed to voicing the subaltern and marginalized minorities as well as women. In fact, Rushdie's novels challenge and transcend cultural conventions and parochial mentalities as do the novels of Ghosh. The postmodern approach of these five writers, however, is one which more often than not exposes rather than condemns the official historiography. Likewise the sense of displacement and alienation in one's own land and within one's own psyche is addressed in the west Indian George Lemming's *In the Castle of My Skin* as well as in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance.* Metaphoric themes that wrestle with the crisis of identity in a decolonizing world are extensively used in diverse postcolonial literatures, for example, in the Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and in *Remember the House* by the Indian Santha Rama Rao.

Mistry's texts articulate the ethno-religious commonalities and differences and his experiences of being 'homed' and 'unhomed' as a

diasporic writer. His understanding and articulation of socio-political scenario of postcolonial India brought him close to Sahgal, Rushdie, Ghosh and Hyder. If Allan Sealy traces the history of Anglo-Indians and Rushdie goes back to the Indo-Islamic roots in his writings, Parsi writers like Mistry, Firdaus Kanga and Farrukh Dhondhy articulate the singularities and individuations of their Zoroastrian ethnicity. Ethnocentrism may be a pejorative term for advocates of cosmopolitanism and global order, but it is one of the preponderant issues of postcolonial studies. Ethnic minority writers of Indian English have, therefore, asserted their ethnic identities through their recent writings.

Ghosh's novels, in a similar way, are engaged with the impact of the colonial encounter on the political, social and cultural lives of India, Bangladesh, Burma and Egypt. He is a writer of the shifting ongoing migrations and transnational cultural flows in different countries over different continents; a writer who questions the validities of boundaries and borders imposed by some powerful race/countries/or communities over others. His writings, therefore, explore and dissolve the boundaries of genres, disturbing the existing divisions of discourse into anthropology, history, fiction and autobiography. The novels of Rushdie and Ghosh generate keen interest since they are open to the application of emerging transnational and globalization theories. There is in Rushdie's fiction a recognizable imaginary geography at work which posits people and their narratives in the terrain of the post-national, trans-national and global force-field. Ghosh, likewise, engages in intensive explorations of complexities, predicaments and

oppositions involved in long standing transnational connections between India and other parts of the world.

Hyder's novels are socio-historical narratives of the partition bringing up tense relationships between the Hindus and the Muslims. She articulates the existence of self-questioning and schizophrenia, as does Sahgal in her novels too, in the trajectory of Indian history, where the act of defining an authentic Indian culture alienates the Muslims and sows the seeds of country's partition. History, then, becomes an act of betrayal and a dirty power game. The partition of the country reproduces the conflict of the *Mahabharata* with brother fighting brother. Sahgal's novels, especially her later ones, explore the first half the twentieth century of Indian history and present a society where people of different backgrounds and religions come together in friendship and understanding. Sahgal's preoccupation with history has been an ongoing concern found in her every novel. In her latest novel, *Lesser Breeds*, for example, the narrator teaches his pupil alternative ways of looking at the past, to turn facts around, to shift perspectives, to become the subject rather than an object.

Writings of Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and Qurratulain Hyder, therefore, obtain narrative significance in the interface between history and narrative in the post-80s and they resemble the other novelists in the world in general and in India in particular. Through their aesthetic/didactic representations of the essentially human values such as unity, hybridity, syncretism, harmony and understanding that transcend the categories of class, gender, nation, culture, race and ethnicity, these five writers

rewrite their own versions of history. Their novels chiefly pre-occupy with the cultural narrative of the nation which runs counter to the conventional or official historiography. In that sense, the specific historical versions depicted by them assume multiple, heterogeneous and alternative fictional historical narratives that at once question and challenge received official versions by subverting and transforming them in terms of their subversive and metafictive narrative spaces.

In concluding the final analysis of their novels, the question naturally arises–what do their stories do ? Obviously, their stories give aesthetic pleasure through their imitation of life and their rhythm. Apart from this aesthetic principle, their novels also have the function of teaching people about the world - showing them how it works, enabling them to see things from other vantage points, and to understand others' motives that in general are opaque to them. Besides this, their narratives also provide a mode of social criticism. They expose the hollowness of official historiography-- its distortions and corruption and its failure to reach the noblest aspirations and ideals. They also expose the predicaments of the oppressed in order that people may be able to see certain situations as intolerable. Above all, their novels show that the narrative may be a fundamental form of knowledge, since it gives knowledge of the world through its act of sense-making. At the same time, their novels also reveal the other side of the truth that sometimes the narrative may be misleading and partial as it happens in the official historiography. In short, their novels problematize this situation while at the same time they also try to make sense of the real world through their fictional versions.