

**Exploring Individual Experiences and Identity through Alternate History
in Select Indian Fiction**

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I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report titled, “Exploring Individual Experiences and Identity through Alternate History in Select Indian Fiction” is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline of English at the Sheno Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Poorwa Naik and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations/ experimental or other findings given in the dissertation.

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COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation report "**Exploring Individual Experiences and Identity through Alternate History in Select Indian Fiction**" is a bonafide work carried out by **Ms. Sakshi Lawande** under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts** in the Discipline of English at the Sheno Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University.



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Chapter 1

The Voice of the Past in Fiction: an Introduction

1.1 Introduction

‘Alternate History’ refers to an alternate or another version of events that contribute to history. In terms of literature it is mostly used as a sub-genre in speculative Science fiction, in which an author provides an alternate course of events different from the real events. (For example, time travel.) It also deals with “what could have happened.” Alternate history in most fiction works deals with the idea of “what if.” In a certain context, alternate history serves as an alternative to the mainstream history that was either undiscovered or neglected.

‘Mainstream history’ is a representation of facts. These facts are acknowledged by a larger section of people. It is what one is already aware of. Alternate history is another side of the same historical event, told from a different perspective. In simple terms, alternate means a different alternative. Another side of a particular historical event is often referred to as “secret history.” However, this study emphasizes on a different version of the recorded historical event, and therefore provides an alternative to the facts. The personalized version of history may or may not be factual just as the recorded facts may or may not be factual. Alternate History is not distortion of history or denial of the same. AH genre requires adherence to at least a bit of historical accuracy and feasibility. Alternate history is always rooted in reality, and offers ‘subjective’ sides of real history. It offers a powerful representation of history and reflects the social trends and collective memory of the era in which the author is writing. The idea of “history” is problematic. History can

be described as “the complex of social and material forces which modify the individual and community in a succession of experienced presents.” (Shah, 12)

History has multiple versions, emerging from multiple perspectives. Literature, particularly fiction, allows a writer to present one such perspective. The past is not “a ‘jigsaw’ that will one day be complete,” as said by Mr. Gardiner. History is a narrative- that is, a blend of observation, memory and imagination. History narrated through authorial voice tends to ignore large areas of social and cultural experience. Writers through fiction offer alternative episodes of the past and also problematize the processes of historical reconstruction to provide space for marginalized groups, communities and other underprivileged sections of the society that might have been neglected.

Almost all the literatures in major Indian languages in India followed the practice of using history as a source for writing literary works. The tradition of using history goes back to oral narratives; folk tales and myths were often born out of past events and people. At one point, history was used only as a background to tales of love. For instance, Romesh Chander Dutt’s *The Slave Girl of Agra* is a love story of Sirish and Hemlata set against Mughal India of sixteenth and seventeenth century. With rising resistance against the ‘colonisers’ in India, writers used past to awaken national consciousness among people. The novelists tried to make sense of what happened in the past. Eventually, writers have different purposes for using past in their works and creating stories.

Indian Fiction widely contributes to representing historical events across the nation and beyond. While the Indian authors have infused their fiction with characters, plots, themes and sub-themes, they also depict events and situations that have happened in the real world. These events and situations are usually of the past, and thus they form 'history.' Therefore, fictional works play a vital role in producing history. A large number of writers in India writing in English and regional languages opted for the novel as a suitable form of expression for reviving and re-narrating the past. Authors writing fiction in India have multiple reasons and motives to create an alternate history plot; portray the reality, present another version of the story/ historical event(s), express resistance to the imperial power of various kinds, represent minority, present a holistic view of the socio-cultural-political set up, being some of the significant reasons. Another reason could simply be to come to terms with the Indian past, to construct and analyze events that led to the existing situation. Novelists either set their novel in the background of historical events or mix historical facts with fiction. Such texts present an 'opposite point of view, perspective and consciousness' placed against the dominant discourse.

A writer plays a vital role in creating alternate history fictional works. With regard to novelist's active involvement with history, Gunter Grass says, "Writers experience another view of history, what's going on, another understanding of progress. Literature must refresh memory." (Dhar, 212) Writers' point of view has three possibilities; one, renewing people's memory of their past. Two, provide alternate renderings of what happened in the past contrasting the versions of the official establishments. Three, influence public opinion and political practices. Alternate histories are also products of writers who counter the given or forced version of history and attempt to reconstruct their own version. On writer's preoccupation with history, Jasbir Jain, says, "An

attempt to define the self and locate it within a sense of nationhood, to understand the past freeing from the myths and misinterpretation which surround it, to project the hitherto marginalized aspects as also to analyze society's response to socio-political events." (Shah, 140)

In writing fiction, some writers place an individual's story at the centre with gradually enlarging circles depicting stories of a family, community or a nation. This pattern of writing is also said to be one of the ways to counter the colonial history. Whether an individual's story or of a community, such kind of works reflect an image of a particular segment of society. In some cases, the story also serves as an "opposite point of view, perspective, consciousness placed against the unitary web of vision embedded in dominant discourse." (Shah, 32) The representation of such stories through fiction adds to the history of a particular event/s. First, this study explores how individual experiences form history. History is not just an objective record of events by one, rather it holds collective experiences of many. Therefore, through this research, one will be able to understand the stories that make up history essentially through the concerned texts. Secondly, this study explores how historical event/s affected individual/collective experience. For instance, in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, attempts have been made to capture the lives of the lower and middle-class within the political event of National emergency. Historical facts of the said event might only state the surface details of the event, and ignore the larger consequences of the same whereas fiction details the other side of the same event through individual voices. As a result, more than the event, a writer in fiction focuses on the consequence of the event. With regard to this, Shelby Foote mentions both historians and novelists tend to seek the truth about the past, but their methods are different. He says, "The historian attempts this by communicating facts, whereas the novelist would communicate sensation. The one stresses action, the other reaction." (Dhar, 23)

The historians and novelists differ in their tones and techniques. Historians would follow the chronology of events whereas a fiction writer might re-think and re-interpret the past from different perspectives, and also make inclusions and exclusions of facts and events. Writers have liberty to make amendments to the received data of history. Their engagement with history is a parallel attempt to reconstruct history by overthrowing hegemonic structures and projecting unheard voices of the past. Fiction is essentially concerned with sensibility, and therefore offers a much richer and complex social account of its people. History is sometimes compared to a mirror. It all depends on the angle. The images of the history differ depending on the angles at which the concerned novelist holds their work. Fiction might not narrate the exact history, however it plays a pivotal role in understanding the past. Therefore fiction holds the greatest possibility of providing alternate versions of past. In the comparison between the two, Ravinder Kumar holds a view that a writer can see more than what a professional historian could. He says, “The creative writer seeks to grasp reality through cognitive processes different from those of the historian. His perception does not depend upon an initial process of disaggregation, for purposes of ready analysis...Instead, the imaginative writer seeks to explore reality as totality. He, therefore, reveals a sensitivity to problems of consciousness and identity which is seldom equaled by the more formal disciplines of social sciences.”

The inclusion of historical events in fiction automatically situates a text in a certain time period. This suggests reading of the text through a new historicist lens, which states reading of a text with its socio-cultural and historical conditions, which form the context. New Historicism in Literary Theory “treats texts as historical artifacts that emerge among particular social, intellectual and economic circumstances.” (Britannica) Any text is conceived as a discourse, which may seem

to reflect an external reality, in fact consists of representations, which are the “ideological products” or “cultural constructs” of the historical conditions specific to an era. Therefore texts in literature capture a picture of society at a given point of time, or over time, but often restrict within a particular historical event/s. The following study looks at fiction by Indian authors with attempts to narrate stories of the past emerging from certain perspectives and shaped by certain experiences.

This research gives examples of works by different authors, essentially post-independence writers. Writers such as Raja Rao, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Manohar Malgonkar, have made attempts to bring out the social lives at varying degrees in the country. Writers such as Nayantara Sahgal, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh have framed their characters and stories in a way that they depict past of India. The following study looks at two primary texts. Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* is fiction in Indian writing in English. G. Kalyana Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* is a translated text of Telugu language. The two texts provide episodes of human experiences through the narrator’s story. Both the texts have institution of “colonialism” at play that alters their ways of life. The personal and the political clashes, and the respective authors narrate the stories of multiple generations. Both the texts serve as a memory text. The narrators in the texts hold the responsibility to present stories to us- the stories of the past that were suppressed, hidden, unheard or ignored. Ghosh and Kalyana Rao locate their texts in completely different spaces, but they serve a common purpose, that is, to present the voice of the past in fiction.

The following study locates history as a matter of perception and personal experiences. It analyses how individual stories or collective experiences play a vital role in shaping history. This

research looks at the impact of past event/s on individual/communities, particularly in shaping their identities and lives. The research co-relates individual experience and history, and this resulting in the narration of alternate histories through fiction. It also throws light upon various other aspects of alternate history fiction such as fact-fiction interface, minority representation, writer's role, etc.

1.2 Aim of the Study

- The aim of the research is to explore the theme of identity and significance of personal experiences in select Indian fiction works, with a focus on alternate historical perspectives.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to,

- Evaluate the dimensions of fact and fiction in the construction of alternate historical fiction works.
- Examine the relationship between individual/community experiences and historical events, and the resulting history.
- Explore identity and representation of the common masses in the alternate historical discourse.

- Analyze the writer's and reader's role in understanding alternate historical perspectives.

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study hypothesizes that,

- Historical event/s influence identity formation through individual and personal experiences.
- Individual and personal experiences influence history.

1.5 Primary Texts

- 1) Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. 1988
- 2) Rao, G. Kalyana. *Untouchable Spring*. 2000.

1.6 Research Methodology

- A thorough study of the selected primary texts has been undertaken, considering the objectives and hypotheses of the research.
- Each text is analyzed in terms of the objectives mentioned through a new historicist lens.
- An interview has been undertaken to explore writer's role in writing alternate histories.

- Several secondary sources have been used to understand the idea of ‘alternate history’ in fiction and to gain more insight into the primary texts selected.

1.7 Limitations

- This study focuses on the selected texts and secondary sources only.
- The select Indian fiction and other secondary sources will be studied with above mentioned aim and objectives, hence certain areas might not be looked at.

1.8 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: The introduction chapter titled, “**The Voice of past in Fiction: an Introduction**”, highlights the framework of the study, giving an insight into the research. It identifies certain areas that will be analyzed in depth in the forthcoming chapters. Moreover, it states the aim, objectives, hypotheses, research methodology and the limitations of the research.

Chapter 2: The Second Chapter, “**A Road to Alternate History: a theoretical framework and a critical analysis**”, provides a theoretical background to the study. It evaluates various concerns pertaining to the alternate history in fiction, including the following: History as a text and its presentation in fiction, alternate history in fiction, the role of a writer, New Historicism and postcolonial approaches, A perspective representing an ideology, Voice to the minority and representation of the common masses, Experiences counting as histories, Forming identities and Role of a reader.

Chapter 3: The Third Chapter, “**Recalling, narrating and shaping lives and history in Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines***”, undertakes a detailed analysis of the novel. It critically evaluates the connection between stories and the past. It treats the text as a “memory text” and evaluates it as the same. It focuses on the present-past dynamics and the process of forming identities.

Chapter 4: The Fourth Chapter, “**Exploring the alternate history in *Untouchable Spring***”, undertakes a detailed analysis of the novel. It touches upon the personal-political paradigm in shaping history, and emphasizes the representation of the voiceless in the text. It also analyses identity formation in depth.

Chapter 5: The Fifth Chapter, “**Fabricating lives into Fiction: An Author’s Perspective**”, focuses on the author’s side of the story, the how’s and why’s into writing alternate history. This chapter analyses works of author Dr. Isabel De Santa Rita Vas, from Goa, and her insights into the purpose of writing such stories and its impact on society.

Chapter 6: The Sixth Chapter, “**The Unending Process: The Conclusion**”, is the concluding chapter of the study, which briefs the analyses of the research conducted. It presents the observations, findings and the conclusion of the study along with recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

A Road to Alternate History: a theoretical framework and a critical analysis

2.1 History as a text and its presentation in fiction

Indian fiction represents historical and socio-political/ cultural events to a great extent. With a few texts emphasizing on specific events of the past, history is largely incorporated in fiction. The facts of history are sometimes fictionally created and sometimes fiction reveals the underlying facts of the contemporary time period. In both the cases, a text brings forth details of a particular event of the immediate or long gone past. New Historicism as literary theory of fairly recent times emphasizes the perspective of history as a text. A text or simply fiction involves a narrative; including plotlines, characters and events. Frederic Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) says, “History is inaccessible to us except in textual form.” [Jean, 2012, p.85] He further explains that history cannot be accessed but by the medium of language. Therefore a “text” plays a significant role in constructing history. However, a fiction narrates any story from a certain perspective. Hence, fiction produces stories and histories in multiple versions. Romila Thappar in her essay *Somanatha: Narrative of a History* explores different versions and narratives available for a single historical event.

The term ‘history’ is derived from the Greek word ‘historia’ which means inquiry, interview, or interrogation of an eyewitness and also the reports of such actions. It is the science of human past. In an objective sense, it has been defined as record or sum total of facts of an event in the past. If interpreted subjectively, history may be regarded as a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness. On this, T.B Macaulay holds that history falls alternately under

the domain of both, reason and imagination. It is sometimes fiction and sometimes theory. Hayden White is of the opinion that the story in the narrative is the mimesis of the story lived in some region of historical reality, and thus it should be considered a truthful account.

Chhanda Chatterjee, in the book *Literature as History* says, “Literature offers rare insights into the lives of people which are beyond the reach of ‘dry as dust’ historians.” (Chatterjee, 1) History has been a part of Indian Literature for a long time. At one point of time, historians also relied on literature as a source of history. However, literature was more of a fable than a fact. There was a distance maintained between history and plot of the fiction. The contents of the literary texts were kept at a respectable distance in historical discourses until and unless those were ‘authenticated’ by archeological sources. Literature focused more on the ‘lives of people.’ History in fiction frames the detailed description of the said event and people’s lives. As pointed out by Ashin Dasgupta, “journalists and historians can merely narrate an event, whereas literature reserves the right to enter into the heart of the event.” (Chatterjee, 1)

History, in simple terms is narration. Narration of what happened in the past. For the longest time, folk-tales, myths, and panegyric songs pre-occupied the historical narrations of the past. Written scripts, recording the facts, and documentation came into practice much later. Some important events or tales were handed down from generation to generation. In this case, history had elements of both; objectivity and subjectivity. Since those tales were narrated by an individual or individual community, perspectives and attitudes interfered in the process. Fiction occurs along the similar lines. The narration is situated in a specific context and narrated in a particular

perspective. With time, history was separated from fiction. The first objective account of history is of the Persian War by Herodotus in the 5th century BC. It was separated from myths and folktales as they were considered to be opposite to truth and fact. History was based on fact, was linear and objective. On the other hand, fiction made more general statements and dealt with possibilities and probabilities. However, the new historicists challenge the traditional concept of history as closed and linear. They imply that in fiction, a writer does not necessarily portray the concrete reality, rather creates their own world to portray certain plains of the socio-political development of the concerned period.

Every aspect of history, each character in the novel and every single event merge together into a process of constant change. Viney Kirpal notes, “The sudden realization of the reality of history in which the individual has an important role to play is reflected in the Indian novel of 1980s.” (Yesapogu, 4) For instance, in Ghosh’s treatment of history, history is a process. In *The Glass Palace*, he presents history as a collective memory. He makes delicate connections between different phenomena, and no event occurs in isolation. His narrative creates a kind of ‘mobility’ to make history a process from past to present. He makes no attempts to squeeze history in his fiction. His narratives rather show how history is a never ending process, and his characters play their parts similar to roles played by the real in important historical tendencies.

History is what happens at a given point of time. The perceptions and responses to it could vary. History could be told from a certain perspective. Historical interpretation is multiple and open minded, and literary texts capture this through experimentation with various “others” and

“alternatives.” History becomes a text in itself, and not merely the background. It serves a story about the past with other stories as its subtext. Interpretation of any text would be incomplete if the text’s relationship to the discourses that helped fashion it and to which the text is a response are not considered. Therefore, history depicted in fiction becomes a proliferation of histories, that includes discontinuous, contradictory or multiple histories, and this provides a backdrop for alternate history’s exploration of ‘alternatives’ of normative historical narrative.

2.2 Alternate History in fiction

History books or even some fiction books based on history represent individuals who have power and make a room in literature. As a result, certain significant but politically less important events are omitted. Historians often miss the circumstances that affected the mannerism of people, transition of communities and silent revolutions. This is because they focused on major communities while the former was not a cause of concern for the authorities. Fiction writers fill such gaps and fissures in history with real events and add imagination to it. Narration in fiction depends on who narrates it and why is it narrated? These episodes, events, and stories serve as an alternate history. It is mainly because they aren’t heard before, and are not given a thought about. For instance, in the book *The Case For India* (1930), Will Durant observes, “this is what the English call the Sepoy Mutiny, and what the Hindus call the War of Independence.” (Shah, 13)

Communities serve as alternative to the nation-state. They have their own ways of dealing with certain events, and have internal mechanisms to go about. They are said to be repositories of certain cultures. Minority community narratives offer alternate views of received histories. They challenge the grand narratives’ national histories through their literature. Sindhi Literature, for

instance, is a minority discourse that challenges the normative narratives of partition with a paradigm shift from stories of violence to stories of dispersal of community, their state of loss and identity crisis. However, an exception is, an author might choose to present a story that was totally unheard.

Nila Shah in her book *Novel as History*, says, “There cannot be a single authentic history. One cannot, then, deny different versions of history as alternatives. There is always a possibility of finding history on the margins of the books of history where the real his (her)/ story waits for being told.” (Shah, 14) Understanding history through fiction entails a certain level of subjectivity. A writer either situates a historical event (a real or close to the real) in the background, or locates it at the center and then frames a plotline around it. In either cases, history and narrative go hand in hand. Fiction presents emotions, experiences and stories of people who were a part of the mentioned event. This becomes an alternative to the said history. Therefore alternate versions either uncover something new or reveals the same thing differently.

For instance, Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*, captures the stories of individuals set in the post-partition India. The Hindu-Muslim war, communal riots, political upheavals caused havoc in the personal lives of people in the early 1950s-60s. The novel shows various episodes of such conflicts, but it also reflects upon the individual stories. For instance, through Maan-Firoz’s or Nawab of Baitar- Mahesh Kapoor’s friendship, Seth shows how individuals can rise above the divisions created by institutions and how friendship can conquer communalism. History, otherwise would mention the Hindu-Muslim war, but fiction allows one to witness the less known possibilities and stories.

Nayantara Sahgal is an Indian writer dealing largely with social and political issues of the country. She deals with past indirectly but in a way that they are recognizable. Also, she concentrates on short periods or one particular event in depth. She was a witness to lot of events that happened in India, hence she constantly connects the immediate past of the country to its older past in her novels. She creates historical constructions through fiction. The characters in her narrative recreate a disguised picture of the past, in which she addresses certain issues and concerns. Unlike her contemporaries, her characters are usually from the upper-class. However, it becomes an alternate history, because she narrates an experience or a story that has been otherwise not told. One major characteristic of her writing is the characters are moulded by events and happenings around them and show a strong awareness of their situation in varied dimensions. In her debut novel, *A Time to Be Happy*, she makes it evident that, due to vast differences in the levels of living and thinking of its people, there was a coexistence of layers of pastness in the country, and hence people responded differently to the colonial forces, and socio-political events. Such one level of thinking, and one kind of response paves way to writing alternate histories. In the text, Sahgal makes her narrator recall the past and narrate the events. It is therefore a kind of historical construction. She connects the personal to political, and shows the varied responses through her characters particularly in times of 1930s. For instance, Sanad's father opts for neutral leisurely life despite the political fervor around him whereas Sanad follows the colonial forces in the wake of fortune. However, eventually he gives up his job with a foreign company and finds "Englishness" acquired during the colonial rule artificial in Independent India. The novel elaborates these reactions as products of history. Sahgal uses the method of understanding the present and the immediate past by relating it to an older past. Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, documents responses to the national event of "Emergency." For some it is a matter of profit and gain. For example, Dev

justifies it by saying it brought stability to the country. However, for Sonali, it is a matter of pain and frustration. Her lines, “we were involved in a conspiracy of silence. So long as it didn’t touch us, we played along, pretending the Empress’ new clothes were beautiful” (Dhar, 152) suggest her critical response to the event. The novel shows how resistance to authority leads to suffering. The novel is similar to Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* sharing episodes of human experience.

In the Indian context, ‘partition’ has been a significant historical event and it had varied consequences on individuals and communities. Each section of society had a different experience. For example, Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* looks upon Hindu-Muslim communities and the effect of partition on their attitudes and relationships. Some communities lost their sense of livelihood, along with their culture in the course of time. One such community is the Sindhi community relegated to the margins. Sindhi Literature chose to show their side of story; the community’s modes of coping with displacement, nostalgia and loss of language and culture. Fiction, for instance partition novels deal with stories of a specific group of people. The writer may choose to narrate only an individual’s story, who becomes a representative for the larger sect. In partition novels, ‘Hindu-Muslim’ relation was a primary concern. The only difference was in their versions. Jasbir Jain opines, “The difference lies in how these relations are projected- as divisive, antagonistic or as a hybrid reality connecting with history and assimilation.” Any version of the above event that varies from the mainstream history falls under alternate versions.

Dalit Literature in India has also widely provided alternate history texts and fiction. Their stories question the status equation and their exclusion from the mainstream society and culture. They reflect stories and experiences that have not been reflected in other literatures. These stories

are mostly realistic in nature, represented through fictionalized character, (if the piece of work is a fiction.) Writing alternate history through texts is seen as a tool of demarginalisation. Re-narrating their stories and inventing new histories facilitates the process of demarginalisation and helps them become a part of mainstream contemporary Indian life, and simultaneously formulate their own identities. Stories narrated from their perspectives highlight their demands, protests, struggles and emotional trauma of the past. The past in their stories seems to nurture their present. It means, that by establishing the foundations of the past; their lives, humiliation faced, structures of domination, etc, they explain the process that led to their present position. By revisiting the past, they attempt to improve their present position in the society. Alternate histories therefore act as a tool for a social change, specifically to influence the marginalized social position of “Dalits.” These texts serve as resource base for their democratic struggle for a better quality of life. In the process of writing history, “Dalits” have developed a counter-historical discourse. These alternate histories have served three major purposes; first, to deconstruct dominant “Brahmanical epical myths” and history of authoritative voice. Second, to explore the caste history and narratives glorifying the local myths of the “Dalits.” Third, to record the unwritten or unrecorded history of “Dalit” leaders, saints, social reforms and common people. Therefore texts with alternate history act as a tool of resistance and change, in which alternate narratives play a vital role.

Kesavan’s story-telling is said to be a historical and political act. Kesavan’s *Looking Through Glass* (1995) views Quit India Movement from a different lens. Quit India Movement is one of the major events in Indian history. The events are narrated through the perception of the omniscient narrator cum protagonist. The text not necessarily focuses on the characters. It emphasizes social and political chaos reflected in individual characters. The narrator of the story lives through the

history, as he witnesses 1942 rebellion, and other events. His knowledge of the past through his grandmother, his present encounters and his future anticipation all contribute to narrating a version of history. In the text itself, the narrator hears multiple versions of history; through his grandmother, Ammi, Chaubey, Masroor and a few others. This 'shadowy assimilation' prevents from forming a concrete knowledge of the past. The narrator questions his own narrative due to multiple voices. This suggests that history is flexible in author's hands. In Kesavan's fiction, public chronicles are infused by narrating individual memories that do not necessarily tally with the historian's version of the event.

Ghosh treats events in close relation to the impact it left on people, or certain societies. In the text, *The Shadow lines*, the narrator's experience and depiction of Calcutta riots holds a significant place in history, in the context of human suffering. Ghosh's narrator provides series of stories and anecdotes as a means of narrating an alternative to the public history that differs from the centres of power, and aligns strongly with the concerned people. The text treats Bengal Partition as an important historical event. Partition in India was a major event, and also a turning point in various arenas; social, political, cultural, and individual lives. The freedom struggle, Independence, and eventually Partition have success stories, and history books focus on the process of accomplishing the same, focusing on the major leaders, their contribution, dates, people involved, victory etc. However, this whole agenda has other side to it that fiction captures in its characters and plots. The partition led to one of the biggest migration of human population. It affected the people on margins tenfold more than the people at the centre. Urvashi Butaila in her book, *The Other Side of Silence*, says, "there are no memorials to mark this momentous event." However, people's memories of partition were confined and circulated within their homes and communities through

anecdotes told by mouth and passed down over the generations. In Post-Independent India, a lot of writers in Indian Writing in English wrote partition literature serving the concerns. Ghosh brings the other side of the story by sharing the human experience of the partition. This “other” side told through individual human experiences sets out as an alternate history.

2.3 The role of a writer

A writer plays a major role in presenting an alternate version via fiction. A piece of fiction is located in a certain time and spatial context, it has a specific perspective(s), and theme(s). In order to analyze fiction particularly dealing with alternate versions of history, special emphasis is laid on writer’s motive behind writing such a piece. Writers are bound to reflect their own times in their works. A fiction writer has a power to utilize history in various forms and for various purposes. T.N. Dhar mentions, “History can be romanticized, sensationalized, interrogated, and problematized. The novelist may critique it, satirize it, play with it, even trivialize it.” (Dhar, 27)

New Historicists maintain that, an author despite being a subject who is positioned by the play of power and ideology within the discourse of a particular era may retain some scope for individual agency. An authors’ freedom and area of choice, and ultimately a sense of initiative and responsibility suggests possibilities of representing the events of their time, and deliberate depiction of certain individuals/ communities.

Fiction also results from writer’s own life experiences essentially in relation to the events mentioned in the text. For instance, Nayantara Sahgal has witnessed certain happenings in her life

that shaped her social and political tendencies. Her perception towards the political scenes provides a framework to her works. For instance, in her debut novel, *Rich Like Us*, she unfolds the situation of common faces against the backdrop of Emergency. As a result, it shows history of the oppressed or the less powered. These stories telling history are presented from a writer's point of view that tries to dis/uncover the suppressed or the neglected issues of the Indian history. This narration therefore allows the writer to construct the story of their community/ nation.

External factors and changes in the socio-political system had an impact on writers in the way they perceived the changes and reacted to it. In some cases, their reactions were turned into books. Some writers of the time made deliberate attempts to capture the reality through literature. Writer's effort to situate reality in literature suggests the inextricable relationship between Literature and society. These writers present an intimate view of life and provide an integrated picture of the perceived reality. A writer has the potential to transport a reader into a particular setting, and involve them in the lives and thoughts of a set of characters- real or fictitious. The backdrop used might be real or fictitious be it a portrayal of society, that the writer thinks is or 'ought to be/or ought not to be.' Therefore a narrative becomes the critique of the existing socio-political system.

Colonial intervention had a great impact on Indian Literature. Colonizers, unable to comprehend the cultures and languages of the colonies, wrote literature that justified their rule. The idea of "civilizing" the "uncivilized" was a matter of justification, and is now a matter of discussion. Over the years, writers have challenged the imperial version of history. In African Literature, Chinua Achebe, brings out the other side of the story in his book "*Things Fall Apart*."

This book serves as a challenge to break the notion of Africa as a “dark continent.” Achebe, presents their native culture, values and belief system and how they were in constant conflict along the lines of ‘colonialism’ through native characters. Biyi Bandele in an introduction to *Things Fall Apart* mentions, “Achebe’s characters do not seek our permission to be human, they do not apologise for being complex (or for being African, or for being human.” (Bandele, xi) Indian authors too narrated such alternate versions. For instance, writers encountered the colonial version of history in their books, and reexamined the values and traditions reflecting a strong anti-colonial feeling. Authors writing alternate history in this context frame plots and characters to justify their culture and belief systems, and also discuss in detail the impact of interference from dominant structures. These anti-colonial texts and challenging the colonial versions of history is one type of alternate history fiction. In this case, writers adopted historical themes in their works as a resistance to the Imperial power, colonial accounts and misinterpretation of Indian history.

Memory is an important aspect in terms of narrating the past. A writer in fiction might either depict his/her present, which over the years becomes the past. In this case, their sense of perception and reaction to the event matters. Or a writer might recall their past and infuse it in their fiction. In this case, memory plays a vital role. There are more chances of having multiple versions to the event in this case, because the writer has not witnessed the event in reality, and only depends on the information heard or read. In general, when past stories are narrated, memory is at play. Therefore ‘past’ or ‘history’ is retrieved out of memory. Certain writers of fiction use this technique of portraying the reality through their characters. For instance, Rushdie’s character Saleem Sinai retrieves past out of a memory. Rushdie attempts to depict reality or discourse of history with a narrative produced out of memory’s truth. The matter of concern here is how reliable

the truth is. Likewise, *The Shadow Lines* and *Untouchable Spring* also give accounts of the past through narrator's memory.

2.4 New Historicism and Postcolonial Approaches

Louis Montrose describes New Historicism as “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history.” (Abrams, 219) In this case, history isn't to be conceived as a mere set of fixed, objective facts, but rather like literature with which it interacts, and like a text that needs to be interpreted. The cultural and ideological representations in texts often reproduce and propagate the complex structures of domination which characterize a given society. New Historicists firmly hold that, “a literary text is “situated” within the totality of institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and producer of cultural energies and codes.” (Abrams, 219) History not only serves as a background to the text, but rather is the text itself. A text is thoroughly embedded in a context, and is in a constant interaction with the other components inside the network of institutions, beliefs, cultural power relationships, practices and products- all of these constitute history.

New Historicism perceives intellectual history through literature, and literature through its cultural context. Nayantara Sahgal's works depict the contemporary Indian social and political history in its totality. Her novels entail a feeling of past and awareness of future. *The Situation in New Delhi* captures the reality of Delhi during the 60s in the post-colonial India. It plants the happenings of two decades through fictionalized characters set in a specific socio-cultural context.

Postcolonial approaches to understanding a text deal with the historical fact of colonialism and the emergent scenario of neo-colonialism. It focuses on the centre-margin dynamics. It explores the postcolonial identities, particularly of the marginalized. Anand Mahanand discusses the representation of tribals in the select short stories of Mahasweta Devi. Besides centre-margin paradigm, Mahasweta Devi attempts to look into the practices of oppression within the margins themselves. She therefore puts forth the pre-colonial history of the inter-tribal rivalries. She articulates the concerns of subalterns through literature. Identity formation is a crucial issue in these studies. Fiction dealing with alternate histories focus on the identities of individual/community, and interrogate why their identities are such. Post colonialism theory questions the notion of minority; who qualifies for the term? Is it a fixed category? There are victims of subordination, as most of the texts reflect. Spivak maintains that the process of identity formation of a colonial subject involves violence. Fiction narrating alternate stories represent such sects of society, and thus challenge the structures of oppression. The subordinated self can be recovered from narratives of postcolonial writers.

2.5 A perspective representing an ideology

For the longest time, history told stories of the rich and powerful. In non-fiction books or history texts, there is a high possibility that the facts involved and stories narrated are in the favour of majority. Fiction allows an author to represent any individual, community or region, either heard from a different perspective or never heard before.

An ideology of a particular period or of a specific region/community is found in a piece of fiction. Thus a story or narrative have multiple variants or alternatives. Ideologies and perspectives vary at the levels of an individual, community, region, class-caste and country. Therefore

understanding from whose perspective a text is written becomes necessary. For instance, Romila Thappar's *Shakuntala: Histories of a Narrative* explores various versions of Shakuntala in different texts; ranging from a mother to a woman from a colonizer's perspective to a powerful woman. Likewise, a historical event has different versions because they are narrated through different perspectives.

2.6 Voice to the minority and representation of the common masses

Works of fiction by minority class/caste/community or fiction by authors representing such populace is often categorized into Dalit writing, folk writing and "black" writing. Such narrative includes stories of people who were suppressed and had lack of freedom. These give an insight into their everyday experience. Such texts mostly include two features; acceptance of the colonizer's culture or ideology or resistance and protest against it. Coloniser, here, refers to any force of authority who oppresses the minority. Fiction representing the minority suggests a story from a perspective different from the mainstream perspective. These stories present settings and characters in their raw forms. Ayyappa Paniker in his essay *Towards an Alternate Aesthetics* writes, "They do contain invariably a lot of details and facts about the occupations, vocations and avocations of the people." [Paniker, p.23] This literature provides an alternative to the dominant or the mainstream literature. A historical event is narrated but from a minority's perspective. Fiction with alternate narratives emphasizes themes of 'anger' and 'grief' immensely. They help in forming identities of a said community through alternate history, thereby giving them voice. A suppressed community or individual see themselves differently than how others see them. Therefore they resort to literature to show their side of the story. Fiction thus becomes their power, way of resistance and they use it to inform others of the truth. Ayyappa Paniker in his essay

Towards an Alternate Aesthetics mentions, “The inner city, the slums, the tribal settlements, the vast mass of people so long kept out of power and privilege, they have a literary voice and it will be and should be heard.” [Paniker, p.29]

In the context of Indian fiction, authors Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry among others hold a unique place in Indian fiction in English by re-narrating history of their community and country. Mistry’s works often represent “Parsi” individuals/families. He links his works with socio-cultural existence of the Parsis, foregrounding the marginalized positions and marks a resistance to social domination and hegemony. Mistry’s protagonists’ lives are interspersed with social and political upheavals. The exterior events, social or political, whether at local or national level, interfere in the protagonist’s personal life, for instance Gustad Noble in *Such a Long Journey*. Mistry, hence, re-constructs the story waiting to be told on the margins of the historiographical account. He brings together the history and social life, and shows what goes in between.

A Fine Balance by Mistry is a fine piece of work that investigates the ordinary lives caught in the complex socio-political events. It explores the lives of four major characters; Dina, Ishwar, Om and Maneck. The novel is set during the period of Emergency (1975-77). The novel offers more than one versions of the same event within the text itself. More than a version, it is a difference in reaction to the same political event by diverse masses. At the onset of Emergency, the upper-class were fascinated. Mrs.Gupta, owner of Au Revoir Exports, is happy and excited about the emergency because the Emergency had positive impact on trade unions. The novel,

however largely depicts the national events from a minority perspective. The ordinary or the underprivileged had no say in the event. The text locates the lives of its characters in the historical context. Mistry's characters have little or no control over circumstances. Thus history happens to them. For instance, Om and Ishwar are forcefully taken to the camp site, their houses are destroyed in the view of beautification camp, and Om falls a victim to forced sterilization. Apart from narrating the lives of these characters during a particular event, the novel also depicts their 'ways of life' in general. Om, Ishwar, Ashraf, Dukhi represent the world of 'subalterns.' Dina's story turns upside down due to emergency as it affects her business.

These texts offer 'social articulation of difference from the minority perspective', unveiling a world of underprivileged classes and minorities with aspirations and assertions. The text demonstrates the personal and political clash, and how the characters develop through it. In the above texts, the circumstances affect characters' identities and lives greatly. Om and Ishwar, for instance, face humiliation almost twice as before. They are doubly exploited and oppressed. This forces them to question their identities in a society where their freedom and voice is suppressed. Mistry uses his fiction to project their voices and stories. As Guy Lawson rightly puts, "Mistry is interested in those to whom history happens, those with little control over their circumstances." (Shah, 119)

2.7 Experience counting as Histories

'Experiences' in this context are stories and personal responses to a particular event in the past. Alternate versions of history are largely characterized by varied responses of different

sections of the society that shape their experiences and identities. Therefore these stories and experiences count as history. The narrator in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, reconstructs stories and histories through memory, imagination and listening to other people's tales. He creates a blend of 'private narratives' and 'public narratives.' Neelam Srivastava observes, "Ghosh believes a private tragedy often assumes a public significance which overshadows the personal urgency of the event." In the text, the narrator's grandmother narrates various episodes to him, including the Bengal partition and other sensitive issues, and her personal life experiences. His encounters with Tridib and tales about him throw light on 'history' and role of a 'historian.' The text includes a detailed happening of Calcutta Riots. The narrator, at this point, shares his own experiences, that is, his experiences of the day as a school student. Ghosh through the narrator explores individual stories of characters caught in the political, and serve as important modes in history.

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is set in post-partition India. At the surface level, it is the story of a mother looking for a suitable boy for her daughter; at the deeper level, the novel journeys into India of 1950s. India is in its formative years and there are issues in politics, secularism, family and marriage system. It dives into the lives of four families; Kapoors, Khans, Mehra and Chatterjees. The novel displays the personal-political clash through its wide range of characters. Seth locates the stories from real life in narrative. The 'Hindu-Muslim' war was brewing causing communal disharmony. This affects the peace of the city of Brahmpur. The narrative also shows the involvement of certain characters in the events. For eg, Mahesh Kapoor's association with Zamindari abolition bill. With the creation of individual characters- imaginary or real, Seth investigates the role of certain sections of the society in history, their conflicts, clashes and cleavages. Mahesh Kapoor's involvement in politics, particularly with abolition of Zamindari,

Haresh working with Czech shoe factory, Firoz and Maan's friendship, reveals microscopic details of a particular time-span of history of India. These experiences of individual characters reflect turbulence and aspirations of a society in a given cultural space that largely forms history.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* captures the early days of Indian Freedom Struggle. The novel holds a mine of information about the sociocultural life of peasant society in southern India. The book not only centralizes the participation of Indians in the freedom movement, but also takes into account the changes and influences of the same on the peasant society (in the text) and their inter-caste relations. Within a village set up, the social relations were hierarchal and rigidly followed. With the onset of freedom struggle, the lines seemed to blur but the class-caste consciousness prevailed. Rao shows these changes happening at the local level within the village of Kanthapura. The novel highlights the internal functioning of the village guided by their beliefs. The existing internal system of the village, Moorthy convincing the villagers to join the movement, villagers coming together, getting exploited; all these episodes form a part of history. The collective experiences of the people of the fictionalized village Kanthapura reflects the real scenario of Indian past. The opening line of the book, "Our village- I don't think you have ever heard about it- Kanthapura is its name." (Rao, 1) Here, the narrator sounds keen to share the story of his/her village- the story one is unaware of. Fiction therefore plays a role to put forth stories of the unheard which is history or contributes to it. A work of fiction like Raja Rao's hence paves a way to understanding the process of the movement through a minority's perspective. The fact that Indians came together despite of class consciousness to fight the onslaughts of colonialism had its own issues and ways, which *Kanthapura* serves to demonstrate.

Kesavan's text *Looking Through Glass* proves that past has its own voices. The voices of the Kesavan's narrators help to reinterpret the past by destabilizing received notions of history. It depicts the tension of the past through tension in the characters and happenings in their lives. Each voice is an experience. The author hints at various major events such as Quit India Movement, Bengal Famine, Partition etc and how personal lives got entwined with them. The text also highlights what happens to each of the characters in the process. However, the author is not concerned with "what happened" but rather focuses on the process. In simple terms, the journey of characters' life that signifies their experiences. Each voice or experience therefore significantly affects the course of history.

2.8 Forming Identities

Individuals cannot live lives in isolation. Exterior factors and external events often alter their lives and identities. Any sort of social, political or cultural event at some point of time might interfere in one's life, interrupting personal relations or life at large. This research looks at both; identity of an individual and collective identity of a community/ society. A historical event alters individual's course of life, either directly or indirectly. Indian fiction often shows the process of identity formation of an individual or a community set against the backdrop of some historical event/s. A character's struggle with his/her identity is one of the major concerns in alternate histories. Any socio-political or cultural event affected them either in the minimal way or in the extremes.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* questions the identity of Velutha, a "Paravan" ("an untouchable"). The novel is set in post-independence India. It represents the Syrian Christian community, and the novel explores the certain 'racist' attitudes of that community. It also gives glimpses of their evolution and settlement in Kerala. The novel is mainly concerned with Velutha's murder by the Ayemenem police, for loving a Christian woman. Velutha's identity is constantly determined by others. The existing community's racist attitudes and the other events such as communist party, Naxalite movement, the march organized by Travancore-Cochin Labour Union etc worsen the exploitation of the "paravans" represented through Velutha. Velutha's plight has been beautifully portrayed in the following lines, "If he touched her, he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win." (Roy, 330) *The God of Small Things* attempts to discuss what happens to the minority class when social and political events are at play, and how the events and the dominating structures impact their identities to a great extent.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, set in the events of Indian Independence, Partition and its aftermath, explores the protagonist's quest for his identity in relation to the past of his life. This past is country's past that left deep imprints on individual lives. Rushdie is concerned with the plight of a common human. Here, Saleem Sinai lives through history as a helpless victim. His identity is constantly shaped by exterior events. Rushdie's character Saleem also contributes to the process of historical construction. His lines, "Memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality. No sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" point out to the power of memory in creating history.

In Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*, effects of 'partition' make it difficult for the narrator to come to terms with his identity. In the text, an individual's private crisis is reflected in the public turmoil. He shifts between the past and present. When he moves to Delhi post partition, he sees multiple changes. He says, "One building with two histories. One history with two buildings. A place had changed names and a name had changed places, creating practical differences for memory and nostalgia." (Shah, 150)

2.9 Role of a reader

Readers play a significant role in understanding a text. In order to interpret the text as an alternate history, a reader needs to understand its socio-cultural context, and the spatial and temporal context a text is situated in. Readers are "subjects" who are positioned by the conditions and ideologies of their own era. The readers tend to read works from different time periods, and not necessarily their own. In either cases there are two resulting outcomes. One, the ideology of the readers conform to the ideology of the writer of the text, and readers 'naturalize' the text, that is, interpret its culture-specific and time-bound representations as if they are features of permanent human experience. Second, the reader's ideology differs from that of the writers and they 'approximate' the text, that is, interpret it as per their own cultural prepossessions. In yet another case, the readers might only do objective interpretation of the text, that is, read a work, as in itself it really is.

Fiction with alternate histories are time and space bound. Some also represent ideologies and consciousness of a society that might be significantly different from the reader's. Therefore it is essential that a reader interprets the work in the said context, and look at the text as story of the

real. In some cases, the readers tend to make a comparative analysis of the known history and the history narrated in the fiction to understand potential differences and similarities. If the story is totally new, there are chances of accepting the stories in the fiction smoothly without any comparisons.

From a reader-response criticism perspective, readers are active agents who impart 'real' existence to any literary work or give 'meaning' to it. This theory brings to the fact that readers play a crucial role in interpreting texts and decoding its meaning. The consumption of any narrative results in adding information to their existing knowledge as well as experiencing varied emotions. Readers have tendencies to relate to the stories in the text, either because there are episodes similar to what they have experienced.

Readers in Indian fiction have varied degrees of responses in reception of texts due to multicultural environment and varied life experiences. Readers in India have stages of responses to fiction depending on the content of the texts. For instance, at one point Indian fiction writers wrote narrative to ignite a spirit of nationalism in their works. The homogenous readers responded positively to it largely. In this case, fiction helped to create a social change, leading to unification of the citizens, at least temporarily. In the contemporary times, writers mostly dealt with gender-issues, women roles, social issues within Indian society, emphasis on certain communities/regions etc. Questions like do readers relate to the narratives? Do they use personal life experiences to process the text? Do they go behind the fictionalized narrative to analyze real life events connected to the narrative? Do they comment on society and its issues while reading the narrative? Do they

let their own opinions and prejudices hinder the process of interpreting the narrative? are central in analyzing reader's role in reading fiction.

A study by Neelam Sharma on “Deriving meaning out of a fictional text: Analyzing reader's performance of a narrative in India by using a mental model approach” has drawn following results; readers actively think about how to complete the story or how to give it a good ending, some connected with the names of real places they had visited and compared the description given in the text, some adapted the text as per their likings, preferences, and beliefs. Interviews revealed that readers' own emotional responses to the character and story situations determined what emotions they would project on the characters. Each reader understands a slightly different version of the same text and brings in their unique interpretation of the story. ‘Gender’ may be relevant in how readers identify the main message of the story especially when the text is gendered. For instance, a novel with two major women characters might be interpreted differently. Most readers thought the stories depict events closer to what they have seen in their real lives. Many readers narrated personal stories related to the text. Readers choose to assess those characters and situations more with whom they empathize more. The above study focuses on just one story and its reading by a small group of middle-class individuals in a city in India. Hence, there are exceptions to the above mentioned statements. Reader's interpretation of the text varies across cultures greatly.

Alternate history fiction stories are mostly specific to one culture/ community/ region. Therefore the chances of people connecting to it are close to impossible. In such cases, empathy, understanding and general emotional response is likely to help in receiving the text. For instance,

in fictionalized texts of 'Dalit Literature', the aim of the writers is to show their side of the story and create their identities in the society. The readers in this case should accept those stories and make space for social change. Alternate histories largely deal with stories of human experience, and therefore a reader's reception of the same is slightly critical and sensitive. There are possibilities of questioning the reliability of the "fictionalized version of truth" or not identifying with the said community. There are also possibilities of questioning the "known truth" and empathizing with the individuals/ communities. Alternate histories are written to share the story and spread the word, in which case a reader definitely plays a part, because the readers are the recipients of those stories and figures of change.

Chapter 3

Recalling, narrating and shaping lives and history in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

3.1 Introduction to Ghosh's Fiction

Amitav Ghosh is a prominent writer in Indian Writing in English. He is also an important figure in the Contemporary Indian English Fiction. His fiction mostly ranges in the post-independence India. Besides fiction, he also wrote non-fiction, for example "The Imam and the Inian" (2002). His complex narrative strategy to blend the personal and national identities is the hallmark of his writing. His notable works are, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2009) and many more. Some of his works have a backdrop of national events, themes of nationality, identity, 'travel' motif, and element of 'borders.' For example, *The Circle of Reason* is set in the rural Bengal of late 1960s, situating the personal within political. Meenakshi Mukherjee opines that, 'his novels show an abiding interest in details of events, regions and people who have been marginalized by purveyors of Mainstream History.' Ghosh's fictional novels are not the conventional historical novels, however his engagement with history makes it a source of history. He gives details beyond just the event, and therefore his stories can be very well received under the genre of 'alternate history.'

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is his second novel, published in 1988. This novel bet him Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989. It is viewed as one of the finest Partition novels. This text explores the relationships across the borders and dives into the stories of the past. The novel offers an understating of the events of the past on a personal level. Girish Karnad, in *The Indian Express* notes, "Ghosh uses to great effect a matrix of multiple points of view in which memory, mythology and history freely interpenetrate." (Rao) This is not necessarily a historical novel, however the

reading of the text suggests the author's engagement with history. Arvind Chowdhary says the focus of the text is fact of history and the post-partition phase, but "its overall form is a subtle interweaving of fact, fiction and reminiscence." (Chowdhary, 1) In *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator inserts researched details of the times and places in which he locates his story. In this case, the narrator does the role of a researcher who has a personal motive for digging into the past. Ghosh through the narrator insist on his/her own version of history. Therefore, this text in this research is analyzed along the lines of alternate versions of history.

3.2 *The Shadow Lines*: a synopsis

The novel is an account of individual stories told by an unnamed narrator through his memory. It is a correspondence between the realms of memory and lived experience. As he grows older, more stories and more experiences make room for their narration. Set in Calcutta, Dhaka and London, the narrator travels across time and spaces to give an account of individual lives and their past. It largely revolves around the narrator's family and friends. Nevertheless, different episodes in their lives are interspersed with the events happening in the outer space, outside their homes. The novel is divided into two parts; Going Away and Coming Home. The novel begins with an introduction to Tridib's family and their trip to London. The narrator talks about his and other family members' relationship with Tridib, Tridib's personality and his doings, his journey to London etc. He then talks about his trip to London, meeting May, friendship with Ila and their visit to Calcutta. The novel constantly shifts back and forth between the past and present. Sometimes, it also shifts from past to further past. Narrator includes stories of Grandmother's childhood and youth, emphasizing on the 'terrorist movement.' The novel then gives details of Mayadebi and Shaheb. The text throughout explores the relationships between the Narrator, Ila, May and Tridib.

Significant emphasis is given on newspapers, or characters referring to the past events, for instance Tridib's curiosity with the newspapers, the narrator's urge to find the headline on Calcutta riots in a Local daily etc. The story then shifts to the growing friendship between narrator and Ila, and his feelings toward her, followed by Ila's confession on "wanting to be free." Further, grandmother's health deteriorates and she dies. This follows with Narrator's life in London. In the next part of the text, narrator conveys what history means to him, and mentions, "there's a joy merely in knowing that you're a part of history." (Ghosh, 115) The part one ends with Narrator waiting for Ila, who had gone with Nick.

Part two, Coming Home, begins with grandmother's retirement and post-retirement phase. It then slips into Grandmother's story of Dhaka- from description of house to childhood fun to marriage of the two sisters. It also throws light on India's partition of 1947 and the emergence of East Pakistan. It then moves to Tridib-May's strange relationship, the episode in which Tridib writes an erotic letter to May. It then covers events preceding grandmother's visit to Dhaka. The story shifts to Ila's wedding with Nick, narrator's sexual feelings toward May, and back to Tridib, narrator and May travelling together. It explains on-going conditions in Dhaka, and the sensing of "trouble." Later, the narrator's scary experience in school, with armed policemen surrounding the compound is discussed. The narrative then shifts to the "trouble" in Dhaka, to which grandmother and others fall a trap. It later shifts back to narrator's college days when he establishes a connection between riots in Calcutta and "trouble" in Dhaka through a conversation with his batch mates. Robi, Ila and narrator meet in London and spend some time together. The novel ends with narrator's last day in London where he learns the truth about Tridib's death through May.

3.2.1 Individual stories and experiences: Memory and Imagination

Each story and experience caught up in the event of the past becomes history. Narrator recalls personal stories along with the public events purely through his memory, thereby creating an alternate version of events from a common person's perspective. *The Shadow Lines* is widely regarded as a memory text. Manjula Saxena notes, "Memory is both rational and emotive-pertaining to the cognitive and the affective parts of the personality." Recollections from memory are often not altered, and are revealed as they are. It exists in correlation with an 'experience.' In the text, the narrator recalls events from his own life, and even from the others, including Tridib, his grandmother and other acquaintances. He also gives his own opinions on the events or experiences he describes. It clearly seems to be out of raw emotions, therefore a certain degree of authenticity and reliability could be considered. 'Memory' serves the matter of the novel. Ghosh fuses memory and imagination to create a full account of a particular event. Imagination plays a vital role. Fiction fulfills the same. For instance, an attack or some mishap might be shown on the television news with details like number of people died and also visual pictures of the same, but one might also tend to imagine the larger consequences of the same not shown on the TV. Fiction fills in this gap by providing minute details of the concerned event. Ghosh's work points out that memory is imaginative and imagination can fabricate memories. In the novel, memory recalls certain incidents and imagination weaves memory. In the interplay of the two, are the individual experiences and stories that contribute to history.

The novel uses a technique of a story within a story. The same story is passed from one person to another. A story is someone's experience told to another person, who in turn tells it to someone else. For instance Snipe tells a story to Tridib, Tridib tells it to the narrator and Ila, and the narrator

tells it to May. It is about Tristan, a man without a country who falls in love with woman across the seas. This story suggests the times before war and countries existing peacefully without boundaries. Another instance is how Tridib recalled what he witnessed and heard about Alan while looking at a photograph. A photograph takes the readers into an event of past focusing on Alan's story. Alan Tresawsen was injured and his arm was of metal bone, he resigned from the Club offices at the onset of war when it moved to some other place and as a result he earned very little. This shows the effects of war on common people. Tridib further recalled the conversation between Mayadebi and Alan, which hinted at the other side of the war, that is, 'people becoming friendlier in London- everyone was being friendly with everyone else.'

Tridib played a vital role in producing stories in the narrator's memory. Tridib's stories have a strong influence on the narrator. He chooses to perceive reality through imagination rather than sense. Like many other characters, Tridib spent a considerable time of his childhood and youth in England at the time of war. He believed "Everyone lives in a story.....because stories are all there are to live in." (Ghosh, 201) Tridib fits a story within a story, and the narrator does the same. These stories are all a bunch of experiences of particular time and space. This line also emphasizes on the idea that one's experience is a story, and it is unlikely to not get affected by the events outside. The combination of the two results in history. Tridib's focus on individual stories highlights the significance of personal experiences in shaping history.

The narrator looks up to Tridib at one point of time, fascinated by his different qualities, one being imagination. Narrator holds a bunch of tales told to him by Tridib. For instance throughout the novel, Tridib is seen sharing his journey to England in installments. The narrator couldn't

forget those stories because 'Tridib had given him worlds to travel in and had given him eyes to see them with.' Tridib often told him to use his 'imagination with precision.' Here individual experiences, imagination and memory, all three blend together to create a story. Ghosh perhaps emphasizes on imagination to bring out the alternate stories in as much precision as a recorded historical event. As mentioned earlier, imagination helps to fill in the gaps, but not fantasizing it. Imagination in this case, is simply the visualization of the concerned place/ event. For Tridib, imagination 'carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places.' Tridib was doing a Ph.D. in Archeology and working on the sites associated with Sena Dynasty of Bengal. He asks the narrator to keep his findings about the mound where the kings of Sena Dynasty used to bury their treasure a secret. Tridib's curiosity about various things in life and particularly with newspapers suggests his urge to find the truth. Ghosh might have deliberately situated Tridib in the discipline of history, to make his accounts sound reliable. Tridib's stories gave insight into other people's lives. For instance when he visited Mrs.Price's house when May was young, he saw May covered in a mask. On confronting them, he learnt that it was a baby mask to protect her in case the Germans dropped gas bombs. This shows the fear in the lives of common people at times of war, narrowing it down to Price's family.

Tridib also shares his personal experiences during the war time in London. On 25th September 1940 it was Tridib's ninth birthday. On this day his mother asks him not to leave the house. This makes Tridib all the more curious to step outside. He runs across the cricket field in Alvanley Gardens. He describes to the narrator how the scene had changed in a day's time. Two days before his birthday, a bomb was dropped and it had dug up fifteen foot in the cricket field due to gun emplacement. Later his mother dragged him back into the house and slapped him. Tridib later gets

to know the reason behind his mother's worries. During those days a notice was circulated by Air Raid Precautions mentioning, 'Tins of toffees are believed to have been dropped by enemy aeroplanes.' It was supposed to be a way to demoralize the population. His mother was worried of Tridib finding one of those toffee tins. This whole incident showed a threat to the innocent lives due to politics outside. As his birthday party proceeded he wasn't able to enjoy it to the fullest due to the constant fear caused by events happening outside. In no time, they heard the noise of the planes above the house, sound of the gun in the cricket field and a loud explosion. Tridib's story of a single day in his life offers a common person's experience in the chaotic times. Tridib's story represents the situation of the common people during the war in London. Their lives were all the time on alert and filled with fear.

Narrator's grandmother is a major source of stories in the novel. Her own experiences during her childhood recalled in the present shifts the narrative to the past. This gives us an understanding of the events from her perspective, even though they are narrated by a narrator through his memory. The narrator describes his grandmother's narration as an 'effort of recollection.' However it proves significant to infuse the personal history with the public history. The grandmother seems to provide first-hand information about certain events, for example the 'terrorist movement.' She told the events happening outside as well as about her personal life. She told him about the secret societies and their networks, home-made bombs used to assassinate British officials, arrests and executions. She further added one incident that happened in her school- Policemen entered her school and handcuffed a boy who was a member of the secret terrorist society. Grandmother's story suggests how the political agenda was almost intervening in their personal lives. A member of a terrorist society with a task of assassinating an English magistrate, sitting quietly in the classroom might

have made no difference to many, but it did make a difference to all those who were present in that classroom at that point of time. Alternate history captures these minute events that made a difference in individual lives. The narrator tried to fit his grandmother into that 'history.' Therefore, the narrator in the text plays a major role on creating a link between an individual and history.

The effects of post partition are mentioned through the family story of Grandmother. The house was empty and was soon filled with 'Muslim' refugees. Due to migration, people occupied spaces they found empty. There was no point in fighting the refugees, 'no Pakistani court was going to evict those refugees.' Jethamoshai continued to live there with the family, and he 'didn't really care what happened.' Migration and loss of land was the most significant effect of the partition. Grandmother's plight resembled several others. Jethamoshai's will to live in the same house even after the partition points out to a strong sense of attachment to one's own land. Events like these shattered people's lives, identities and hopes. Some moved on, while some just couldn't.

Grandmother didn't ponder much on the current affairs. Her mind and soul often travelled into the past. When she makes new friends post retirement, she mentions, "The past is what we talk about." (Ghosh, 140) This strengthens the role of story-telling in reviving the past. While talking about the past, that is likely to be a common event, each individual opines their view or experience. This revives or reconstructs the past, making space for each individual's experience. Therefore, sometimes memory that is going back to the past also brings certain stories to the fore that were untold before.

Narrator's grandmother gives insights into the riots of Dhaka. However much before that, the narrator sets the sequence of events at a steady pace. He gives an accurate timeline that leads the audience to that event. All of these is a result of his memory. For instance he mentions "2 January 1964, the day before they left for Dhaka." (Ghosh, 209) A clear information on dates might be a deliberate attempt of the author to facilitate the reader in locating the event across the history of India. Their whole visit in Dhaka was surrounded with 'trouble.' Their visit to the old house also depended on whether there were signs of any trouble. With no possible trouble at bay, they set out with a security guard with them. With much effort, they finally come up with a plan to take Jethamoshai with them back, the grandmother's uncle whom she had come to take back from Dhaka. However during their trip back, a gruesome incident occurs. The narrator learns the rest of the story from May, on his last day in London. In Dhaka, their car was stopped by a mob, attacked them, and fired gunshots. Later the mob chased the rickshaw in which Jethamoshai and Khalil were travelling. May got out of the car and tried to stop them, followed by Tridib. In a matter of minutes, Tridib, Jethamoshai and Khalil were killed brutally. Tridib's death was the only mystery the narrator had in the series of stories stored in his memory. Through a sequence of stories either from the grandmother, or Robi, or May or his father, the narrator gives the readers an insight into the Riots of 1964, in which he places his family's suffering at the center.

Riots in Calcutta as well as Dhaka and its impending fear are explored by using the metaphor of 'trouble.' More than the event and effects of it, narrator's story gains an insight into the 'fear' of it. Narrator's family members gauged the 'going-to-be-trouble.' They planned their actions accordingly. As a young narrator he was unable to understand its complexity, it is only much later in the text that he connects the dots. And he also gives readers a ride into the emotions of fear,

anxiety and uncertainty at a time of ‘not so known’ event of the country. Narrator in this case, shares his own experience caught in the ‘trouble’ in Calcutta. As a child, the narrator experienced the events he termed as “departure from normalcy.” The streets were empty, the school bus was almost empty, his friends were absent etc. In his school, the students heard loud voices in the distance followed by silence, there were bells of fire engine, and smoke rising into the sky. Later a contingent of policemen surrounded the school and all the students were safely led out. Squads of patrolling policemen made rounds on the roads, the shops were shut, and a lot of commotion was the scene in Calcutta. His school bus sensing the mob ahead took a different road to save themselves. These events built up utmost anxiety in the narrator and others. “Our city had turned against us,” says the narrator. (Ghosh, 224) The building up of an event also built a pile of emotions on the public, and narrator’s story serves this cause.

In Dhaka they plan their trip to the house depending on the possible troubles they might encounter. There were rumours time and again of a possible trouble to take place. These sheer examples of likelihood of ‘troubles’ all the time grappled people with fear, restricting their movement and freedom. It was a kind of feeling in which they were aware of the trouble, but not the effects. There was uncertainty of life and stability at all times. It was a sort of fear. “That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe” (Ghosh, 225) says the narrator, posing ‘trouble’ and ‘fear’ in relation to one another. History is not just the events and the resulting effects but also includes the phase before it. Ghosh does not emphasize on the cause, or what led to the events. He rather deals with the emotional turmoil within individuals who were the spectators of the said event. The narrator places the ‘trouble’ (that is, the events preceding the major event) as against the normal. “The spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits can become,

suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood,” (Ghosh, 225) suggests the individual’s sense of comfort in their own spaces.

The narrator in the text talks about the joy one could experience in being a part of history. He refers to Tresawsen who the narrator thinks was aware that he was a part of the most important events of his time that is, war, fascism etc. He also mentions these things are a part of history books in the present. The narrator makes a point that the mere presence of an individual in an important historical event impacts their life, and their lives impact the course of history in due course. “there’s a kind of heroism even in their pointless deaths. That’s why they’re remembered.” (Ghosh, 115) He emphasizes an individual’s role in the larger scheme of events and the necessity of it to be considered in the ‘history’ of a place or time.

3.2.2 Present-past dynamics in recalling and narrating stories

The narrator in the text makes a contrast between the past and the present with reference to certain events, places and people. In this process, his memory plays a crucial role. For instance he compares the appearance of Gole Park between his childhood and youth. Specific events of the past also contributed to these changes, and the narrator quite smoothly situates the present- past dynamics within that context. By doing so, Ghosh narrates personal experiences of a character who was involved in that event. For instance, when the narrator visits London, he inquires about the Left Book Club where Alan Tresawsen used to work before the war. Post war it had turned into some office, however there was a trace of the past in it, that is, the displayed picture of ‘Victor Gollancz.’ Narrator comments on the chapel like building in one of the cities of London now

recognized as 'London Jamme Masjid' to be a synagogue when the place used to be a Jewish area until the war. The above two examples suggest the effects of war.

The narrator in the text is often seen trying to imagine the plight of the characters who were a part of a particular period of history. He imagines what it must be like to survive in those times. For instance, he wonders that a group of friends, Mike, Alan, Dan and Francesca might have been talking and quarreling over the Nazi-Soviet Pact, or for that matter everything that was happening around them, that is, precisely the war. Similarly he also tries to locate his grandmother in the events she narrates through his imagination. He says those people living during tough times such as war or riots were aware of the 'reality.' They might not know the details but they could sense the danger ahead of them. In this case, he says, some things cannot be known but only experienced. "There are moments in time that are not knowable." (Ghosh, 75)

The present-past dynamics could also be seen in grandmother's trip to Dhaka in 1964. In this case, not the grandmother, but Robi narrates the events to the narrator, which in turn are told to us. Therefore a sequence of events goes through multiple memories before reaching the reader. However, each part of it is of what one has experienced and what the other has seen or heard. For example, Robi tells the narrator his grandmother's first reaction on reaching Dhaka. She says, "Where's Dhaka. I can't see Dhaka." (Ghosh, 213) Phrases such as "It can't be our lane," "It must be a lie" add to her disbelief. This change is significantly related to the partition of India. Dhaka became a capital of the East Pakistan post partition which was then a part of India. Therefore a lot of changes have taken place. Throughout her stay in Dhaka, the grandmother questions the 'Dhaka' she lived in.

A change in Jethamoshai's attitude towards people can be considered in the comparison between present and past. This change has a strong relation to the exterior events he was a part of. Post partition he shared the house with the 'Muslim' refugees, and didn't complain of anything nor asked them to leave the house. Before the partition, he couldn't stand people of 'Muslim' religion. Grandmother mentions how he was an 'orthodox' and wouldn't let a Muslim's shadow pass within ten feet of his food. The strict rules followed then were nowhere to be seen. This seems a positive change, an indication of the abolition of 'racism.'

3.2.3 Identity amidst National Events

The Shadow Lines gives an account of personal lives amidst the construction of national events and even events outside the country. It tries to construct an identity at two levels; a national identity and a self. Different set of events impact individuals in varying degrees. These directly or indirectly impact their identities. Ghosh's account of stories show the correlation between the events and identity of individuals.

Narrator of the text is a connecting link between people and their stories, between events and experiences. His journey from childhood to youth and his immense level of understanding in the course of time can be viewed as 'Bildungsroman.' His own exploration into events and his memory develops his self. The unnamed narrator in the text establishes an identity through his responses to the characters he engages with and the responses he elicits. He himself calls him a chronicle, and not a human being. The narrator constructs himself through the act of narration. In the wake of chronicling stories, he acquires an identity for himself. The identity of the narrator does not lie in his physical characteristics, his academic records or his preferences and choices. It rather

establishes through his relationship with his family and acquaintances, his encounter with their stories, and his understanding of the past. His narration is a complex narration of memories, oral stories and newspaper accounts. The analysis of the text suggests the narrator becomes a metaphor to 'alternate history.' His narration tells the version of an experience of a particular event. The narrator in the text takes the responsibility to uncover the 'silences.' For instance in his memory, the facts and information on Riots of 1964 seem incomplete or partial, after which the narrator embarks on a journey to find the hidden history of the riots. As an outcome of this, he is able to establish to connect the dots between his childhood experiences, trouble in Calcutta and riots leading to Tridib's death. The narrator uses his memory and curiosity to uncover the hidden 'facts' and 'truths' which were denied agency and voice by public narratives. The narrator's efforts to construct history through personal narratives shape his identity as well as an alternate story.

The narrator's grandmother had strong ideas of 'nationhood.' She said war was a religion and it took hundreds of years for the people of a country to build it into a nation. Years of war, sacrifice and bloodshed goes into building a country. She often felt the same for her country India and told her grandson that he too has to do the same. During her childhood, she was fascinated by the stories of the terrorists or acts of heroism. She also mentions her wish to be a part of the terrorist group. "I would have done anything to be free." (Ghosh, 43) She was a woman who strongly determined her identity along the lines of national identity. In the grandmother's case, nationalism blends the homeland sentiment with a pride in national history. However, post-partition things change drastically. Grandmother's reaction to the partition of India, riots, and times of 'trouble' is a great example of the impact of such events on one's identity. She finds it extremely difficult to identify with her birth place post-partition. When she gets an opportunity to visit her hometown, there's a

bound of uncertainty. She says, “I don’t know if I should go. It won’t be like home anymore.” (Ghosh, 164) The place of her birth suddenly had turned into conflict with her identity and nationality. She experienced a loss of self, losing a piece of self into a place that was demarcated with a boundary. She feels as if she’s a foreigner in her own land. Feelings of alienation and nostalgia constantly alter the grandmother’s identity. Due to partition, the comfortable space of the nation suddenly turns into a hostile terrain; this turns true when they visit Dhaka in 1964. The emergence of boundaries treat her as the ‘other.’ Grandmother’s story can also be categorized under ‘Diaspora.’ She resembles a strong diasporic identity- feelings of alienation, homelessness and identity crisis. While furnishing the details on documents of the visa forms, she struggles with fundamental notion of identity. She doubts her sense of belongingness. Post-colonial theories also look at the post-partition victims through a psycho-social lens. For example, looking at the ‘partition’ that uprooted many people from their natural environment in the name of nation making. Grandmother’s situation shows these diverse emotions which result due to displacement, migration and change of ‘nation.’ Her chaos, like all the partition victims could be seen in the phrase “Going Away and Coming Home.”

Grandmother also emerges as a source of the past. For her, her home and former identity exists only in memory. Therefore, as narrator mentions, she ‘is very skilled in the art of recollection.’ Story-telling strongly gets associated to the grandmother, and contributes to her identity in great ways. She becomes a figure who was part of the most important events of the country back in 1960s. In the present, she becomes a link to revisit the past through tales in her memory. Hence, the series of events in her childhood and revisiting them back makes her compare the present and past. As a person she questions the change, and events such as partition. She becomes a seeker of

knowing the truths. For instance, she gets very concerned about the border between the two countries. She says, “What was it all for then- partition and all the killing and everything- if there isn’t something in between.” (Ghosh, 167) She must have been in quest of such answers all along her journey from the time of partition to the present. However, her portrayal never shows any signs of weakness. Her attitude only suggests the need to fight them back. In the ageing years of her life her urge to serve her country manifest in two things; firstly her urge to bring her uncle Jethamoshai back to Calcutta and secondly she donates her gold chain to the war fund. In the second case, she mentions it was for the sake of freedom and that was the only chance she had. This suggests her growing need to identify with the nation. The grandmother doesn’t really assume an individual identity apart from being a teacher, but always feels to be associated with a ‘nation.’ Her present and past experiences alter her identity throughout the text that signifies the impact of major events on her life. She also becomes a representation of partition and post-partition survivors and their fate.

In the novel, Tridib attains a status of ‘he.’ He becomes an important link between history and the narrator, just like narrator’s grandmother. The narrator relies on the stories of Tridib to weave the threads together. Tridib’s identity largely lingers in his search for knowledge. He was curious about everything in life. As an archeologist he collects facts, but his own personal experiences also lead him to understand history better. Tridib’s life caught up in the chaotic riots of 1964 assigns him an identity of “sacrifice.” Tridib’s death suggests the plight of a common person to get involved in an event such as war with no close association with that event at all. Tridib’s identity for a long time could be viewed as a ‘storyteller’ but post his death, he becomes an important figure involved in the riots at least in the eyes of his family. Tridib’s character ponders upon the fact that

many such individuals ‘sacrificed’ or lost their lives in the wake of violence and riots, who except for their families no one knew about. Ghosh gives an identity to Tridib post his death, and as a result gives him a recognition.

3.2.4 Alternate History: an Observation

There is ambiguity in understanding whether the author tells us a historical fact. The novel more distinctively deals with the narrator’s transformation of his memory into reality. He reconstructs his private history and public history and fuses them together. Ghosh attempts to transform private history into public history. This idea supports the research hypothesis, that is, past in one’s private life or an individual experience becomes a part of the history. An incident created in a work of art may evoke an emotional or aesthetic response, where as in a history book it will be received as a piece of objective history. Alternate history in fiction often involves subjective factors such as personal experiences, emotional response to the event, etc. This novel situates personal lives of the characters within the public events, and the resulting reaction is captured in his memory that he narrates to the readers. For instance, narrator’s involvement in Calcutta riots.

Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* gives a systematic timeline of events, even though the plot is narrated in ‘back and forth’ technique. The novel opens in 1939, and ends in the narrator’s present time. The two major events highlighted in the text are the Second World War (1939-45) and the post-Partition riots of 1964 in Calcutta and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). These dates help in the reconstruction of the events of public history and their discourse on the narrator.

Grandmother, Tridib, Ila, May, Robi and others' direct stories and experiences give first-hand information about the times in history. They only tell what they saw and experienced- only the stories. Rudrashish Chakraborty says history is suggested through "cryptic phases, monologues, sudden burst of energy, image formation etc." (Chowdhary, 22) Stories in the novel are the only reliable source of history in the text. Ghosh's treatment of history is not concerned with the causes and details of a historical event, but its effects on masses and their involvement in it. Nivedita Bagchi in her essay *Materiality and Historical Reconstruction in TSL* argues that the Colonialism and its effects for instance partition have displaced the "other" largely and thus a proper chronological, ordered and one authentic history is not possible. "The history that we create as members of such a dispersed society is one that is fragmented in newspapers, oral narratives, stories, street names, buildings, and postcards. Any of these is necessarily subjective, which only results in personal reconstruction of the past." (Prasad, 91) The above statement highly suits the narrator's attempt to construct history.

There is a contrast of opinions between the characters in the text. Ila considers famines or riots as 'local' things because it's "nothing that's really remembered." She compares them to revolutions or anti-fascist wars, and considers those events to be not capable enough to provide a political example to the world. There is certain level of centrality to those events which are always in the mainstream news. The narrator questions this centrality or significance given to only the specific events. Because of this he feels 'lives' like his, assuming it as a common person's life, become 'voiceless events' in the backward world. This observation by the narrator hints at the suppressed history of certain masses or societies. History in this case are their stories and experiences that have been silenced. He also argues that 'alternative wasn't blankness.' This

suggests that until we try it ourselves, “we would never be free of other people’s inventions.” (Ghosh, 35) He makes it a point that alternatives exist and it is an individual’s responsibility to manifest it. To prove this point, narrator includes the experiences of certain people in the riots through his narration. He gives their stories a voice, and therefore an alternate version to the mainstream one.

The text focuses on newspaper reports. A newspaper is the disseminator of a factual event. During a discussion with his friends, everyone was unaware of the riots of 1964. At this point of time narrator found it essential to find a news report that would support his stance. There was no news of Calcutta Riots in the well-known Calcutta Daily. However, the narrator ended up in a journey into a land outside the space he knew. He read more newspaper reports on Riots in Khulna in East Pakistan that largely resulted out of the theft of scared relic called “Mu-i-Mubarak” in Kashmir. Eventually he learned the connection between the two events. The narrator notes that by the end of 1964, “the riots had faded away from the pages of the newspapers, vanished without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves.” (Ghosh, 254) The text however counter-argues this by giving first hand experiences of a family caught up in upheavals of the riots. Grandmother’s stories and the newspapers’ silencing of the Calcutta and Dhaka riots also shape the discourse of nationalism.

The narrator considers the ‘less talked’ events or the ‘hidden facts’ as the silences of history. He talks about his mentioning of episodes of 1964 as a struggle with the silence. His struggle to uncover the truths is an attempt to provide the alternate stories of the event. He considers these facts as ‘silences’ that could lie in any corner of his world. He describes this silence as ‘a gap, a

hole, an emptiness in which there are no words.’ It is out of one’s intelligence because it is not talked about. It is not popular. As a child he believed in the reality of space and believed in the truth of perceptions. It is much later that he comes to terms with the realization that “there’s more to it or there’s another side to it.” Narrator’s determination and the need to defeat the silences brings us to the stories of various events in the text. With reference to the ‘silences,’ narrator comments upon journalists and their struggle with silences. He argues that journalists too are aware of these silences. But he question why they never speak of it. He contrasts Conferences, wars, revolutions as politics to the “other unnamable things” as silences. He poses journalists and historians and people of intelligence who have a larger scope of navigating into such stories and revealing them. He also discusses the durability of such a news: “party splits and elections put out their eloquence in newspapers and histories for years and years but these other things.....fall silent.” (Ghosh, 251) Therefore the narrator takes the responsibility of diving into those silences. Ghosh through the narrator brings out the silences through the narration of the stories.

The characters in the text have made certain events sound more impactful and important than others. Malik’s statement on riots as a ‘local’ thing and its impossible comparison to war suggests the sidelining of certain events in the mainstream news. He further says, “your riots didn’t manage to make it to the front page.” However, narrator’s determination to show them the truth exceeds the above situation. His sheer determination of not letting his past vanish without a trace marks the significance of narrating an alternate history. The narrator himself feels the riots of Calcutta in this particular context have been sidelined and therefore feels there is a need to reveal the same. Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* captures the need to treat a local event with as much significance as any major or national event.

3.3 Conclusion

History in the text is purely born out of the narrator's memory, fusing the domain of public knowledge and private understanding. Therefore, history is reconstituted through narrator's memories and perceptions, thereby proving an alternate version of experiences. Arvind Chowdhary in an introduction to the book Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines: Critical Essays* mentions, "The Shadow Lines creates 'the brave new world of disorder, of rootless histories, and selves.'" (Chowdhary, 9)

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* weaves experiences and identities together by locating them in the midst of major events in and outside the country. His personal stories delicately penetrate into the public historical event, thereby giving a product of both- that is personalized version of history. Ghosh's strong narration of stories, anecdotes and experiences provide an alternative to the public history, which was otherwise sidelined or 'silenced.'

Chapter 4

Exploring the alternate history in *Untouchable Spring*

4.1 Introduction to Dalit Literature

For the longest time, Dalit Literature existed in the form of oral narratives such as songs, myths, legends, or plays. It was largely performance based, and was passed down to next generations through stories. An instance of the same is evident in the chosen text: Naganna and Yellanna compose songs and perform, Reuben narrates a legend told to him by his ancestors and many more instances. Much later, it took a written form that is autobiographies, short stories, novels, historic accounts etc. Dalit writings had two motives: one, to share their stories and culture, and two, to challenge the mainstream stories or accounts. Dalit writers took up the task of correcting falsified history, rewrite them and deconstruct the images of the “other” constructed in the dominant discourse. It is an account of the life the Dalits have lived, experienced and seen.

Dalit literature has got great prominence in Telugu literature from 1990s. It is only by the twentieth century that Dalits experienced a shift from being written about them to writing themselves. The contemporary writers internationalized Dalit writings as a genre in cultural and academic spaces. A lot of movements have challenged the subordination of Dalits over the years; Bhakti Movement of the seventeenth century, Social reformation movement of the nineteenth century, Adi-Andhra movement of twentieth century etc. During each phase different set of writers dealt with Dalits differently. For instance, Kusuma Dharmanna in the twentieth century wrote against caste oppression, untouchability and discrimination. The Dalit Literary Movement of 1990s brought up the experiences of Dalits who felt oppressed by the domination of the upper caste leaders within the movement. During this time, two major anthologies were published-

Chikkanautunna Pata (1995) edited by G.Lakshmi Narasaiah and Tripuraneni Srinivas, and *Padunekkina Pata* (1996) edited by G.Lakshmi Narasaiah. These included poems by poets who supported Dalit cause and represented the minority in their works. These also highlighted the Dalits positive reaction to the Left Movement. Several autobiographies and autobiographical prose writings came to the fore over the years. Examples are, Chilukuri Devaputra's *Panchamam* (1998), Vemula Yellaiah's *Kakka* (2000), etc. Dalit Literature was also influenced by Marxism, an ideology that believed in the equality of all classes. Another major influence was Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's works. His experiences while travelling, in school and at various other places convey the treatment of Dalits as 'outcastes' or 'pollutants.' For instance, he couldn't touch the water tap unless it was opened by a 'touchable' person.

Dalit Literature largely aims at bringing about a social change and artistic neutrality. It searches for freedom, hope and aspirations, free from exploitation and hegemonic dominance. Writers deal with situations of the said community, giving an account of their first hand experiences. It comprises of both; life under dominance and their struggle or fight against such discriminations. It extensively deals with 'centre-margin paradigm' of power. The centre in such a concept refers to the powerful or the dominating structures. Margin, or also referred as periphery, are the marginalized, the discriminated or those who are at a disadvantage. The concept of 'boundary' is highly problematized in Dalit writings. It serves as a major feature for writing an alternate history, mainly because it speaks of the situation of dalits who are driven away from mainstream history and society. These boundaries could be a geographical map of a dalit village as well as the mental map of people who distinguish dalits as the "other." Here, the village becomes a symbol of alienation that dalits suffer and also stands for the social and cultural situation of dalits.

The main part of the village remains prohibited for the dalits, but they still tend to depend on it for their livelihood. This becomes a major source of exploitation, and therefore a lot of texts including *Untouchable Spring* portray the issues surrounding the village to bring out the situation of dalits from a minority perspective. “Un/touchability” becomes a space or a boundary that is contested and deconstructed in Dalit writing, sometimes portraying and sometimes subverting the discrimination. One of the significant issues countered by Dalit Literature is ‘water-related’ situations of Dalit. Being considered as ‘pollutants’ they couldn’t use water freely as the upper castes. For example, Yendluri Sudhakar’s poem “Village Without a Pond” discusses Dalits’ longing for water. Likewise, *Untouchable Spring* addresses water disputes in the village of Yennela Dinni.

Kalyana Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* is categorized under ‘Dalit Literature.’ It is also viewed as ‘subaltern literature.’ Subaltern writing includes works of the downtrodden communities who raise their voices through literature. The text particularly focuses on the caste discrimination and exploitation, and the fight against it, but also the text is a prominent example of ‘subversion.’ Subversion is a process by which writers, activists, or reformers subvert the centre and the margin. It aims at asserting identities of those who are suppressed by subverting the power structures. In this novel, the process of subversion could be seen by dalits’ fight against the powerful, but also could be seen through the ‘boundary’ concept. The issue of ‘boundary’ is a vital aspect in the novel which is depicted as ‘ooru’ and ‘palle.’ This boundary determines their identity. Rao juxtaposes the Dalit part of the village with the ‘main’ village, and shows the resulting conflict through various episodes. The text does not necessarily focus on the demarcation, rather focuses on Dalits’ attempts to challenge such boundaries set by the hegemonic institutions. These stories

of courage through humiliation count as an alternate version to the upper caste version of boundary system.

4.2 An insight into G Kalyana Rao's works

G Kalyana Rao began his writing career as a playwright. He has written around fifteen plays. Examples are, *Tolipoddu*, *Satire* and *Lockup*. He was a member of Virasam, Viplava Rachayitala Sangham- a Revolutionary Writer's movement. He was a staunch believer of revolutionary ideology, and is often talked amongst the writers of Telugu language post 1970s. He was a Dalit as well as a Dalit convert to Christianity.

His novel *Untouchable Spring* is one of his major works that gained large popularity, essentially in terms of Dalit writing. It was originally published in Telugu titled *Antarani Vasantam*. It was translated into English by Alladi Uma and M Sridhar, with the motive of reaching a wider audience. The novel is a pack of Dalit experience. Rao claims to have 'written out his life' in the book. The text is said to have grown out of the author's involvement with his community and the Naxalite movement. In the original version of the novel in Telugu, Rao maintains a rich texture of an oral text, and also provides footnotes to refer to certain references. He has dedicated this novel to his parents and revolutionary leaders Shyam, Mahesh, Murali and Lakshmirajam who were martyred.

Parsa Venlateshwar Rao in his review on Rao's work mentions, "He has set out to write the story of oppression of dalits through the family saga- his own- and he has adopted the fictional mode to construct the narrative." This novel is considered autobiographical in nature, with Rao's

life experiences overlapping with the fictional characters. This suggests writer's involvement in writing an alternate history, narrating their own times and experiences through fiction. In the Translator's note of the novel, an excerpt from Kalyana Rao's essay has been included which states, "That's true- my ancestors lived really outside the village. But they were inheritors of a magnificent culture. Great artists. All that magnificence has become untouchable. Art and Literature have been assessed from the perspective of the caste. That's the great tragedy here. Why?" (Rao, 277)

4.3 *Untouchable Spring*: a synopsis

The novel is an account of personal experiences of the Dalits told in the form of a story. It has a total of 18 chapters, followed by a Final Word. Narrated from Ruth's perspective, the novel narrates the social, cultural, political and personal lives of a particular community across various generations. The text begins with an introduction to Ruth. Ruth's narration of various events and stories is extensively based on stories told to her by Reuben, her husband. She remembers and recalls, and thus the text follows the pattern of passing stories from one to the other. The first chapter has the story of 'kamadhenu,' the divine cow. This legend, as revealed by Reuben marks the origin of the untouchable castes of malas and madigas. The next few chapters provide details of the village 'Yennela Dinni' and their family members and ancestors. The readers are acquainted with the geographical demarcation of the village into 'ooru' and 'palle.' The village rules for members of different class/communities are detailed in the beginning chapters. For instance, seating arrangement during a performance. Ruth introduces to Reuben's grandfather, Yellana and his ventures in the villages, and his major encounter with the 'truth.' Other characters such as Boodevi, Yerrenkadu are also introduced. The text further moves to Yellana and Naganna's

growing relationship, and then into further past, that is, Naganna's childhood, flood in Yellana Dinni, the courage of the Dalits to cross the Palle, discussion on mound, Narigadu's death, and Naganna's departure from the village. Chapter 6 briefly gives a picture of the state of Boodevi's and others on Yellanna's disappearance, Karanams and the return of Yellanna. The next few chapters locate Yellanna's journey; his interest in composing and singing songs, and dancing, his marriage to Subhadra, his son Sivaiah's birth etc.

Chapter 11 introduces Yellanna as a 'mala bairagi.' This marks his journey from village to village. It also narrates the incident of Pedakoteswarudu's death, mainly caused due to composing some poems. The next chapter shows the state in Yennela Dinni- Sivaiah's growing years, Subhadra's courage but also longing for her husband, and the irrigation system. The following chapter includes episodes of drought in the village and construction of the Buckingham Canal, and its impact on the personal lives. It also includes Yellanna and Subhadra's death. The next few chapters highlight conversion to Christianity, focusing on Sivaiah's character and his bond with Martin, violent deaths on Christmas Eve including those of Martin, Saramma and Sasirekha. At this point, the narrative shifts to Reuben's diaries and his search for stories of his village and family. Last few chapters deal with the next generation, that is, Ruth's and Reuben's children, Immanuel and Rosy. It brings forth the story of Avalapadu, and subsequent political events, such as communism, naxalite movement etc, followed by Immanuel's death. Further in the text, the plot revolves around Jessie and Ruby, the next generation, and ends with Ruth's note to her grandson. The author has included a Final Word, suggesting a sequel to the book on lives of Immanuel, Jessie and Ruby, and also hints that there is more to the story. He says, "what has rested is only Ruth's

memory. It is necessary to shake Mary Suvarta. If she is moved, another part of ‘Untouchable Spring’ will commence. Then we cannot say life is embedded only in these pages.” (Rao, 265)

4.3.1 Stories of stories: an alternate perspective

“A wonderful journey. One of them is known. The other needs to be introduced. That introduction is not all that easy. Unless they have a lot of worth, people of those castes do not get recognized.” (Rao, 41)

Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* is an account of stories from Ruth’s perspective, which in turn are in the form of a memory. These stories are told to her by her late husband Reuben. Rao maintains the story-telling tradition in the text through its narration, which also becomes symbolic of alternate histories. These histories were not written or recorded, but only told orally. Author infuses the story telling of a sect of community and brings to the fore their story, thereby creating alternate history in fiction in written form. Each story narrated in the novel is from a Dalit’s perspective, spread across series of generations. These stories are a blend of multiple ideas; their culture and art forms, their conflicts with the upper caste due to boundary system, their struggle for identity and their actions to fight the dominating structures. Each story, in brief, is the situation of Dalits and their unheard tales. It is the story of each generation of family; Yellanna’s story, Sivaiah’s story, Immaneul’s story and Jessie’s story. Each story becomes history. The following research attempts to narrate story behind a story through a minority perspective, to create a strong base for ‘alternate history’ in fiction.

The novel begins with a story that hints at the origin of ‘untouchable’ castes of ‘malas’ and ‘madigas.’ It is the story of a divine cow, Kamadhenu, who gave honeyed milk and Chennaiah, its care taker who desires to drink its milk. On Kamadhenu’s death, instead of cooking only one part of the meat, Jambavanta cooks the entire meat. While doing this, a piece of meat falls and gets defiled, but Chennaiah puts it back. As a result Siva curses both, Chennaiah and Jambavanta, and that in the Kaliyuga, Jambavanta’s children become *madigas* and Chennaiah’s children become *malas*. This story is described as the story of birth of malas and madigas. This is the story that several generations of malas and madigas have grown up believing to be true. This story can be interpreted as a base for knowing the unknown. Rao creates a legend of the origin of the said community to establish an understanding throughout the text, that is, just like the birth of the caste was unknown, the Dalit’s side of the story was unknown too. However, Reuben as a character questions it. He says, “My grandfather told it so convincingly. His grandfather narrated it as if it were really true. The story of my birth and your birth. Where did we come from? From a curse. Why is it so? (Rao, 4) This story becomes an example of how a pre-defined position is given to Dalit. As a new generation individual, one would definitely question the reliability of the story like Reuben, but the fact is that everyone over the years have been believing in the story. Another reason, the novel situates this legend in the beginning is to question the known story. What if there’s another version to it? However, the story can be considered under alternate version because it is narrated from a Dalit’s perspective. There is also a high possibility that since it is passed down from generation to generation the story has achieved a reliable form, no matter where their origin is really from. Therefore, this legend of origin serves two motives in the text; one, alternate side of the story where in Dalits are sharing their origin. And two, it questions the story of origin, suggesting how they have come to internalize the stories told by others.

In another instance, due to heavy floods, palle gets drowned. In order to save themselves, they had to climb up the mound, crossing Ooru region. This was almost next to impossible because they could never think of crossing the marked line. The villagers said, the elders in the ooru will kill us. Narigadu and Mataiah's courage saved them all. They walked toward the mound fiercely and all the people from Palle joined them. Narigadu said, "Till now we had no piece of land here. Now we won't even have our lives. I don't want to die. I want to live." (Rao, 32) This spirit of courage in one person kindled courage in the rest of the palle to stand for themselves. When the elder Karanam and ooru learnt about this, they kill Narigadu. Post this, Mataiah exiles into the forest. The main initiators are no more, however they leave behind a story to tell. The place later is referred to as the mala mound. Every action of the malas and madigas was taken as a humiliation to their position by the upper caste and this story proves to be the case. This story counts as an alternate version because the origin of mala mound was not necessarily out of desire, but due to the need for survival. The upper caste may view this as an approach to take over the mound, but from a Dalit's perspective it is a cause to live. Naganna tells this story to Yellana, which was a part of his childhood. A childhood experience like this becomes a part of history, to understand the origin and creation of the mala mound in Yennela Dinni.

When the village of Yennella Dinni is hit by a drought, people begin migrating. Due to this there is loss of livelihood and immense starvation. A lot of malas and madigas migrate to the construction site of Buckingham Canal in search of employment. They are chased away from the site because they are "untouchables." Sivaiah and Sasirekha approach the place where the digging of canal was taking place, which is full of coolies. The man incharge of giving employment abruptly stops writing when Sivaiah mentions, "I'm a mala from Yennella Dinni." He starts

screaming and a few coolies attack him and Sasirekha. Assuming a danger to their lives, the two flee away. In the view of this episode, Rao says, “The only words that were comprehensible were mala and madiga.” (Rao, 140) This episode clearly highlights the state of Dalits even in the most fragile times. Each episode in their lives was bound by “untouchability.” Rao represents a number of Dalits through Sivaiah and Sasirekha who shared their plight in a significant episode of history—the construction of Buckingham Canal. This huge activity of construction employed labourers and migrants from the lower classes, however there was discrimination even at that level. Rao focuses on Sivaiah and Sasirekha’s story that contributes to history because suffering of each individual becomes a story of the past.

The story of the village of Avalapadu also serves a major role in the text. It is a story told by Reuben to Ruth, which was described by Ramanujan. At the onset of Communism, the “untouchables” fight against the upper caste resulting in conflicts. At this point of time, a lot of changes take place in Palle, new people coming to the village, malas and madigas raising their voices etc. A young “untouchable” youth gets beaten up, people of palle destroy a part of the field of upper caste, upper caste people tie up the women of palle, the malas and madiags attempt to drink water from the lake they are forbidden to etc. A lot of actions arise from the blame-game and revenge. Due to constant conflicts, the upper caste devise a plan. They ask Chettodu, a police officer to take action. All set to arrest Sinasubarayudu, he fails to arrest him. The people of palle join hands and chase away the constable. Later a young fellow, Penchili hides the officer’s gun. Due to this Chettodu arrests over fifty people including Ramanujan. This was followed by destruction of property and huts, torturing women and children and burning down the entire village into ashes. Small actions led to bigger consequences. Upper caste turned violent when lower caste

tried to fight against them for their rights. Rao includes this story to show how this conflict was not a war, but looked like a war. He mentions, “if they could get water by peaceful means, there would not be anyone more peace-loving than them. But their lives taught them that they could get anything only if they fought for it.” This story serves an alternate purpose; not to focus on conflicts- the number of deaths, the cause of fight, etc, but to emphasize on the idea of life as a “war.” Rao maintains a view that Dalits don’t care for what historians or others think about their lives, they may say- they fought, they quarreled etc. For Dalits, it was a matter of survival and self-respect, and therefore it was a war. A conflict or a war can be viewed differently from different perspectives. Rao focuses on Dalit’s perspective. Through the story of Avalapadu, which was an “untouchable’s” experience, he maintains the conflict not as a war, but a way of life.

4.3.2 Voice to the voiceless: representation of the minority

Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* voices out the silences and brings in the voices.

The lives of Dalit are a major representation of this text; focusing on their pain, suffering and struggle, but also bringing out their art forms, folk tales and culture. It particularly highlights the ‘malas’ and ‘madigas’, a section of Dalits belonging to the state of Andhra Pradesh. These direct depictions of Dalits’ lives pave way for representation of minority discourses. Rao’s inclusion of Dalit forms of music, dance and art that is largely excluded from the mainstream art can be seen as a metaphor to alternate histories that are excluded from the mainstream history. “Many artists were buried in the depths of the past. There are no records that history has made a note of them in its pages.” (Rao, 41) The author clearly indicates the need of writing this piece of fiction. This text serves as an embodiment of Dalit art forms. In addition to these forms, it narrates stories of their

ways of life that just like art forms haven't been recorded. Fiction dealing with alternate histories narrates stories that were either unheard, or silenced. These stories therefore become a voice to the voiceless, who are largely the minority, neglected or the suppressed sect of population. The following text provides a complex web of both positive and negative experiences. The lives of Dalit by large were interfered with the exterior forces of power within the internal system of village as well as beyond it. In the text, two forces of domination are at play. The Dalits are discriminated and exploited within the village, strictly following the concept of 'boundaries.' Secondly, their involvement in the Naxalite movement shows their role in asserting their identity.

Dalit women are seen as doubly marginalized individuals due to domination within their own community and by society at large. The village of Yennela Dinni restricted women to domestic chores and boundaries. However, women have their own stories of courage. Women in the text fight for their rights within the village as well as participate in the larger movements. The novel provides an alternate representation of women in the text that challenges the mainstream portrayal of the marginalized women as weak and vulnerable. This text brings out the heroic acts of women undertaken as a resistance against the power structures. Rao fuses the role of Dalit community as a whole in their fight against the discrimination. However by emphasizing on women characters and their active participation in the struggle, Rao gives a strong voice to the women of the said community. The text reveals their side of the story. The novel also seems to contrast women's courage against the fear of Dalits in general. For instance, Subhadra emerges as a strong individual who takes a stand for their community. Due to diversion of water by the upper caste, malas and madigas faced water crisis. Due to this, the mala mound was undernourished, crops were affected and eventually there was no drinking water left. They began stealing water at night. On being

caught, the Dalit men were beaten up. Amidst this violence, Subhadra broke the bund with a spade and the water started flowing. Subhadra's courage shines in this case, however the others question this courage. They say, "If she was just a mala or an untouchable she would not have dared to do such a thing. Therefore, it must be a goddess that possessed Subhadra." (Rao, 118) The others thought of stealing the water at night, while Subhadra out rightly did the act. This shows the constant fear of Dalits towards the upper caste. This episode in the text highlights two major ideas; firstly Subhadra's brave act and in turn courage of Dalit women. Secondly, revealing the truth as it is, that is, Rao talks about the fears and weaknesses of Dalits. He not only points out their struggle and fight, rather the whole process. Alternate histories do not highlight only the exploitation that would arouse sympathy, or only active struggle that would arouse appreciation, rather it shows the reality. It doesn't mould it for the sake of acceptance, but shows it as it is to challenge such an acceptance. Another instance that juxtaposes woman's courage against the Dalits' fear is that of Boodevi's reaction to missing Yellanna. She shouted and berated the elders, and insulted the Karanam (upper-caste) elders. She abused everyone in the ooru to the point that Yenkatanarsu dragged her and beat her, who had never raised hand on her. He did it because of the fear; he was afraid of what would the ooru elders do. In the text, he is described as a coward in contrast to Boodevi, who inspite of possible repercussions, fights for her missing nephew.

Various episodes in the text represent the dalits; creation of the mala mound, cultivation on the mound and resulting conflicts, fight against the upper-caste due to injustice to some mala or madiga. Each episode or story represents a Dalit's experience. This section of paper narrows down the representation of Dalits in the Naxalite Movement to elaborate on minority representation in the selected text. The involvement of Dalits in the movement is seen through Immanuel and his

generation. Immanuel joins Ramanujan in the communist work. He gets highly involved in the work, gets arrested and finally dies. This work is continued by his son Jessie and Rosy's daughter, Ruby, who fight for the rights of their people. He had joined a programme by Jana Natya Mandali in their village. Ruby joined Women's Organisation. They were taking steps to participate in a war of justice and survival. They would go on to villages and address people. Their story ends in a marriage and the author suggests that there is more to it. Dalit's involvement in the anti-caste movement in the novel represents their perspective towards it. It is not just about Immanuel, Jessie or Ruby who joined the movement actively, but also about their family members. The emotions and state of mind of those left behind could be seen in Ruth's character extensively toward the end of the last chapter. The Naxalite Movement, here, not only counts sacrifices, bloodshed, justice, and courage, but also accounts for each Dalit family and their emotional state during such a time. The novel captures such a state. For instance when Jessie leaves the house, Ruth, his grandmother visualizes Seventeenth July before her, the day on which Jessie walked in another direction, Karamchedu madiagapalli- the attack of the deadly weapons of the landlords float before her. Ruth entered into a state of mind where she questioned the life they have lived. Therefore, through Ruth's character, Rao gives a direct insight into the mind of a Dalit, who has seen life, who has heard about life, and is now a part of her memory. Ruth says, "Life is indeed a battle field. Everything is a war. This body, house, hunger, field....everything...everything....everything." (Rao, 261) The innermost thoughts and emotions are revealed to the readers. The minority perspective about the predicament of Dalits is unfold in the novel through Ruth's emotional state. Fiction therefore succeeds in narrating the perspectives which wouldn't have been known otherwise. No one would have known what a Dalit might have felt with their own life. The novel

definitely focuses on struggles, episodes of courage, fight against the upper-caste, everyday war etc, but one of the essential representations in the text is that of a Dalit mind.

Untouchable Spring gives innumerable insights into the Dalit Art forms. Yellanna loved to compose songs, and perform them. He never wrote them as he knew no alphabet. “All he had was a feeling heart, a shareable experience, tear-shedding eyes.....that was it, the song would weave itself.” (Rao, 6) Yellana’s love for songs and dance grew all the more with his encounter with Urumula Naganna in Pakkela Dinni to the point that he moved from village to village singing songs and sharing his knowledge with others. He came to be termed as “mala bairagi.” In the third chapter, Yellana’s experience in the Ganga Jatara festival gives an insight into their dance. A crowd of people, applying vermillion all over the body were singing and dancing. Yellanna joined them and danced as if in a trance. The conversation between the two, Yellanna and Naganna gives the details of the Urumula dance and the secret of Puranas. Naganna reveals how art form became a part of his life post a drastic event in his life. His life was filled with Gangamma’s song and the vermillion dance. Yellanna and Naganna represent the artist in Dalits. They too had their own way of composing songs, performing them and infusing them in their culture. Their lives weren’t reduced down to the mere war. Ruth in the novel points out, “Nagannas and Yellanas did not go after recognition. Didn’t dance to be known. Didn’t sing. Art was in their veins. In their blood. In the depths of their hearts. In their very sweat.” (Rao,43) The art they had and the puranic secrets they passed down had an embodiment of revolt. Each art form represented their selves.

The novel also represents the Dalits’ plight with reference to a performance. During any performance, the ooruu elders occupied the front seats, followed by barber and potter castes. The

malas and madigas would sit on the mound far away from the stage. They were not allowed to arrive before the upper-caste elders arrived. Once, when Naganna and Yellana's group performed a play in Yennella Dinni, they changed the routine tradition. They asked mala and madiga elders addressed as 'pedda mala' and 'pedda madiga' to occupy the front seats. However, the upper-castes couldn't digest this fact and they held Naganna and Yellana as criminals, because of raising mala and madiga to the level of a karanam or a kapu. In another incident, the fear of the worse prevented them to perform at Dibbalamitta. Yellanna thought not to perform would be the best way to save self-respect. The Dalit minority is represented in the text through their art form. This art was a confrontation that remained as history. It symbolizes three words; turmoil for art, agitation for song and revolt for dance. The art was affected due to caste ideology and Rao delicately sums this in an episode. When a British officer, Brown was interested in Telugu Literature, the Brahmin pundits and copywriters collected the works of only upper-caste people, excluding the art of the "other." On learning Pedakoteswarudu's writings, the upper-caste burns the pages and murder him. There is also a mention of Yerra Gollalu in the text. It was a group of artists who performed street plays for about fifteen days in a row. It had musicians, singers and actors.

4.3.3 Identity and Individuality in personal-political interface

"Everything is a war. From Yellanna who fled holding his life in his fist and ran to Jessie who is fighting an armed struggle for the people. From Subhadra who placed her foot on the dike and lifted her spade to Ruby who has become one with people like fish in water. Everything is a war. A long struggle." (Rao, 261)

The lives of Dalits were tangled in this war. The war of survival shaped their identity. Each individual life was caught up in the political paradigm. Several episodes of personal-political clash in the novel determine the identity of the Dalits. They had to fight for the 'self-identity' and self-respect as a human being against the staunch established social system. Each generation of Dalits fight in the battle of freedom and search for the identity continues, with several incidents intervening in their lives; floods, drought, conversion to Christianity, Naxalite Movement, however they are unable to determine who they are.

The identity of Dalits was determined by the 'boundary' system of the village. It was suppressed due to the constant dominance of the upper caste. Dalits were treated as 'pollutants', 'outcastes', and 'inferior.' They were not supposed to cross the line marked by the upper-caste. Doing so only led to violence. "The life of Yennela Dinni was all under Karanam's surveillance. It revolved around the lines he drew. Very little was in the hands of other castes. Malas and Madigas had no land at all." (Rao, 26) Malas and madigas in the text struggle for their identity for generations, but at the same time they fight for it and maintain their self-dignity. The personal and political is deeply intertwined that it moulded the identity of Dalits. In one case, political was the 'boundary system' that made Dalits the inferior race. A lot of episodes in the text support this stance. One example is, when malas and madigas of the palle cross the ooruu region and walk across the mound during the floods. This makes the upper-caste infuriated. Instead of providing them a helping hand during the crisis, they consider their entry into ooruu region as 'impure.' Another example is when Yellanna is chased away by the upper caste because he entered their area. As a child he was unaware of the truth of his 'caste.' They lashed at him and hit him with stones. Yellanna's identity was thrust upon him by the dominating structures even before he could

understand what it is. The line in the village marked their identity, irrespective of their talent and nature. For generations together they strived to achieve a sense of identity. They only wanted others to treat them as “humans.” The narrator in the text argues against the discrimination inflicted on the Dalits. He says, “They were human too. Two legs. Two hands. A brain. Like everyone else. Just like the Brahmins, Reddys....In Tamil Country, pariahs. In Kannada country, hoolelu. Among Telugus, malas and madigas.” (Rao, 144) Rao points that the situation of Dalits was the same in every corner of the country. Their identity was pre-defined and names were decided. Their individual selves had no scope of developing into unique individuals, no matter what they did, they were pushed into the space of “untouchability” created by the upper-caste. These examples show how the identity of the Dalits was framed by an exterior boundary system. The following novel locates the identity of the Dalits along the lines of politics of a village, or the country.

The identity of the Dalits as “untouchables” doesn’t change even in a bit when the villagers move outside the village. The mark of “untouchable” further affected their identity during the times of crisis. This is evident when Sivaiah and Sasirekha migrate elsewhere in search of food and water. When they bump into the construction site of Buckingham Canal, they ask for work. But the man refuses them because they are “untouchables.” Sivaiah wonders what makes them different from others. He questions his identity; “Even those coolies who threw stones at them had walked miles for livelihood. Just ordinary coolies. But hunger too had untouchability. Labour too had untouchability.” (Rao, 142) The moment they revealed their names, they were termed as “untouchables.” There was no scope for further identity formation. Rao’s novel counters this issue of label that marked their identity due to which they suffered terribly. Their identity affected their scope for betterment and their past affected their scope of determining a strong identity.

The novel is set in the postcolonial times, and marks the event of large scale conversion to Christianity. Dalits' conversion to Christianity plays a major role in their lives especially in terms of their identity. This conversion is viewed as an important historical event, and the novel shows its impact on the identity of the Dalits. On meeting Martin and Saramma, Sivaiah and Sasirekha convert to Christianity. Martin, formerly called Chinnodu, encounters a 'white' man on a horse who touches him. This 'touch' was a great thing for Chinnodu. He wondered no one until now had touched him except for other malas. After a month, he was baptized. Post this Martin's curiosity whether his untouchability had shed off increased. To which the white man replied, "For Christ, nobody is untouchable." Conversion to another religion seemed to promise a great deal of relief to the Dalits from the burden of "untouchability." For some days, for the first time in life perhaps Martin walked in confidence with a raised head. He spoke and addressed people in palle, read Bible verses; all this was a totally new life experience. Rather, the Dalits converted into Christianity to save themselves from the dominance of the upper-caste. This suggests the participation of the Dalits in a massive event mainly to alter their identity. In this case, the conversion event and their supposed identities go hand in hand. However, the novel shows how the label of "untouchability" never left their identity. Though conversion changed their lives for a short period the superiority or the dominance of the other class still ruled them. Eventually there was categorization of Christians into "mala and madiga Christians." There were attacks only on "untouchable" Christians. Even after conversion to a new religion, they were put in jail, tortured, paraded half-naked, etc. Rao gives various examples of torture towards mala and madiga Christians in different villages. For example, in the village of Cheemakurthi, a young madiga was caught and stabbed because of three reasons; he had bible in his hand, he wore slippers and he walked in the ooru region. The village was soon grappled with fear and anxiety due to increasing

attacks. The text shows the dynamic shift in the identity of Dalits from “untouchable” to new religion and back to “untouchable.” The event of conversion seemed to have more deadly effects on the Dalits for reasons as simple as holding a Bible in the hand. Their struggle for identity didn’t stop at that. It was Martin who took the initiative. He said, “We didn’t join the religion to keep silent. We didn’t get baptized to squirm our bodies.” (Rao, 170) He began preaching for their rights, who later followed by Simon, then Immanuel, Jessie and Ruby. The fight to determine their identity and shed off the label of “untouchability” remained for years together. They knew they were human beings, but they wanted others to realize the same. Rao details various episodes of exploitation to imply to the readers that every day in the life of Dalits was a day of war for survival and a struggle for identity. Rao also hints at the lack of freedom and choice due to the staunch hegemonic structures that had the ultimate hold over their lives.

Naxalite Movement in the text is a record of the lower caste uprising who fight against the ‘powerful.’ Their participation in the movement also acts as a kind of resistance. They emerge as brave individuals, trying to subvert the dominating in order to assert their true identity. Several characters such as Immanuel, Jessie and Ruby get involved in it. This event suggests their strong desire to establish an identity for themselves and strive for the betterment of their people. It can be summed up as fight for emancipation. In the wake of the Naxalite movement, ‘struggle’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘love’ and ‘courage’ came to be associated with the identity of Dalits. Their lives, and their notion of ‘self’ was influenced greatly, but all of it was because of the search for an ‘identity.’ Naxalite movement in the history of India made Dalits stronger and confident in their struggle for freedom and identity.

Though the Dalits strived for identity, they had kept it safe in their art forms. Their longing for achieving a stable identity was imbibed in their traditional dance forms, songs, and plays that are portrayed in the novel in contrast to the mainstream arts. The art forms reflect their deprivation of human right and identity. The art forms demonstrated in the text also represent the identity of Dalits. In terms of first statement, art is used to create awareness to establish their identity. For example, Yellanna uses his art learnt from Narigadu to create an awareness in the Dalit community. He changes the tradition followed before a performance by addressing the mala and madiga elders. An attempt to assert their identity turns violent. Post this, Yellanna leaves the village to give his art form a change, and he sings songs and passes the knowledge. In terms of the second statement, the art forms were their only identity. Therefore the art forms and culture in the text works as a paradox. Ruth mentions the songs they compose reflect their lives. “The song was born from every work done on the earth. They hid life in those songs. They made them voice love, sexuality, humour compassion...” (Rao, 42) Therefore different forms of art were the only mode of expression for Dalits to voice out themselves. Therefore, art in the text strongly determines their identity.

4.3.4 History in the text: an Observation

Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar, translators of the text state, “The book seeks to provide an alternate history.” (Rao, 278) They discuss Rao’s treatment of history, stating that the novel questions the authenticity of ‘written’ histories. Mainstream histories do not represent the truth, for instance, how a certain community is treated at a particular point of time. In the novel, there is a reference to Buckingham canal, a major event of the past. Rao represents the event from a Dalit’s perspective. ‘Untouchables’ were not allowed to work as coolie workers during the construction

of Buckingham Canal. Mainstream histories miss out how certain communities are treated at a particular point of time, and also neglect the lower caste warriors who play a major role in creating an alternate viewpoint. Rao's *Untouchable Spring* serves these two causes; he situates the predicament of Dalits over the years as well in particular points of time in history, and secondly, he highlights stories of the Dalit warriors such as Narigadu, Yellanna, Martin, Immanuel etc.

Malas and Madigas in the village continued cultivating the mala mound that was created by Narigadu and Mataiah, remembering their courage, sacrifice and blood. Rao states that history continued like that for several years, as each fight or struggle was a necessity. "The examples of Dalit history did not stop with them. The revolts, the struggles, the sacrifices and the courage of the untouchables- that history had not taken into account or even if it had, had not given it due importance." (Rao, 87) Rao questions the notion of history in the text. He argues how these experiences were not included in the pages of history. Even if they were, then to what extent? Therefore *Untouchable Spring* provides an alternate history to argue on the truth; these revolts were not a war but a necessity.

Alternate History could also be seen in the art and culture depicted in the novel. These art forms and creative skills were historically sidelined due to caste oppression. For instance the urumula dance form that comes to the fore through Yellanna and Naganna. In the text, the narrator mentions the 'urumula' dance to have been stolen and hidden in the temples by the upper castes as Perini dance. It emphasizes on the idea of 'stolen.' Just like their life, their art was also stolen. Stolen in this case could also mean never revealed. Rao embeds art forms of Dalit into the narrative to bring out the cause of the Dalits. Through various episodes in the text, Rao proves the dominance

of caste over art and he considers this to be a ‘catastrophe.’ Rao challenges this notion, and portrays art and creativity of the Dalits.

The novel also reveals the truth behind the conversion to Christianity. The dalits had participated in the massive conversion process in the hope of getting freedom and life of dignity. However their lives were changed only to face discrimination from another level. Mercy Margaret, a poet says, “Untouchable Spring reveals the so-called myths perpetuated behind the conversion of Dalits to Christianity.” She further added how the book has blurred the lines between the truth and the myth. She added, “I knew that I’m a converted Christian from my forefathers, but I never knew the absolute circumstances behind our forefathers’ conversion. This book has shown me that history.” Similarly, the novel has made another writer, Manasa Yendluri learn the history of her ancestors through the novel who shared the history of conversion to Christianity. This novel creates an alternate version of events during the conversion process from a Dalit’s perspective that was sidelined with the mainstream history.

4.4 Conclusion

Kalyana Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* is a neatly-woven Dalit narrative through a web of stories and experiences. Rao’s depiction of the predicament of Dalits to their participation in the major events of the history hints at possible alternate version of stories, which were otherwise sidelined. The novel is narrated from a minority perspective, thereby giving a strong base to the Dalit’s/ subaltern’s side of the story. The fusion of Dalit art forms and culture with their identity uncovers their suppressed talents and the need to establish their own identity. The novel through Ruth’s

perspective narrates a family saga, considering it as a historic responsibility to tell their version to the world. They sang the songs then, they wrote the words now, only to reveal who they are.

Chapter 5

Fabricating lives into Fiction: An Author's Perspective

5.1 Author in Goa: An introduction

This chapter includes the insights from the interview conducted to gain author's perspectives on writing fiction. As discussed in the former chapters, writers too play a major role in creating history of their times, or of a particular period. This interview focused on writer's side of the story and motives behind writing such a fiction. The following information provided by the concerned author serves as a first-hand information, which facilitates an understanding of fiction in the contemporary times.

Dr. Isabel de Santa Rita Vas is an Indian author, playwright, theatre director and a teacher. She is the founder of the Mustard Seed Art Company, a theatre group based in Goa. She has written as well as directed a lot of English plays under the Mustard Seed Art Company. She has been into teaching service for more than forty years across various educational institutions in Goa, including the Goa University. Her most notable work is *Frescoes in the Womb: Six Plays from Goa* published in 2012. The most recent publications are *A Time to Act: an anthology of Plays by the Mustard Seed Art Company* and *Stage Lights: an Anthology of plays on Amazing Lives, Singular Times*, both published in 2022.

Most of her plays are set in Goa, with a backdrop of real-life events. She incorporates what she sees as "real and factual" in her fictional works. Her plays often include a plethora of contrasting viewpoints. Each character tends to be different, and holds a view. For instance, her

most recent plays *It's a Bebinca Stupid!* is a reflection of post-pandemic times that includes the diverse responses to the one common event.

5.2 Fabricating Fiction

Fiction, sometimes could be a stark reality. However, there lies a difference between fiction and reality. What makes fiction different from reality is, the author says, the element of subjectivity. In a novel, short story or a play, the subjective interpretation is vaster, even if events and persons included are 'historical.' An author might retain the reality by referencing certain historical events, and make the plot or characters fictitious. For example, in the play *Kator Re Bhaji (Frescoes in the Womb)* which is based on Goan hypnotist Abbe Faria, main events of his life are referenced such as his voyage from Goa to Rome to Portugal to France, his family relationships etc. But other characters and happenings are fictitious. In the play, *Hold Up Sky*, set during the Cultural Revolution in China, majority of characters are real such as Chairman Mao, Madame Mao, Khang Sheng etc, and the story line is fictional. Dr.Vas mentions that, the motives of the characters or plotline are through analysis and understanding of the playwright. This implies that when an author creates fiction to portray the reality, there is a certain sense of analysis and interpretation of the events on the author's side.

Any historical happening would be termed as 'reality.' While depicting that reality in fictional works, authors tend to get a certain degree of freedom. Dr.Vas opines that 'a fictional writer can take some liberties but extreme of it might turn a piece into a satire or fable. But the writer might use their freedom in creating characters and interpreting events.' This brings to the idea that an author while creating fiction might situate fictional characters in a historical event who, or create

characters who represent real characters. Each character's side of the story, in this case, becomes an alternate version to that event of the history.

Fiction plays a vital role in representing certain sections of society or even the plight of a common individual at a particular point of time. Here, the role of a writer shines greatly. The writer of a piece of fiction takes into account the individual/ community stories and also assigns a certain degree of significance to it. Writers determine motive/s behind representing such voices. In some cases, these voices are a key in providing alternate stories. It is because the writers often represent those who haven't been heard yet. Dr. Vas' plays represent the minority of "opinion", that is a point of view that contrasts with the majority. Examples are plays such as *Harvest of Goa*- story of a lady's efforts from the Kunbi community to protect her farm land from the greedy construction lobby in Goa. *Bhaji Puri* involves 'women' and migration issues. These plays provide honest stories and points of view, different from the mainstream views. In brief, they give voice to the voiceless.

Another instance of representation of certain sect could be read in *Rabindrababu at the Post Office*, set along the First Partition of Bengal in 1905. The play highlights the tendency of people to discriminate against people they consider 'inferior.' The characters in the play are real historical persons from different strata of the society, including the upper-class, the working class etc. The events in the texts such as meetings are fictitious, and it touches upon the idea of "what if." This also serves as an alternate history.

A work of fiction often tends to have contrasting viewpoints. Dynamic conflict is crucial for the development of the play; it could be a conflict within a person's mind, between persons or between ideas or views. Fiction gives an opportunity to the author to make certain characters closest to their viewpoints. These contrasting viewpoints create complex plotlines and enrich the work. Dr. Vas notes, "This demanding complexity is part of the charm of writing a play." Two or more viewpoints in the same plot might also create the set up of challenging each other's viewpoints. This often happens in fiction with alternate histories, because it challenges the mainstream viewpoints or story. Fiction offers the flexibility to the authors to include diverse viewpoints; this helps in suggesting that a story or an event could have more stories to it. Each event could have multiple reactions that might otherwise go unnoticed. Fiction captures these viewpoints and makes them par with the mainstream viewpoints.

5.3 Author's role in making History

A writer contributes undoubtedly in making History. A writer tends to narrate stories and incidents of their own times, which render a great possibility of counting them as 'histories' in future. Dr. Vas agrees to this and mentions the notable works of some great authors such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, Pundalik Naik's *The Upheaval* and Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin*. All these works acquaint the readers with the social history of a time and place. As a result, the readers could grasp the events in their imagination.

For instance, *It's a Bebinca Stupid!* the most recent play is the story of the immediate past, and for the author it was her present that she captured. She captured what she saw, observed and experienced. There is a possibility that this work might be considered as a depiction of history in

the coming years. To this, the author agreed that ‘a not so popular view of the present might become widely accepted in the future as the information spreads.’ Likewise, she has mentioned alternate versions of the common, or the voiceless or the neglected sect of the society in her plays. And as time evolved, these viewpoints came to be accepted or at least known. They made their mark in the history of a said community or a period. For example, *Who Sits Behind My Eyes* focuses on the situation of the women of the fishing community in Goa and their challenges. Another play by her, *A leaf in the Wind*, remarkably her first play, is based on real life observation. In this work, she talks about the discrimination faced by the people living with HIV/AIDS. Much later, in the modern times, people are aware of such discrimination and such attitudes are changing. An author in a piece of fiction creates an awareness of their present that often leads to significant changes in the future. And when looked back at it, such a work represents a time which become a history. With fiction, and its contrasting viewpoints and personal observations on the part of the author, it becomes an alternate history.

Author’s focus on individual stories and experiences pave a way to alternate history. With regard to whether Dr. Vas’ plays offer alternate histories, the author mentions that some do. Her plays often portray multiple voices, especially those works that revolve around real historic events. These plays include characters from various walks of life, and each character has their own view or perspective. An example is *Playing with the Eye of the Dragon*; a play set during the Liberation of Goa in 1961 from the colonial rule and its impact on individuals from a particular neighborhood. Though the event was common to the whole state of Goa, there was diversity in the responses to that event. The above play captures that diversity and provides multiple alternatives of the impact the said event had left on the common people. One’s story might be different from another,

however it all becomes a part of history. Authors have the freedom to capture these stories or voices, and make them relevant in the present as history. Therefore writers capture the moment of the ‘present’ and hold it forever in the pages. Their words in the works they create are objects of history. Each word, each story, each viewpoint counts as history.

Historical events vary in the way they are depicted in a history book and in a piece of fiction. A writer holds credit to this difference. Dr.Vas holds a view, ‘Books of history are generally written by the powers at a given point of time and may disapprove of certain events or might alter it due to their “prejudices” whereas fiction is written from author’s perspective or explores a given subject in depth. This results in presenting a ‘subject’ with diverse nuances and greater complexity.’ Therefore fiction offers richer understanding of event/s through diverse characters, situations, plotline and themes. It offers a rigid comprehension of the cause and effects of event/s, than a history book that might only offer details of the event/s. History books may offer the minutest details, but the diversity, complexity and individual experiences are to be found only in fiction.

5.4 Writer and the Society

Alternate stories are written to reach a larger audience, to reveal the ‘other’ side, to uncover the truth and to voice out the voiceless. They are meant to create a difference in the society; be it their knowledge, opinions and attitudes, or general truths of the past. Dr.Vas’ certain plays could be categorized under the concept of ‘alternate history.’ The writer holds a motive or an agenda behind writing a work. Fiction that deals with proving alternate versions or stories often has its motives in relation to the society. Each author has his/her own way of going about it.

Dr.Vas observes ‘Covid’ pandemic as a major event in our social and personal lives. The play uses many layered Bebinca as a metaphor to the interconnectedness many people experienced during the pandemic. The play demonstrates the love and kindness, a positive aspect of the pandemic crisis- the alternate side of the story, which was otherwise only known to be a period of despair. The author of the play found the audience reflecting on their own phase of lives after watching the play. It suggests that any fiction (play in particular helps in immediate feedback), has a considerable impact on the society.

Authors hold a great responsibility in fabricating lives into fiction. It is sometimes also fabricating of a ‘society’ into fiction. Dr.Vas prioritizes characterization as a major aspect of fiction, while she also notes that other authors might choose to prioritize plots or settings. According to her, ‘a multi-dimensional character can grab the attention and empathy of the reader and remain in the memory unchallenged by the passage of time.’ The blend of a character from a real historical event into fiction makes an author weave fact and fiction together, thus fabricating lives, which are fictional but if looked in depth, are real.

Chapter 6

The Unending Process: The Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Remarks

Post-Independence a lot of Indian authors reflected their times in fiction. Ranging from national issues to individual problems, fiction in India focused on individual/community lives and explored it through complex plotlines. Period before Independence and after Independence in India was a crucial period in history. Fiction, both in English as well as regional languages explored history in it. Novelists' treatment of history proves important to this research. Writers weaved history in their works alongside the plot and characters. Works with alternate histories highlighting individual stories came to the fore. These texts not just serve history, but also comment on individual lives, their role in history, identity formation etc.

Hence, this research aimed to explore the theme of individual experiences and identity in Indian fiction through alternate historical perspective. The two texts chosen for the study are similar in terms of their narrative styles and method, however they reflect different persons, times and spaces. The two texts along with secondary sources looked at the nuances of alternate history in terms of an individual and his/her identity.

6.2 Findings of the study

On the basis of the research, the following findings have been presented:

The study looked at the points of differentiation between fact and fiction, in terms of constructing an alternate history. Many writers support the idea that fiction allows for more

subjectivity than the former. Both the texts, analyzed in the study provide details of the lives of individuals while exploring their relation with the ‘real’ historical events. The study concludes that fiction focuses on subjective experiences, responses and emotions whereas the former is used to give direct details.

The thorough analysis of the selected primary texts prove the relationship between personal experiences and history. In Rao’s *Untouchable Spring*, the detailed lives of Dalits and their constant encounter with the exterior events (often of the dominating nature) signify their role in shaping history. For example, their participation in the Naxalite Movement is History. In Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, narrator’s stories are a key to understand the personal-political paradigm. The text suggests each character’s involvement in an event is a part of history.

Fiction with alternate history is meant to represent the ‘other’ side or the ‘alternative.’ The reading and analysis carried out as a part of this research proves the above statement. Both the texts represent the voices of the common masses. The texts are situated in different times and places, and both are suggestive of people’s lives in that context. While Rao represents Dalits, Ghosh represents a middle-class family. By representing individual families, or individuals, the authors of the above two texts share their stories as a source to alternate histories.

The research also looked at the writer’s role in constructing an alternate history. The interview conducted to support this stance provides partial proof to the objectives of this research. Dr.Vas, the interviewee, an author and a playwright from Goa, agreed upon fiction having contrasting viewpoints. Her plays are largely fictionalized with a flavor of a ‘real’ event. Her plays and opinion

on fiction in general support the idea of a writer's contribution in creating history. Writers play a major role in capturing their 'present' which eventually turn into 'histories.'

The study made an observation on the authors' direct statements on 'history' in the concerned texts. While Ghosh calls it as 'silences', Rao says the 'missing pages' in the book. Authors create a sense of need to uncover the unknown histories. Therefore the stories they narrate turn out to be a source of understanding the suppressed histories. The narrators in both the texts make their attempts to narrate the alternate history visible. For instance, narrator's surfing of the newspaper reports in *The Shadow Lines*. In *Untouchable Spring*, narrator's constant emphasis on 'truth' leads to digging into the narratives of Dalits' experiences.

6.3 Hypothesis analysis

This study of "Exploring individual experiences and identity through alternate history in select Indian Fiction" is based on two-fold hypothesis. The first one states that: Historical event/s influence identity of individuals. The second one states that: Individual and personal experiences influence history. These statements have been proved to be partially right in the analysis of the primary texts, supported by several secondary sources.

This research looked at alternate history as a concept to understand the personal experiences that shape history and its influence on their identity. The research suggests both go hand in hand. A personal experience becomes a part of history. People's involvement in history shapes their identity. The two primary texts chosen for the study provide detailed accounts of a family and their

involvement in certain events in a particular context (that is, time and space). Through accounts of alternate histories narrated in the text, the above two hypotheses can be evaluated as follows.

Research supports the stance that historical event/s influence the identity of individuals. The direct or indirect involvement of individuals affect their responses, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Sometimes, it also influences their course of actions. G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* is an account of social history through a Dalit perspective. Their stories of predicament and struggle suggest their response to the events they were caught up in. Ranging from the political system of the village to Conversion to Christianity to Naxalite Movement, the individuals in the text underwent a series of changes. The transformation from 'passive' to 'active' or from one religion to another demonstrates the identity dynamics within the web of political events. The text also portrays their struggle for identity and how that process is hindered due to various events at play.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* highlights the lives of various individuals across time. The formation of 'selves' is explored in multiple characters. A thorough study of the text suggests a direct relationship between an individual and a historical event. One example is, direct impact of partition on narrator's grandmother. Her identity crisis proves the very possibility of an event to intervene in the lives of individuals. The text explores the involvement of other characters such as Tridib, Robi, May, Ila, grandmother, his parents and narrator in events such as Riots, war and partition. Post-partition is not an event, rather a phase that also influenced identities.

Research supports the second statement of the hypothesis, that is, ‘Individual experiences influence history.’ This study also analyses the importance of personal stories and experiences in creating an alternate history. Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* combines story-telling tradition and memory in narrating stories of the multiple generational family. These stories or experiences are looked at as alternate versions, mainly because they were suppressed, neglected, or unheard. Rao brings out these experiences as “the other side of the story” to the mainstream story. Rao’s infusion of Dalit art forms and culture also emphasizes representation of art forms that were never seen before. Characters’ involvement in various events becomes their experience. These experiences or stories count as histories.

In Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, personal experiences are largely born out of a certain event at a particular point of time. This text also adopts story-telling and memory technique in narrating the individual stories of the characters. By comparing and contrasting events across times, and eventually forming connections between them, Ghosh constructs history through personal experiences. The novel is largely a recollection of stories and events in an individual’s life, but these stories are largely concerned with the major events such as war, riot and partition. The analysis of the text suggests each personal experience counts as a history. By referring to the metaphor of ‘silences’ (assumed as alternate histories), Ghosh brings out those stories and experiences, in attempt to make them a significant part of History.

6.4 Scope for further study

This study focused on exploring alternate histories only in certain times and spaces. The two primary texts chosen for the study serve as the basis of the research. A lot of contemporary modern

Indian fiction is emerging. More texts and resources could be studied, with different objectives and hypothesis apart from this research project.

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Chapter 1 The Voice of the Past in Fiction: An Introduction 1.1 Introduction 'Alternate History' refers to an alternate or another version of events that contribute to history. In terms of literature it is mostly used as a sub-genre in speculative Science fiction, in which an author provides an alternate course of events different from the real events. (For example, time travel.) It also deals with "what could have happened." Alternate history in most fiction works deals with the idea of "what if." In a certain context, alternate history serves as an alternative to the mainstream history that was either undiscovered or neglected.