

**SALVAGING THE PAST: A STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL
NOVELS OF ALEX RUTHERFORD AND INDU SUNDARESAN**

**Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Linet Sebastian**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, **Salvaging the Past: A Study of the Historical Novels of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan**, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations, and bona fide research carried out by me, under the guidance of **Dr. Sajitha M.A.**, Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **Salvaging the Past: A Study of the Historical Novels of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan**, submitted by **Ms. Linet Sebastian** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research, carried out by her, under my supervision, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CONTENTS

Chapter I	Introduction	1 - 37
Chapter II	The Interpretative History and the Historical Fiction Narratives	38 - 73
Chapter III	Her Story Paradigms of the Mughal Historical Women	74 - 133
Chapter IV	The Reconstruction of the Mughal World in <i>Empire of the Moghul Series</i>	134 - 190
Chapter V	Conclusion	191 - 202
	Works Cited	203 - 214

Chapter I

Introduction

Historical fiction with its interblend of fact and fiction became an academically respectable genre and a vehicle for reconstructing and reimagining the past in unconventional ways. In the conventional paradigm, history and literature are placed at two opposite poles: history at the realistic pole and literature at the imaginative pole. Literature is a realm of pure imagination whereas history is a truthful fact of the bygone years written through rigorous academic research. In light of the contemporary narrative theory, both are identified as transgressing the borders of fact and fiction. Over the past few years, the relationship between history and fiction has become increasingly entwined and this problematic relationship has been analysed by the novelists, historiographers, and philosophers of history. The history fiction nebulous has its roots in the ancient literary criticism right from Aristotle. In *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that literature imaginatively recreates events more philosophically while history merely depicts records of events.

Historical fiction provides a textual supplement to academic history and it offers something in the place of conventional history - the other unseen and unheard past. Historical fictions are an attempt to reinvent a more possible past that is beyond the scope of the conventional historical text. The study argues that the select novels of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaesan have transgressed the boundaries between fact and fiction and question the monology and objectivity of history as a discipline. R.G. Collingwood challenges the classical approach towards history as

authentic and states that the writing of history needs both the capabilities of perception and thinking. For him, historical imagination makes a constant correspondence between history and imagination that focuses on the creative possibilities of history and it reminds us that history writing becomes a constant interaction between the past and the present. This interaction is carried out by “interpolating” or by “bridging the gaps” in the available historical sources. R. G. Collingwood defines the process of constructing history as “one of interpolating . . . or bridging the gaps in what our sources tell us, in an obvious use of the historical imagination” (240-241).

The thesis concentrates on how the past and imaginative fiction is tied together in the praxis called historical fiction. This thesis attempts to explore the interblend of fact and fiction in the select historical fictions, analyses the reciprocal relation of history and historical fictions, the significance of reconstructing history from multiple perspectives, and the discursive nature of history as a discipline. The postmodern philosophy of history has stressed the polyphonous nature of the past. The conventional history has certain limitations as it excludes the role of women and other marginalised sections in the historical process. Historical fiction is an apt medium to remind the gendered asymmetries of power prevalent in the discipline of history. This thesis studies the significant patterns of interblend of history and imagination in the fictional works of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaesan. The select novels of Indu Sundaesan and Alex Rutherford come under the ambit of historical fiction and the novels are based on Mughal history.

In this thesis, salvaging the past signifies an attempt to retrieve the past to

reinterpret it to encompass all possible entities of the past. The contemporary theories in the domain of historical discourses have given new meanings to the past and new strategies to the inquiry of it. An interpretative effort in history enables the evaluation of history in terms of different sets of parameters. The rereading of history attempts to juxtapose it with the social realities. Maintaining an argumentative tradition in the field of historical discipline provides a better understanding of the past. Romila Thapar observes that the right sense of the past provides, “The right context for any discussion on current concerns including debates about economic growth, the establishing of a greater degree of social equality and comprehending the potential of a multiple cultural heritage” (15). Historical fiction can provide a solid level of interdisciplinary information in the rereading of history. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan, in their attempt to reconstruct the Mughal history, have taken the official history of the Mughal Empire and imagined a more plausible Mughal past.

History is the investigation and elucidation, exploration, and explanation of the past events of humanity. History is multidimensional as it involves the reconstruction of cultural artefacts, political life, social and religious practices, the position of women, and many more things related to the existence of human life. Historical narrativity is the emplotment of the past events by a historian and historiography is the process of writing the past as a discipline. Metafiction pinpoints how texts are constructed which revolves around postmodern issues such as the formulation of reality and truth. Historiographical metafiction emphasises the larger theoretical issues about the writing of the past, reconstruction of it, and it

explains history as another kind of narrative construction. The amalgamation of fiction, fact, and fabrication raised a sense of scepticism about conventional history. Hence, historical fiction shares the qualities of a “veracious imagination”. The evaluation and interpretation of the historical source are like a winnowing process to know the truth. This has enriched a historian with multiple facts and truths. This new practice of interpretation and experimentation in the discourse of history made a historian more humble and broad-minded rather than a tyrannical master of the past.

The terms “history” and “story” are derived from the same word ‘historical’: etymologically, which means an account of imaginary events or events believed among a small group of people. But later those two words have developed separately and “history” meant an account of the real events of the past and “story” has come to mean an account of imaginary events. Some contemporary novelists began to perceive historical fiction as another way of integrating the past by supplementing events to be true or even creating an alternate history. Historical fiction, in simple terms possibly is defined as the fictional account of the past. It is a memory or an imagination about the past events which may be real or fictional. Jerome de Groot writes, “The inter-genric hybridity and flexibility of historical fiction have long been one of its defining characteristics” (2). Historical fiction can be of any type such as detective, horror, thriller, counterfactual, gothic, and postmodern.

In the post-truth era, there is an attempt to dismantle the concept of “truth”. Historical revisionism or the interpretative strategy in the light of the new facts to achieve a broader view became an innovative development in the field of the

historical discipline. Historical fictions attempt to complement the official history. Since historical fiction has become an increasingly important tool for the common man to understand the past, it is important to understand what constitutes historical fiction. Galda and Cullinan relate fiction about the past as an interesting genre consisting of "imaginative stories grounded in the facts of our past" (205). They further add that:

Historical fiction differs from nonfiction in that it not only presents facts or re-creates a time and place, but also weaves the facts into a fictional story. Historical fiction is realistic-the events could have occurred and people portrayed could have lived-but it differs from contemporary realistic fiction in that the stories are set in the past rather than the present. (205)

Historical fiction claims to reveal more about the past and the untold characteristics of the historical figures. There are opinions about the insufficiency of academic history. Jacobs and Tunnell state, why they consider history textbooks are inadequate, "The people are missing! The best one-word definition of history is, in fact, 'people'. Without human beings, whose emotion and actions influence the times, there is no history" (117). Historical fiction recreates the past from the standpoint of the common man. The tradition of historical fiction has woven around the invisible masses of heterogeneity and plurality. Not much was talked about them in the conventional and chronological framework of academic history. Only a privileged minority involved in the breathtaking battles with heroism, invaders, the overarching emperors, and their chieftains were narrated in the traditional and classical history. This thesis is a study of the historical novels of Alex Rutherford

and Indu Sundaresan. Both of them have anchored their creative genius to depict the rise and downbeat of the most vigorous, rich, and glamorous dynasty in the history of India: the Mughal dynasty. Soon after the foundation of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, it became a synonym for boundless and immeasurable wealth. The rich raw materials and the vastness of the country triggered Babur the first emperor of the Mughal dynasty to bounce back from every setback to conquer India. He had also the ambition to stand in the line of the accomplishments of his ancestors Genghis Khan and Timur. During the Mughal time dynasty was fortified by the concept of hereditary rule.

The admiration of historical fiction can be understood in corollary with the public's recurring interest in the genre of historical fiction. Historical fiction is not the sub-genre of history as many people wrongly perceived. Even in contemporary times, historical fiction remains popular with authors and readers. The authority and control exerted by the male writers have generally played a key role in determining the inclusions and exclusions of the historical discourse. These historiographers concentrate on male authority and marginalised the female voices. As language is the only medium to narrate the past, the representation of the past is inevitably entangled in the myriad complexities of a text with the interplay of poetry, romance, imagery, and representational strategies. Hence, a historical text thus, like any other text, becomes 'polysemous, polyphonous and multi-layered'. It is open to multiple interpretations, debates, and discussions. Historical discourse has freed itself from the attempt to 'fix' meaning to history and provide a single objective record of events, instead, history becomes open to a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. The indeterminacy of meaning unfastens the way for the inclusion of

heterodox voices to generate provisional, conflicting, and unstable meanings. Such a perspective incorporates divergent viewpoints in the discipline of history. This concept is the backbone of all historical novels.

The Mughal dynasty had a lasting impact on the entire composition of the country. Both Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan became increasingly enamoured about the creators of the great Mughal monuments of Northern India – Humayun’s Tomb, Red Fort, Akbar’s Tomb, Taj Mahal, and Fort in Agra. These Mughal monuments and their ruling time have spilled a spellbinding dynastic saga in their minds.

Alex Rutherford is the pseudonym of the couple writers Diana Preston and her husband Michael Preston. Both of them are desirous travellers and they have visited more than 140 countries across the world. They have chosen the name Alex, since it is one of the few names in English that can indicate either male or female. As admiration for the New Zealand scientist and Nobel Prize winner Ernest Rutherford, they chose the second name as ‘Rutherford’. India was their favourite country to write about as they were fascinated by the sights and sounds of the country. Their first visit was a catalyst to them and like most of the visitors, they were captivated by the beauty of the Taj Mahal. Alex Rutherford has spent almost two years in India researching the physical and emotional details of the Mughal rule in India, examining the chronicles, battles, deaths, executions, diaries, and letters. These searches revealed before them the compelling and exuberant anecdotes of the Mughal times. Rutherford’s *Empire of the Moghul* series tries to reconstruct the Mughal world.

Indu Sundaresan is an expatriate Indian novelist, settled in the U. S now. Her *Taj Trilogy* evoked considerable interest among the critics and readers. In her *Taj Trilogy*, she creates an enchanting 17th-century story of one of India's most acclaimed and controversial Mughal empress, Nur Jahan: a woman of brilliance and determination who shaped the course of the Mughal Empire. *Shadow Princess*, the third novel in the trilogy is about the struggle and supremacy of Jahanara, the daughter of Shah Jahan. Sundaresan brings home the empowering and engaging lives of two Mughal princesses through the trilogy. She recreates the profound history of the Mughal times through a gendered perspective. Her extensive researches into the books, travelogues, memoirs, chronicles, and collection of letters of the Mughal times have its profound reflection in the novels. Romila Thapar observes in her *The Past as Present*, "The history of women in India is now eliciting far more interest than it has done before" (26).

Indu Sundaresan's historical fiction in the *Taj Trilogy* signifies a feminist intervention into the conventional historical discipline. Sundaresan's reconstruction of Mughal history through the feminist viewpoints is an attempt to reclaim the heroines of the Mughal period such as Nur Jahan and Jahanara from marginality and misrepresentation in the patriarchal historiography. This quest raised by Sundaresan is an imaginative and political task, offering scope for the writer to rebuild the histories of her ancestors. By rereading the histories of Nur Jahan and Jahanara, Sundaresan provides alternate historical texts and points to the practices involved in historiography-those of selection and removal; explanation and compaction.

Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have juxtaposed their works with

history, historical narrativity, and history fiction interface as an all in one mixture with a pluralistic narrative paradigm. They created a kaleidoscopic aesthetic experience for the readers. These writers present themselves in the different historical context of Mughal India, revealing an extensive polychromatic view of the grand, colourful, and yet cast down the history of the Great Mughal Empire. All the novels selected for the study have a direct implication on Mughal history. Though these select novels written in contemporary times, it throws back a very compelling sense of history and thus it partakes in salvaging the past. They have taken slices of the past and mix it with imaginative elements and gave birth to their novels. These writers have made brilliant experiments with the threads of Indian history. A significant number of novels in India have been written in response to the landmarks of historical movements or events such as the Gandhian movement, British rule and partition of the country, and evolution of the new India.

Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Trilogy* highlights the role of powerful women in the administration of Mughal Courts. The reconstructive endeavour from the part of a historic novelist makes a serious attempt to depict cultural minority and marginalised sections in a powerful manner. The academic community as well as the common man confronted with the shortage of quality narrative about the literary, cultural, and historical impacts of racial and ethnic minority groups and women. Historian Robert Darnton argues that all artefacts and data collected and disseminated by the scholars and historians have gone through the processes of selective exclusion and inclusion. He adds:

You may open a box of manuscripts and confront information in the form of

letters or diaries or memos. But this raw material isn't raw at all. It's cooked. Every document embodies some rhetorical convention, argues for some hidden agenda, must be read between the lines and related to all the surrounding documents. (15)

Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan create a veritable experience of the Mughal world which is different from a historical textbook. The Mughal India that they have framed through their novels imparted a unique sense of the past. Before going deep into the revisionist reading strategy of Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford, it will be helpful to understand the already existing images of Mughal India portrayed by other writers. Poetry, prose, history, and biography were extensively produced during the Mughal times. Historian Abul Faisi's (1551-1602) *Akbarnama* is an important historical record about the administration of Akbar. Babur's autobiography *Baburnama* evokes a living picture of the inception of Mughal rule in India. Badauni, a noted historian and an orthodox Muslim of the Mughal court writes critically about the secular policies adopted by Akbar. *Tuzuk I Jahangiri*, the memoir written by Jahangir is a significant source to explore the socio-cultural aspects of Jahangir's time. Gulbadan Begum, the daughter of Humayun wrote *Humayunnama*, an account about the reign of Emperor Humayun gives a detailed account of the position of royal women in the court and their significance. Shah Jahan's eldest daughter Princess Jahanara Begum's autobiographical Sufi treatise *Risala-i-Sahibiyah* gives the pen picture of the impact of Sufi order among the Mughal Emperors and queens. Both Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford have heavily depended on these material resources for their historical fictions on the Mughal times.

Jaishree Mishra's *Rani*, Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*, William Dalrymple's *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, John Speed's *The Temple Dancer* and *Tiger Claws* are some of the literary works about the Mughal period. Tanushree Podder's *Nur Jahan's Daughter* is an absorbing tale about Ladli, the forgotten daughter of Nur Jahan. The novel explores the greatness of Nur Jahan as an Empress of the Mughal Empire.

Postmodern historical fictions allow pluralistic voices of the alternative past by subverting historical documents and facts. Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress of Florence* (2008) is a historiographic metafiction that narrates the history of Mughal India and the impact of the renaissance. He recreates the Mughal period under the rule of Akbar. The novel deals with the visit of a strange Mughal from the city of Florence in Italy to the city of Fatehpur Sikri, built by Akbar. It is a mix of fact, fantasy, reality, and history. Svetlana Alexievich, a contemporary writer and a Nobel laureate has experimented with the possibilities of multifarious past by approaching history from different facets. She used memory as a perfect historical source and thereby stressed the polyphonic nature of history. Alexievich's *Second-hand Time* progresses through the testimonies told by various participants. Alexievich taps the full possibilities of oral history in her historical narratives. Traditionally, oral history does not come under the purview of academic history.

William Dalrymple is a reputed travel writer known for his popular narrative histories. His *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (2003) is a social history of 18th century India, focusing on the interracial relationship among people of that time. *White Mughals* was his first experiment with narrative

history. In this book, he narrates history like a story and avoids the serious factual tone of academic history. He wrote a hybrid genre that fascinated history lovers and literary readers alike. Dalrymple's *Last Mughal: The Fall of Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (2006) also focuses on the disintegration and political decline of the Mughal Empire during the rule of Bahadursha Safar. In contemporary times history, fiction, autobiography, and biography are interblended to form a new style of writing. These materials were taken as serious sources or backbone of history.

L.P.Sharma in his book *The Mughal Empire* (1988) traces the history of Mughal times in a conventional style. He has concentrated only on the political aspect of the Empire and the administrative policies of the six major Emperors. The socio-political spaces of women were completely neglected and he has allotted a few pages for Nur Jahan, a single paragraph for Mumtaz Mahal and Jahanara's hold in the court is completely missed out. John.F.Richards' influential text *The Mughal Empire* (2001) presents a detailed account of the Mughal rule from Babur onwards and he has described the constant political struggles of the emperors. John. F. Richards acclaims Akbar as, "The Emperor himself, rather than a physical site, was the capital of the empire" (12). Nur Jahan is the only Mughal royal woman who gets even a scanty reference in Richard's work as Jahangir's reign is inseparably entwined with her life period. S.M. Edwardes and H.L.O.Garrett in their book *Mughal Rule in India* (1962) write about the life and times of the six Mughal emperors and their major contributions to Mughal India. They observed that Akbar is "a born leader of men and can rightly claim to be one of the mightiest sovereigns known to history" (53). While analysing Nur Jahan's role in Jahangir's

administration, Garret sarcastically remarked, “Her influence over the emperor, sodden with drunk and opium, was enormous” (60).

Scholars have explored Mughal history with a revisionist perspective to construct it from a feminist standpoint. Sundaresan in her *Taj Trilogy* novels opens up the fascinating world of royal women in the harem and their influence in the affairs of the court. History as a discourse practised by male writers generally stands by the traditional canonical parameters of historiography by neglecting gender and female subjectivity. The patriarchal and hegemonic nature of such historical narratives, demand the necessity for women to break it to create alternate histories or “her stories” which will be “inclusive and pluralist rather than exclusive and monolithically male” (*Preface to Feminist Criticism and Social Change* xii). Women writers open new horizons of her story paradigms by denying the traditional male voice of history which is seen as the authentic document of the past. Such a new re-reading of history challenges “dominance” and “authority” of male-centered historical vision and it enriches the diversity and multiplicity of history which is truly the innate characteristic of history. Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford remind the necessity of the reconstruction of the Mughal past from different angles to heighten the effectiveness of history through their historical fictions.

Rekha Misra’s text *Women in Mughal India* (1967) tries to reconstruct the power exhibited by the royal women in Mughal court. She comments, “The family of Babur which inherited the traditions of Chingiz Khan and Timur allowed their families sufficient political right and enabled them to share the political rights”(16-17). Fatima Mernissi in her *Hidden from History, Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993)

draws the significance of the female historical figures such as Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and many other prominent ladies of the Mughal court. K.S.Lal in his *The Mughal Harem* (1988) makes a detailed study of the Mughal harem and its influence in the administration. Kathryn Lasky's *Jahanara: Princess of Princesses* (2002) is an admirable work about Shah Jahan's eldest daughter Princess Jahanara.

Many theoreticians, historians, and novelists have identified the similarities between “fictional narrative” and “historical narrative” in the last three decades. They have reinterpreted Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history, which survives even today. In his comparison of poetry and history, Aristotle speaks about the universality of poetry, because it has a higher subject matter. In a famous passage of the *Poetics*, Aristotle's observation runs like this:

It will be clear from what I have said that it is not the poet's function to describe what has actually happened, but the kinds of things that might happen, that is, that could happen because they are, in the circumstances, either probable or necessary. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse ...The difference is that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason, poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history, for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats particular facts. (14)

The above-quoted passage makes it very clear that Aristotle says that the historian speaks about the particularities of “ what has happened” whereas the poet on the other hand speaks of “ what could or might happen” and so poetry has more

universality than history. Aristotle's writing regarding history and poetry, especially his concept of "mimesis" formed the basis of most of the western criticism till the nineteenth century. The principle of "mimesis" argues that poets not only copy the external events but he reshapes these events into an organic whole. Aristotle's *Poetics* emerges as a foundational stone to the discussion of the linguistic turn of history. The interpretative narratives such as literary narratives have the power to absorb the holistic nature of the past and its strangeness. Historians reconstruct the past through memory, evidentiary traces, and other considerable material artefacts. This truth claim necessitates self-reflexive scrutiny to prove its objectivity.

The historical novel is an imperishable popular genre that speaks aloft serious questions about literary concepts, fact and fiction, identity, history, and the philosophical strains of narratology. Groot in his seminal work *The Historical Novel* offers a complete and detailed introduction to the genre of historical fiction by focusing all the critical debates around it including the origin and evolution of the historical novel from the early eighteenth century to postmodern and contemporary historical fiction. This text also discusses counterfactual writing, the encounter between fact and fiction, the related issues of the audience, the authenticity of the historical novels, and the numerous uses of historical fiction. Groot particularly focused on the connection of the historical novel to the larger cultural sphere. Groot writes about the complex relationship between historical and literary in his text *Remaking History: The past in Contemporary Historical Fiction*.

Historical fiction is a complex genre that looks into all the nuances related to the discipline of history. Many contemporary writers such as Orhan Pamuk, Gore

Vidal, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison have written their masterpieces in the backdrop of the historical setting. Gustave Flaubert and Leo Tolstoy envisaged their historical fictions not as novels but as experiments and serious interrogations of the cultural life of people who lived in the bygone years.

History is to be simply defined as the familiar present. The historical novel is an attempt to recognise the possibilities of the past by thinking and imagining the present. The historical novelist explores the incongruity and dispersion between two historical times then and now, making the past understandable but at the same time unfamiliar. Alessandro Manzoni thinks that the historical novelist is supposed to furnish not just the bare bones of history but something more perfect and complete. The historical figures in these texts are understandable because they speak the same language that the common man speaks and they encounter the very present-day realities and dilemmas and their concerns are similar to us. The circumstances and situations may be different. Historical fiction conceptualises the multiplicities of memories of the past from the standpoint of the common man.

Walter Scott's *Waverly* is an inaugurating text of the historical novel and it is evolved from the novels of Defoe and Fielding. Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish historical novelist, playwright, and poet. His first published novel was *Waverly* (1814), and it was followed by *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary* (1816). These novels together formed a trilogy that provides Scottish history from the 1740s to the 1800s. His other notable novel was *Ivanhoe* which was also a commercial success. *Ivanhoe* ignited among the scholars and in general an interest in the medieval period. Historical novels emerged as a coincidence along with the writing

of history. Even though Walter Scott provided the foundation of the genre called historical fiction, it was George Lukacs who made a pioneering attempt to give a theoretical approach to this genre in his *The Historical Novel* (1937).

Lukacs considers *Waverly* as the first historical fiction. As a Marxist historian, he thought, “The most important thing here is the increasing historical awareness of the decisive role played in human progress by the struggle of classes in history” (26). But to Lukacs, Scott did not pay ample strength to the struggle of classes in history. Later, Lukacs made another important observation, “Scotts’s historical novel is a direct continuation of the great social novel of the 18th century” (30). He further adds that, “What matters, therefore, in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel, and act just as they did in historical reality” (27).

The foundation stone of the theoretical understanding of historical fiction was laid down by Marxist literary theorist George Lukacs, from which later theoreticians begin their study. In his seminal work *The Historical Novel* (1955), he identifies the emergence of historical fiction as the result of social forces in the 19th century. Lukacs’ appraisal of historical novels was influenced by the Marxist theoretical perspectives and it shows a sense of history emerged from enlightenment, development of the sense of nationalism, and exactly the French Revolution. Medieval readers considered epics and legends as an accurate presentation of historical facts and reality. The original historiography of the medieval period

according to Fleischman was “annals” and “chronicles”. Annals and chronicles lacked the structure of an official history which is marked by discontinuities and gaps. This sort of historiography organised only based on chronological order and it lacked logical connection.

The postmodern historians argue that both annals and chronicles are the imperfect portrayals of the past and so the history based on these sources also suffers a similar issue. The renaissance history was distinctively different from the medieval annals and chronicles. History in the renaissance period became more focused, continuous, selective, and integrated. The modern concept of history evolved out from the renaissance consciousness of the depiction of the past. During the eighteenth century, history began to be evolving as an independent discipline free from religious sentiments.

The category of historical fiction has no exact definition, as it changes its meanings and uses with every new writer. Alessandro Manzoni, who lived in Italy in the nineteenth century, wrote an essay on historical novels and it was a pioneering attempt in the study of its significance, the interface between fiction and history, nature and scope of the genre. He was not happy with this genre because he says it failed to satisfy the expectations of the readers. As it is a mix of “things that occurred and things that have been invented, two different objects of two different fully contrary, sorts of belief” (21), such novels are not useful for the readers. His idea of historical fiction is not relevant in the present context. The boundary between history and fiction cannot be a fixed one. But Manzoni was aware of the confusion created by the genre of historical fiction.

George Lukacs argues that his book is a part of “a theoretical examination of the interaction between the historical spirit and the great genres of literature which portray the totality of history in the context of bourgeois literature” (13). He aimed to “show how the historical novel in its origin, development, rise, and decline follows inevitably upon the great social transformations of modern times” (17). Lukacs sees the life of humanity as a historical process and a good historical novel should portray man’s location in time conditioned by socio-economic development. So an exact retelling of the historical events is not needed. Lukacs praised the methods adopted by Scott in his historical novels. Lukacs does not consider the factual errors in Scott’s novel as a serious flaw.

Avrom Fleishman came up with a more holistic exposition of the term by including within the frame of historical novels a number of writers who were excluded by Lukacs. He forwards some criteria for a historical novel. Firstly it should be “set in the past –beyond an arbitrary number of years, say 40-60”. Secondly, its plot “must include a number of historical events particularly those in the public sphere - war, politics, economic changes” (3). Fleishman says, “When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when novel’s characters live in the same world with historical persons we have a historical novel “(4). Fleishman’s discussion ends with the idea that genuine historical fiction is born out of “historical imagination” (14). Fleishman had a very comprehensive view of the term historical fiction than the other two thinkers already discussed.

F.J. Tickner in *An Anthology of Modern Historical Fiction* gives his explanation of the term historical fiction as it “must conform to the fact by a

reasonable show of historical accuracy. The actual personages who appear in its pages must resemble with more or less closely, the real persons of history: the fictitious characters must behave more or less as if they had been living at the time”(X). T.N. Dhar observes that Tickner combines the concepts of Fleishman and Lukacs. Tickner’s idea behind his definition is like this, “There is a fixed view of the past, of the people and events of a particular time, to which historical novels should conform as far as possible”(16). After the decline of positivistic philosophy, there has been a change in the attitude of the past and its objectivity. A uniform, generalised view of the past has been rejected by the thinkers. Many novelists write novels on history to project their dissatisfaction with the writing of history. Harry Henderson in his attempt of defining historical fiction shows a greater awareness of the complex interrelations between history and fiction.

Henderson advocates a pragmatic and flexible approach by adopting the “philosophic method” instead of the “historical method”. Henderson argues in favour of the legitimacy of the novelist to make assumptions about the past. To avoid the methodological issues in the history fiction interface, Joseph Turner has come up with a new theory of the historical novel. He proposes three categories of historical novels within two boundaries, “One between the historical novel and other fiction, one between historical novels and narrative history” (336). The three categories of historical novels are the documented historical novel, the disguised historical novel, and the invented historical novel. The documented historical novel incorporates actual events available to us through the official records and also appears in academic history. A disguised historical novel on the other hand shows

the novelist's interest in the past. It stands between documented historical fiction and conventional fiction. But in the invented historical fiction characters and events may be imaginary.

Turner divides historical novelists also into three categories based on Hegel's three classes of historical consciousness such as original, reflective, and philosophical. Turner's personal preference is the novels of philosophic mode for it widens the scope of the historical fiction. Turner admits the fact that more studies to be done on this category. Since history fiction interface has reached more complicated terms in recent times, Turner's concept of historical fiction underlines the significance of the rethinking of the scope of this genre is very relevant.

The influence of historical fiction in the 20th century is the result of the influence of postmodern philosophy which believed in the destabilisation of the conventional academic history. Thoughtful questions were posed against the factuality of "historical factor" or the honesty of sources and its interpretations in constructing the idea of the past. Historiographers and historical novelists in the last few decades have shown extensive interest in the problems surrounding the narrativisation of history. This awareness has also lead to the philosophical questioning of the power of discourse to shape our concepts of reality. The term postmodernism suggests how the writers try to deal with this dilemma. Historical fiction offers many kinds of variant histories. Linda Hutcheon called such text, "historiographic metafiction" (5).

Hayden White in his article "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" and his other writings on the nature of historiography and the historical

imagination, analyses the advantages and the disadvantages of the narrativisation of history. The true value of all kinds of narratives including historiography is its power to communicate ideas to other people and it expresses the notion of reality. Since historiography is a communicative agency, it has to follow certain conventions that make understanding possible. These conventions of narrativity are common to both historians as well as to fiction writers which ensures the effective communication of truth and the views of the world.

In India, historical fiction became a crucible for the awakening of national history before independence. It became an important channel to spread the social and historical reality among the emerging middle class. This genre of fiction became a part of the typology of nationhood and helped to define the concept of a “nation”. In recent years, one of the striking features of the Indian novel in English is its tendency to narrate the nation’s histories. Until the publication and grand success of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, the “Western” vision of India remained dominant in the world of fiction written in English. The renaissance leaders in India like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote the glory of the past of the country through their speeches and writings. Nationalistic ideas had a sweeping appeal among the common people with the introduction of the printing press and the publishing agencies. All these factors created a consciousness about the past of the nation which resulted in the extensive publication of historical fiction from 1930 onwards. In the initial phase, the historical novel in India was published in the regional languages. The foreign

writers were interested in Indian history and they wrote Anglo-Indian historical novels. These writers were followed by Indian authors who created historical novels based on important historical events or incidents in India in the English language. Thus the Indian historical novel in English began to emerge slowly.

Bengal took the baton in the social, political, and cultural renaissance in India in the 19th century. The emergence of middle classes took place first in Bengal when compared to other Indian states because the entire social condition in Bengal was favourable to that. Thus the birth of both novel and prose happened in the Bengali language much earlier than in any other regional language. The intellectuals from Bengal keenly observed and studied European literary styles. Bankim Chandra, Pyari Chand Mitra, and Bhudeb Mukherjee from Bengal were the pioneers of Indian novels in English. Bengali writer Bankim Chandra's *Raj Mohan's Wife* is considered the first Indian novel in English. The Indo-Anglian novel began to develop along with the influences of the Anglo-Indian novel and the Indian novel in the regional languages of India. Many of the Anglo-Indian novels were historical novels. Meadows Taylor's *Tippu Sultan* (1840) is considered the first Anglo-Indian historical novel. The novel deals with the reign of Hyder Ali, Tippu's father and it vividly portrays the rule of these Muslim kings, their courtly life, harems, religious faith, and the controversies in the court. Meadows Taylor's other historical novels were *Tara*, *Ralph Darnell*, and *Seeta*. This sudden surge of historical fiction in India shows that the genre of historical fiction fascinated both the novelist and the common man alike.

The Revolt of 1857 was a major incident upon which many historical novels

were written. Meadows Taylor was an inspiration to many English writers to write novels based on the history of India. Anglo-Indian novelists like Mollie Kaye, John Masters, Paul West, and Robert Payne continued the tradition of historical novels even after the independence of India. John Master's novels *Bhawani Junction* and *Nightrunners of Bengal*, Mollie Kaye's *The Shadow of the Moon* (1957) were about the Revolt of 1857. Robert Payne's novel *The Tortured and the Dammed* deals with the emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee inaugurated the genre of historical fiction in Indian English literature with his *Durgesh Nandini* (1865). The novels began with historical themes and settings in many of the Indian regional literature. Bankim Chandra's other important historical novels were *Raj Singh* (1881) and *Anandamath* (1891).

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her *Twice Born Fiction* (1971) says about the evolution and development of Indian historical fictions as:

While Scott's realistic social novel was itself the direct confirmation of the great realistic social novel in the eighteenth century, the novel in India made its first appearance in most of the Indian languages as historical romance and did not have its foundations in a tradition of social or political realism as did the great historical novels of the West. (19-20)

Meenakshi Mukherjee further points out about this historical beginning of the Indian novel:

It is interesting to note that the novel emerged at different times in different regions of India but almost everywhere the first crop showed a preoccupation

with historical romance. The historical novels published after *Raj Singh* could not outgrow the limitations of the historical romance. Even the Anglo Indian writers could not publish good historical novels. (19)

Sardar Joginder Singh, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Romesh Chunder Datt wrote historical novels. All others except Joginder Singh wrote historical novels in Bengali and then translated them into English. These writers were the pioneers of Bengali historical novels as well as the historical novels in India. Mulk Raj Anand's trilogy *The Village, Across the Black waters, The Sword and the Sickle* were published between 1939 and 1942. The novels also turned to depict the changing political life of the country. It combined the historical, social, and political dimensions of the time. R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, K. A. Abbas's *Inquilab*, Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, and Nahal's *Azadi*. A.P.S. Ayyar's *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* (1939), Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers, Shadow From Ladakh* (1966), Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) are some examples of the novels which portray the socio-historical realities. Khushwanth Singh was another major post-independent Indian writer who narrated important historical events in India. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* and *Delhi: A Novel* are examples of historical novels.

In contemporary times, a great number of historical novel has emerged. Many Indian writers have turned to the past to trace the beginning and development of nationalism, freedom struggle, and the partition. They tried to cherish the heroic past and events of national importance such as the Gandhian Movement, imperial

rule, partition of the country, and the emergence of the New India. The first half of the twentieth century in India was marked by the massive movement for the liberation of the country from the exploiting rule of Britain. The struggle was long and fierce. The novelist could not escape from writing about such a mighty movement and the indomitable spirit of the people. The British historiographers tried to impose upon Indians the western ideas of enlightenment, education, public administration, military and law, and nationalism. Many of these concepts were unknown to Indians. The early writers propagated the ideas of political freedom of the country. To a certain extent, nationalism and a sense of the past were imparted through literary writing in India.

The remarkable event that spilled the interest of the fiction writers was the partition of the subcontinent. With Partition, India was taken towards a worse time. It caused widespread disturbances, massacres, violence, riots, communalism, and destruction of wealth. Even after several months of the partition, the conflicts and suspicion between Hindus and Muslims continued. The Indian English writers and the regional writers responded to this alarming situation through their writings. The novels such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Attia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh*, Raj Gill's *The Rape* (1974), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1976), Balchandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1976), and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What Body Remembers* (1999) vividly portray the horrors of partition and the responses of the common man to this traumatic historic situation. The writers provided a truly pathetic picture of the refugees and the loss of human values. History, social realities, and the political aspects were the major concerns of

the writings of post-independence India. Thus historical fiction was an important vehicle to raise consciousness among people at each critical juncture of the country. This shows the significance of this hybrid genre of historical fiction.

In the literary scenario, the 1980s saw the emergence of the second generation of Indian English novelists who were born after independence. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) which won the Booker Prize was marked by a different approach to the historical narrative. Rushdie concentrated on the impact of historical and political development in determining the lives of common people. Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Rohinton Mistry, Gita Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal followed the path of Rushdie. They experimented with historical metafiction and a new method to narrate history. These writers focused on the relationship between the historic, political, social aspects of the country and how it influences individual lives and their relationships. A historical novelist can reconstruct history from the standpoint of a social historian to provide a larger canvas of the past. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan in their historical fictions tried to include the multiplicities of the Mughal society to reconstruct the Mughal past through the dimension of a social historian.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a serious discussion sprouted among the scholars and philosophers of history about the representation of the past. Postmodern ideas gained momentum during this time, historian and scientific philosopher Thomas Kuhn, pointed out that history cannot represent a single authoritative narrative when it comprises, "claims, counterclaims, and debates over fundamentals" (6). This wavelength of the time and the scepticism over the

objectivity of history gave birth to revisionist historiography. Traditionally the discipline of history had heavily depended on documentary data collection, realistically presented its findings, and claimed its objectivity too. These drastic change happened in the field of history has its repercussions in literature and fictional writing moved away from realistic depiction towards historiographic metafiction. The past is not left only for the historians or the archaeologist alone, even laymen could provide fresh insight into its analysis. It is at this juncture that the creative writers take up their social responsibility to rewrite history through anticipation, imagination, and fictional modes. Such writings are called postmodern because it is against the conventional way of understanding the past.

Historical interpretation turned to be ‘multicentric’ and interpersonal in recent times. So a paradigm shift happened to the traditional historiography in its treatment of creative writers, particularly novelists. The thinkers like R.G. Collingwood and G.M. Trevelyan have considered history as a subjective act. Historical unpredictability and the complex interplay of fact and fiction to fill the gaps in history prompted historical novelists to write historiographic metafictions. Linda Hutcheon has coined the term, “historiographic metafiction”. The focus of historiography on man instead of society is reflected in this new kind of writing. With the advent of a new philosophy in modern times, the concept of ‘one culture and one truth’ naturally lost its place and both history and fiction are seen as the product of imagination. The overriding thematic involvement with history in most of the significant contemporary novels invites a serious discussion of the genre of historical fiction. The novelists like Milan Kundera, Gunter Grass, Calvino, Marquez, Umberto Eco, Salman Rushdie, and others have demonstrated the problem

of history by appropriating it with fiction. These writers could not distinguish history from the individual experience. History for them is equal to the identity of a common man and predicting the socio-political change.

A brief discussion of the uses and application of the term historical fiction by the critics of the West and the critics of the Indian English historical fiction demonstrates that its meaning, use, and scope are wider and it has the potential to reconstruct the past. The above-discussed critics have helped in examining the various ways in which novelists have used history from time to time but no interpretation was complete in defining the term. This incompleteness is related to the nature of the novel as an art form. The novel is a flexible genre and cannot be framed in a concrete fixed form. At the same time, history as a discipline displays its dynamic nature and it is not easy to write the past linearly. The past and the present are taken to a new relationship in a historical novel which initiates new awareness of the past. The earlier concept of historical fiction presupposes history as a pre-formed thing. So the task of the novelist is to incorporate all the written facts and shreds of evidence to make the novel quite factual. History provides the backdrop for literary exploration to examine the life of the past. This is what Khushwant Singh writes in his note on *Delhi*, "History provided me with the skeleton. I covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid into it" (1).

A line of demarcation emerges between a historian's version of the past and a novelist's use of it because of the preoccupation of the novelist with the individual concepts of reality. The inevitable concern in the frame of a novelist is the outcome of the encounter between the self and the world whereas a historian would anchor

his belief about the world from a different angle conditioned by prior obligation for a reason and available evidence about the past. Moreover, novel in its variant forms takes a microscopic view of the realities of man and which is difficult for a historian to take up. The subjective exploration of the past is not the task of a historian. It is because of this reason that in the twentieth century, a novelist turned out to be more amenable to history by depicting the complex relationship existing at various planes.

Historical fictions are creative rewritings of factual events. Under the new theories of historiography, history became a sort of autobiographical endeavour by connecting individual life with the larger stream of history. This mode of new historiography puts man as the centre of events, unlike the traditional historiography which was impersonal and conventional. What is more important in such history is not the study of the sequential order of events but the imaginative presentation of political and historical matters to see history in a larger frame of collective human history. In the New Historicist reading strategy, autobiographies, biographies, memory writings, oral tales, and literary writings are all considered significant sources to reconstruct history. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have extensively used these sources to reconstruct the Mughal past. Among the various literary modes, the interrelation of the novel with history has been the closest. During the early phase of the development of novels, it tried to imitate history, in the middle phase when the novel form is established itself as a powerful genre, novel made extensive use of history in it in the latest form. The novel has not only incorporated history but also problematised the discipline of history.

The philosophers including Foucault makes the argument that historical

discourse should open out to accommodate areas and voices which have been constantly avoided by the earlier historians. The widening of historical inquiries into new vistas opens up new possibilities for novelist's concern with history. Historians have left out large areas of groups, communities, and societal formations. Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon propagated the influence of imagination in history and the poetic turn of the historical discipline.

The Great Mughal Empire in its grandeur and splendiddness has attracted historians as well as fiction writers. Historiographers and novelists have gone deeper digging into the administration of Mughal kings, their passion for arts and architecture, their administration, and courtly life. Indu Sundaresan comments about her fascination for Mughal times in an interview with *The Tribune* as, "There is little about the Mughals that's not fascinating. They lived larger-than-life lives, they loved passionately; they built palaces, forts, monuments fervently; they came to India to conquer and stayed on to leave an indelible mark on India's history". While going through the annals of Mughal history Indu Sundaresan, recognised the significance of two powerful women, Nur Jahan and Jahanara, and their significance in maintaining the vast Mughal kingdom. Sundaresan with great craft recreated the ways by which these two powerful women entered into the male socio-political realms and made a space for themselves. Nur Jahan is vividly portrayed in Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses* as a lady of beauty and brain who spearheaded a vast empire courageously. Sundaresan's *Shadow Princess* illustrates the eminence of Jahanara to motivate Shah Jahan to overcome the troublesome period after the death of his wife and the quarrels of his sons to capture the power. But both of these women were not glorified or celebrated by historians.

Historians neglected these royal women and their extraordinary political and diplomatic skills.

Sundaresan, an Indian American novelist settled in the U. S began her career as a writer in an attempt to connect to her roots. She wanted to maintain her ties with her homeland and found writing about Indian history as an interesting way of remaining in touch with her culture. In an interview with *The Tribune*, she has acknowledged the link between her writing and her feelings for her motherland, “ I write only about India because for me, writing about India while living away is an opportunity to visit the country of my birth as often as I want in my mind and on paper. And I keep in touch with the past that has shaped me and my thoughts”. In this interview, she further explains how she chanced upon reading about the Mughal world that became the basis of three of her novels. She says:

I came upon Mehrunnisa/Nur Jahan’s story during my last year of graduate school at the University of Delaware. One winter evening, when I was homesick; I wandered into the library and typed the word ‘India’ into the computer. I returned home that evening with an armload of books, among them a book on the Mughal harems – how the women lived, how much power they had, the intrigues and mysteries within the harem. This sparked my initial interest in Mehrunnisa’s story and I read more about her and researched extensively before I wrote the two novels on her life.

Indu Sundaresan was born and brought up in India. Her father was a fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force and she travelled around different parts of India with her father. She has taken her M.A in Economics and M.S in Operations Research

from the University of Delaware, United States. She wrote six books so far. Her books are, *The Twentieth Wife* (2002), *The Feast of Roses* (2003), *The Splendor of Silence* (2006), *In the Convent of Little Flowers* (2008), *Shadow Princess* (2010), and *The Mountain of Light*.

Alex Rutherford, the couple writers writing fiction and nonfiction under one pseudonym is fascinating. Both of them had studied at the University of Oxford. Rutherford's internationally best-selling series *Empire of the Moghul* depicts the rise and fall of the great Mughal Empire, the social scenario of the time, and the inner politics of the court that is beyond the purview of the historians. In their interview with *The Hindu*, Alex Rutherford revealed their mechanism of writing together as:

We have always enjoyed working together, and we found that the process came relatively naturally. A real bonus is that writing can sometimes be a lonely business. It is great to have someone to share the highs and lows and talk through difficulties with. It's harder for two writers to get writer's block than one.

The *Empire of the Moghul* series is a quintet. The novels in this series are, *Raiders from the North*, *Brothers at War*, *Ruler of the World*, *The Tainted Throne*, *The Serpent's Tooth*, and *Traitors in the Shadow*. Through the novels in this series, Rutherford reconstructs Mughal history through the eyes of a writer of fiction. Rutherford presents the life history of six major Mughal Emperors and marks the significant incidents of the Mughal period in India. The combined writing mechanism of Michael Preston and Diana Preston produced other works such as, *A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: Explorer, Naturalist, and Buccaneer*, *The Life of William*

Dampier, Taj Mahal: Passion and Genius at the Heart of the Moghul Empire, and A Teardrop on the Cheek of Time: The Story of the Taj Mahal.

The objectives of the study revolve around the concept of the genre of historical fiction. The study focuses on the intermingling of fact and fiction in historical fiction and it highlights the significance of reconstruction of the past through the lens of a fiction writer. It also gives ample emphasis to the postmodern concept of historical fiction by drawing it into the outlines of narrativity. Historical narratives with its discontinuity and lacuna often invite the surveillance of fiction writers too. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have tried to establish a sort of an argumentative and interpretative tradition in the analysis of the past. They observed historical discipline as a field of certain authoritarian ideologies and no space had given to argumentation. The fiction writers began to recreate an argumentative history by underlining the polyphonous nature of the past. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have shown faithfulness to the historical facts by accommodating the available resources about the Mughal times. Historical fiction helps to reconstruct the concept of objective truth and single history, instead, it promotes the dialogic nature of history.

The introductory chapter of the thesis is an attempt to trace the history of historical fictions and its gradual evolution as a genre from its popular form in the 19th century to the contemporary historiographic metafiction. It analyses how postmodern historical fiction has undertaken the task of critical appraisal of academic history. The chapter explores the tradition of Indian historical fiction and the development of the concept of nationalism through historical fiction. It also

examines the scope and significance of the reconstruction of the past through various perspectives to vindicate the dynamic nature of history as a discipline.

The second chapter of the thesis titled as “The Interpretative History and the Historical Fiction Narratives” discusses the revisionist historical narrative style of Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford which can be analysed in the light of the postmodern philosophies of history and the New Historicist theories. This chapter presents the key arguments of New Historicism and the postmodern philosophies of history. The select novels for the study present historical situations in manifold perceptions and it emphasises the possibility of multiple histories. This chapter studies the significance of New Historicist reading strategies in the analysis of historical fiction and the reciprocal concern of the literary works in constructing the idea of the past. The first chapter explores the theoretical frameworks of Hayden White, Linda Hutcheon, Stephen Greenblatt, and Michael Foucault.

The third chapter of the thesis “Her Story Paradigms of the Mughal Historical Women” explores Sundaresan’s attempt to reconstruct the female heroines of Mughal time such as Nur Jahan and Jahanara through her *Taj Trilogy* novels. In recent years, feminist historians have tried to give voice to the previously obscured female historical figures. Indu Sundaresan has worked to establish Nur Jahan and Jahanara as central to her historical fictions on Mughal India. This chapter details the reconstruction of the Mughal world through the recasting of the real Mughal heroines. Sundaresan interrogates the gender politics behind the historical representations and she argues in favour of reconstructing Mughal history from the standpoint of women. This chapter discusses the significance of rewriting Mughal

history in terms of feminism, postmodernism, and historical metafiction. Sundaresan makes it clear that historical fiction is an apt medium to intervene in the misrepresentations of Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and such other major and minor female historical figures. She expresses her doubts on the concepts of accuracy and authenticity of the Mughal history. Hence, Sundaresan traces to reconstruct the Mughal past to highlight the historical royal women.

The fourth chapter “The Reconstruction of the Mughal World in *Empire of the Moghul Series*” analyses Alex Rutherford’s historical fictions in *Empire of the Mughal* series. Rutherford’s novels in this series demonstrate the postmodern philosophy of history, questions the Grand Narratives, and an interest in the reinsertion of the marginalised historical figures of the Mughal Empire. While reconstructing the public and private spheres of the Mughal Empire, Rutherford has given ample importance to discuss the Mughal cultural practices, hunting habits, major and minor battles, Mughal’s interest in horoscopy, and the royal women’s intervention in the political affairs of the court. Rutherford challenges the accepted authenticity of history, historical truth, and authority of historical shreds of evidence as a critical apparatus in his revisionist historical fictions.

The proposed study looks at how the historical and fictional elements are blended uniquely in the select historical fictions and the complementarity of both the historical and the literary. The study will be carried out by two different methods. One is the historical method and the other is the literary method. The historical method is carried out by studying the New Historicist reading strategies, postmodern historiography, and narrative or interpretative history. The study also examines the

historical documents, the memoirs of Babur, Jahangir, *Akbarnama*, and the influence of art, literature, painting, and architecture of the Mughal times.

The literary study method looks into the unique style of interblending fact and fiction in historical fiction. The compartmentalisation of literature as imagination and history as the authentic fact has transgressed the borders in contemporary times. Literary imagination explains the possibility of the past. The study is relevant because the historical fiction genre has not lost its newness so far. The General Indian public is much interested in Indian history, especially in Mughal history. If there is no access to a full and authentic past, then that past can be constructed from a series of different sources and traces. What is true and what is fiction is increasingly difficult to separate. Literature is a medium to bring such varied interpretations before the public consciousness. Historical fictions become a strong vehicle to carry out serious discussions about the imperfections of history.

Chapter II

The Interpretative History and the Historical Fiction Narratives

History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions, and ignorance as well as our perceptiveness and knowledge.

(Imaginary Homelands 25)

The interpretative nature of history becomes the back born for historical fiction. Postmodernism and its philosophical strains have dominated the intellectual circles since the 1980s and reached its pinnacle at the turn of the century. Postmodern ideologies shed new light on the “conceptualisation” of history and it began to formulate historiography as a “linguistic construct”. The philosophers such as Foucault, Barthes, Hayden White, Linda Hutcheon, and Derrida undermine the very structure of traditional and classical historiography. The objective of this chapter is to explore the repercussions that postmodernism exerted in contemporary historical thinking.

This chapter probes into the hermeneutics of historiography that is the narrative philosophy of history, the theoretical framework of New Historicism, and the undercurrents of traditional as well as modern historiography. Historical fiction becomes an effective medium to reconstruct the past. The thesis tries to argue that the conventional historiography is biased it underrepresented or neglected certain sects of people and their contributions in the making of history. Hence, there is a

possibility to reread history to reconstruct it. Historiography, while constructing historical facts makes a process of selection, while omitting many incidents and events for ideological reasons. This inevitable process of selection often favours the hegemonic voices while neglecting the marginalised and peripheral sections of society. Hence, there is a greater possibility of rewriting history from multiple perspectives. Historiography is a subjective discipline where the different person uses a different methodology and narrative design based on their preconceived ideologies. As the thesis makes a study about the comingling of fact and fiction in historical fiction, a brief analysis of the key assumptions of New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, and its influence in the literary studies are important. It intends to analyse the theoretical propositions of the leading historical philosophers such as Hayden White, Linda Hutcheon, and Foucault on the nature of history and historiography. The chapter includes Stephen Greenblatt's theoretical perceptions and his New Historicist reading strategy. The present study is based on the historical fictions written by Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford. Such an endeavour necessarily requires an analysis of the discursive nature of history and the nature of the history fiction interface.

The dominant postmodern ideology of the 20th century challenged the essentialist beliefs and practices followed by the traditional historiography. It denaturalised many predominant aspects of our traditional way of life. It established the fact that the seeming understanding of certain practices as “natural” is contradictory. All entities related to life are constructed and not natural. Postmodernism is a critique of the representational strategies and the concept of the reality of representation. The postmodern and the deconstructive theories in various

disciplines fully acknowledge the possibility of narratives. Complete objectivity in the field of historical discourse is only a myth. Historiography which wants to establish the objectivity of scientific disciplines is now conscious of the role of narrative and subjectivity in the representation of the past.

The trust in the classical historiography as holding the actual events of the past is invalidated. So the watertight compartmentalisation of history and fiction as separate entities cannot be an existing belief. Linda Hutcheon puts it as, “There are other kinds of tension in the postmodern too: the ones created by the transgression of the boundaries between genres, between disciplines or discourse, between high and mass culture” (*The politics of Postmodernism* 18). Postmodernism is a political ideology that destabilised the foundational principles of all the existing establishments and institutions. Linda Hutcheon defines this new wave of thinking as, “Fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political” (4).

Historiographic metafiction targets the issue of the presentation of the events of history and how historiography turns to be another kind of narrative. Metafiction explores the ways by which texts are constructed and the politics behind it. Historiographic metafiction incorporates literature, history, and theory. This genre is self-aware of the human construct of fiction and history. Linda Hutcheon posits that historical metafiction makes experimentation with the conventions of historiography and confronts with the issues such as subjectivity, the relation between history and fiction, and the implications of rewriting history. It examines the larger debates about the creation of meaning and reality.

In contemporary times, the concept of narrative has been a serious subject for debate in the discipline of history and historical theory. Historical text and a fictional enterprise on history use narratives to generate meanings for the readers. Hence, it is important to analyse the nature, characteristics, and issues of narratives as both history and historical fiction are largely a product of narrativity. The mutual commingling of narrative and historiography has to be examined in the light of postmodern philosophy. A narrative can be defined as anything that tells a story; literary book, picture, ballet, newspaper, or movie. Narratology is the tendency to consider the text as a rule-governed structure in which human beings fashion their universe through the modes of their articulation. The narrative is universal and widespread. It can be anything like fictional or fact, verbal or non-verbal, true or untrue, realistic or unrealistic, oral or written, and literary or non-literary. Above all, narratives put an end to the borderline between fact and fiction and it admits the possible fictionality of the reality. A narrative tends to make the connection, clarity of ideas, and sensibility in articulation. In this regard, Barthes expresses his viewpoints in his *Image, Music, Text*:

Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of form narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind, and there nowhere is nor has been a group of people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, the narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (79)

Barthes asserts the role of narratives in the construction of the idea of the human past and its culture. A narrative often gives paramount importance to emplot the incidents or events in a very convincing manner by arranging it in order. It is an unavoidable human tendency to fix meaning to the past by giving a totalising grant structure and a symbolic signifying system. They are widely spread in human society and they play an important role in shaping the future of societies and communities. Narratives can empower and exterminate communities and groups. They form the fundamental expression of the question of temporality. Human beings' concept about the present, past, and future is created through the narratives. Continuity, pattern, and structure are attributed to life through narrativity. In total, narratives define the human understanding of the universe: its past, present, and future.

The narrative is a kind of verbal discourse. Hence, it is a part of natural human consciousness. Hayden White remarks that in the field of historical studies narrative cannot be seen as a by-product of a theory or as part of a method, but it is a "form of a discourse which may or may not be used for the representation of historical events depending upon the situation" ("The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" 2). This view suggests that the nature of the narrative in a given history may vary according to the circumstances. The quantity of narrativity will be "greatest in the accounts designed to tell a story, least in those intended to provide an analysis of the events of which it treats"(2). Historical fiction deals with real events rather than imaginary ones. It is not a constructed imagined story at all. A narrative historian's description of the past cannot be undermined as

the product of his literary talent, it may be the result of his research on the available resources through a rigorous historical method. Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford claim that they have shown utmost care to include available historical facts in their novels. Both of them have conducted a rigorous study of various sources including travel writing to unravel the complete picture of the time. Historical fiction is a narrative discourse born out of an imagination of a possible past. The historical text itself is a narrative endeavour. White further explores the nature of narrativity in history in his “The Question of Narrativity in the Contemporary Historical Theory” as:

A simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about what happened in it at particular times and places can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what ‘reality’ consists of. However, the rest of the real, after we have said what we can assert to be true about it, would not be everything and anything we could imagine about it. The real would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could possibly be. Something like this may have been what Aristotle had in mind when, instead of opposing history to poetry, he suggested their complementarity, joining both of them to philosophy in the human effort to represent, imagine and think the world in its totality, both actual and possible real and imagined, both known and only experienced. (10)

The historical fictions of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan are a mixture of history, cultural and political dimensions of the Mughal time which construct a

form of social history. This kind of historical fiction helps one to understand the polyphonic nature of history, the conflicting dialogic characteristic of the past as Bhaktin observed. The New Historicist reading is an important tool to know the pluralistic nature of history and the poetic turn of the historical discourse. Hence, historical metafiction develops an argumentative tradition in the field of history and it also reminds the possibility of literary narratives to supplement the knowledge of the past.

Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan portrayed the emotions and the inner voices of the major and minor Mughal historical figures. In the select novels, history/context is as important as it provides the proper impetus for the literary narratives to explore deep into it. History as a discipline stands for the voice of the ruling class, it projects the dominant voices. But historical fiction, when reconstructs the past, picturises the viewpoints of the common man. It becomes individualistic rather than a collective representation. The novels of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan make a unique intervention to the past to present a much more holistic Mughal world. The writers, while trying to reconstruct Mughal history, travelled through personal memoirs, historical monuments, and other important historical texts. Such a rereading enables them to unravel the unheard aspects of the past. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have reconstructed the unknown and unacknowledged past which is beyond the scope of a historian.

The narrative is an inevitable element in building the concept of a nation among its subjects. The literary narratives in India played a pivotal role in defining the true spirit of the country among its common man. Homi K Bhabha, in his *Nation*

and Narration, shares the concept that it is through “literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea” (1). Here, he makes it clear that the idea of the nation is constructed and maintained through narrativity. Bhabha discusses the narrative strategy in maintaining the idea of the nation such as “textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, subtexts, and figurative strategies” (2). Bhabha keeps in mind the postmodern idea of the possibility of multiple histories. He postulated that the concept of nation is established and perpetuated through the linguistic construct. Cultural hegemony, the superiority of classes, representation of women, and other subaltern groups in the periphery are negotiated in the new reading strategy reinforced by the contemporary theoretical framework of history. Bhabha further comments, “...such an approach contents the traditional authority of those objects of knowledge, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation of holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity”(3). In his article “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Literary Theory’, White posits:

The form of the discourse, the narrative, adds nothing to the content of the representation, but is rather a simulacrum of the structure and processes of real events. And insofar as this representation resembles the events of which it is a representation, it can be taken as a true account. The story told in the narrative is a "mimesis" of the story lived in some region of historical reality, and insofar as it is an accurate imitation it is to be considered a truthful account thereof. (3)

The narrative is often seen as an objective account of truth rather than a

culturally influenced interpretation of it. Writing about the past reality is a serious issue in this regard because the large numbers of the evidence available to historians are imaginary stories told by the other, may be earlier interpreters of the past. So the writers have to be conscious not only of their capacity as interpreters and their traditions and conventions but of the cultural background of the "authentic" documents as well. If fiction has a significant historical dimension, it can be called historical fiction. Reconstruction of the past through historical fiction does not mean an arbitrary rewriting of it, but it is a responsible task of searching for the new dimensions of the past.

Indu Sundaresan highlights the role of royal women in running the Mughal Empire through her *Taj Trilogy* novels, thereby she argues for the inclusion of women's history as part of professional history. The important texts about Mughal history have not given adequate space for the discussion of the female Mughal historical figures such as Nur Jahan, Jahanara, Gulbaden begum, Maham Anga, and many others. Scholars who reconstructed Mughal history from the standpoint of women have emphasised the significance of the harem or the ladies quarters of the royal palace in the administration of Mughal court. Sundaresan herself commented about the lack of proper narrative about the private sphere or the domestic space of the Mughal court. Rutherford has constructed a social history of the Mughal times by depicting all the major socio, cultural, religious dimensions of the time. In their *Empire of the Mughal* series, they have mentioned the position of royal women right from the time of Babur onwards, about the royal weddings, childbirth, festivals, princesses and concubines of the harem, preparations for the battles, the annexation

of various territories, cuisines of the royal families, visits of the foreign travellers, royal hunting, climate, and its impact, technical advancements of the time, architectural styles and monuments, cosmetics and garments of the time, the practice of horoscope, religion, educational system, wet nurses of the emperors and so on. Therefore, the historical fictions of Alex Rutherford formulate a sort of narrative social history.

The narrative is used to represent the past as old as the concept of written history. Several oral tales and songs tell the stories of the heroic past. Modern historical theories discuss the centrality of narrative in the field of history. As Richelle Gilmour says about the significance of narratives to depict the past, “They bring the past to life, offer an interpretation of its meaning and significance and express the complexity of human experience and national events”(1). The very understructure of modern historiography has a deep-felt impact on the reconstruction of the past. It never interpreted the past through definitive terms. The clear understandings of historical text as subjective, partial, and prejudiced have given new impetus to historical fiction. The large number of historical metafiction published in world literature to interpret and reinterpret history is an example of the renewed interest in the genre of historical fiction.

The past as such cannot be represented in any historiography: certain angles of it may appear in the representation. Every possible cause and effect cannot be counted by a professional historian. The infinity of facts and events of the past is like an ocean. Identification, selection, and representation of the chosen event are the only possible task. There are gaps and misrepresentation in professional history.

Each historian selects facts from the vast ocean of the past. Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford have chosen the eye-catching Mughal empire to write upon. Indu Sundaresan in her *The Feast of Roses*, *Shadow Princess*, and *The Twentieth Wife* draws attention to the inadequate representation of women in history. She points towards the lack of proper narratives about the Mughal royal women and their exceptional lives. Sundaresan unravels the patriarchal structure of the historiography which neglects women as a historical subject. The past and its representation in the text are two different things. Keith Jenkins writes, “The past and history are two different things. Additionally, the past and history are not stitched into each other such that only one historical reading of the past is necessary. The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart” (4).

Before proceeding deep into the category of multiple histories, it is significant to have some idea about historiography practiced in the traditional as well as modern times. The nature, scope, methodology, and objectives of historiography have undergone a serious change in contemporary times. The philosophers influenced by the postmodern thoughts re-examined the traditional historiography. They held the view that there are differences of opinion among the historiographers about the actual past: “This broadens our idea of historiography from being “what actually happened to” an interpretation of representation of what happened in the past that will vary among historians who hold different ideologies”(Gilmour10). Past events, accounts of these events, and the inevitability of personal bias and misrepresentation of the past are central concerns of modern historiography.

Historiography is an inescapably political and ideological interpretation of the past. Some historiographers claim objective scientific verification of the available sources. The so-called scientific methodology of representation is not practical in the field of history. It is important to study the influence of narrative in historiography and basic presumptions of historiography to understand the phenomenon of history fiction nebulous and the theoretical argument for multiple histories. Postmodern philosophy unleashed liberal thoughts and a new wave of scepticism about all “Grand Narratives”. Based on these reflections, critics ask several questions regarding the nature of historiography and the use of narrative in history. Historical fictions use both historical facts and literary devices to underscore the desired impact. Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford in their novels use this interblend systematically.

A narrative can uniquely weave the complex causes, impact, and effect of certain events in a far more interesting and appealing way. Historiography makes use of this imposition of structures to convince the reader. The historical narrative and the reality of the past stand apart. For example, when a historian writes about a public speech, even if he tries hard to depict it meticulously, he may not capture the tone of the speech, the stress the speaker puts on certain words, and the mood of the audience. Thus it falls short of the actuality in representation. Narrative truths have its truth value too. As Richelle Gimour says, “If it is acknowledged that narrative can convey truth even when imagination is employed in its creation, then it ought to be considered a vital tool for the representation of the past in historiography” (17)

Another principal theoretical background for the thesis is the basic

postulations of New Historicism and its impact in the field of literary studies. Even though the fundamental principles of various social, political, and historical conceptualisations formulate the methodology of the study, New Historicism provides a systematic theoretical foundation for the thesis. The hasty acceptance and institutionalisation of the twin developments of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism is an important milestone in the critical history of the 1980s. The cardinal principles of New Historicism were taken from the post-structuralist thoughts initiated by Foucault, Derrida, De Certeau, and Barthes. These principles were applied in a broad investigative field which initiated the emergence of a new reading strategy of New Historicism. Because of its dual nature of theory and practise, it got an unusual and comfortable welcome in the academic field. New Historicism rose to the limelight with Stephen J. Greenblatt's publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980). His other works that studied the undercurrents of power relations in the Renaissance culture and act as a catalyst to the New Historicist movements include *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance* (1982), *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988), *Learning to Curse* (1990) and *Marvellous Possession: The Wonder of the New World* (1991). The journal "Representations" started in the year 1982 was another momentum for New Historicism.

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have some common practices in terms of methodology and subject matter. The chief theoretical artifice to understand the polyphonic nature of historiography was laid down by New

Historicism and Cultural Materialism, postmodernism, and the ideas put forward by Foucault. So the origin and expansion of these theoretical practices and reading strategy open up a wider understanding of the history fiction nebulous.

Cultural Materialism which is practised in Britain is an offshoot of American-based New Historicism. Apart from the matter of geography, it has some other distinction such as in the case of its aims and objectives. New Historicists concern about the reflection of power structures of the society in the literary text, whereas the Cultural Materialists argue that the text expresses the voice of the hegemonic class as culture itself is hijacked by them. Cultural Materialism has a Marxist inclination in its practise. British Cultural Materialism is influenced by Marxist thinkers like Raymond Williams who coined the term “Cultural Materialism” in his *Marxism and Literature*. The chief influence of Greenblatt and Louis Montrose was the works of Foucault mainly his *Analytcs of power*. John Brannigan in his text *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* differentiates both the concepts of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism as:

New Historicism and cultural materialism share a common preoccupation with the relationship between literature and, history, and share an understanding of texts of all kinds as both products and functional components of social and political formation. Many previous critical approaches to literary texts assumed that text has some universal significance and essential ahistorical truth to impart; new historicists and cultural materialist critics tend to read the literary text as the material product of specific historical conditions. Both theories approach the relationship

between text and context with urgent attention to the political ramifications of literary interpretations. In the eyes of new historicists and cultural materialist critics, the text of all kinds are the vehicles of politics insofar as texts mediate the fabric of social, political, and cultural formations (3)

The practitioners of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism believed that the past can be chiselled from various sources as Brannigan says, “ legal, medical and penal documents, anecdotes, travel writings, ethnological and anthropological narratives and of course literary texts”(3). Instead of finding the distinction between history and fiction, they have opened up a possible dialogue between the two. New Historicism refused to read literary text against the background of historical context because history itself could be read outside the written text. New Historicist raised doubts against the “textuality” of history. For them, literature is not only a channel to reflect the past but it is an active by-product of the particular socio-historic conditions of the time. That is why they consider literature as a source to reconstruct the past. Brannigan writes about the mutual interactions of literature and history as: “For new historicism and cultural materialism, the object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature in history. This is to see literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with the creative forces, disruptions, and contradictions of history (4).

Debates about the role of literature as social expression began in the distant past right from the time of Plato onwards. Plato argued in his *Republic* that poets should be banned from an ideal city-state because of their corrupting effect upon the citizens. Art and literary writings were always subject to severe social criticism,

controversy, and censorship. Writers tried to break the existing power structures which gave privileges to the dominant classes. The anxieties of the state and the hegemonic classes came out of their fear of chaos and political instability if literature promotes scepticism and critical attitude among people. New Historicists and Cultural Materialists argue that literature has a powerful effect on history and vice versa. New Historicist reading practice gives legitimacy to the role of literature in interpreting history and historical events in shaping the imagination of a literary writer. They acknowledge the mutual interaction of the literary and the historical. They never constituted literature and history as two different entities.

The boundaries between history and fiction cannot be drawn. It has a wobbling relationship and the two fields may not be as distinct as we believed. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty history is a “subject primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives” (98). Writing about history brings the past alive and it is a means to capture the past. Though the past events have gone, the reverberations of the past still exist. That means the past is not completely lost: “What allows historians to historicize the medieval or the ancient is the belief that these worlds are never completely lost” (112). Historical fiction tells possible narratives about the past and it tries to graft imagination with the historical facts.

History is not an objective chronological representation of the past. But it is a rhetorical remaking of the past and the categories of men and women are not represented equally in the historical text. Indu Sundaresan in her Taj Trilogy novels raised some pertinent questions against the historical misrepresentation of two powerful Mughal royal ladies - Nurjahan and Jahanara. She reminds us about how

gender hierarchies are formulated, legitimated, challenged, and constructed. In *Taj Trilogy* Sundaresan interrogates Mughal history through a feminist lens. In one of her interviews with Dina Yuen, Sundaresan speaks about how she had come up with the idea of *Taj Trilogy* as:

I remembered the book on Mughal harems, and went out researching and reading about Mehrunnisa, Empress Nur Jahan's life, and found what I read to be absolutely fascinating. Here was this woman, a twentieth wife, who comes into the Mughal harem of Emperor Jahangir very late in his life, who then consequently becomes so beloved that she's the most powerful woman to come out of that era in Indian history. A love story, and a story of power—all true also; what more could a novelist want?

The New Historicist reading strategy gave strength to the fiction writers to rewrite history with fresh insight. Historical fiction makes room for the use of imagination. A historical novel cannot be considered as an authentic document of the past but it contains traces of the past. The mixing of fact and fiction make this genre a complicated one. It grounds itself in analysing the actual cause and effect of the past and the chain of events that form the present. Historical fiction is not a representation of all historical records and events. The writer has the liberty to imagine the possible past. New Historicists and Cultural Materialists see literature as a powerful tool to study the past. For them, “literary texts are vehicles of power which act as useful objects of study in that they contain the same potential for power and subversion as existing in society generally” (Brannigan 7). For them, the past constitutes the present and literature becomes a domain of politics.

New Historicists see historical narratives as an inevitable attempt to fit the expectations of society. Marxist critics have taken this idea to criticise history as a hymn to the victors and the ruling class. The hegemonic ideology of the dominant ruling class reflects in all historical texts. Walter Benjamin in his *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* asserts the power and privilege of the ruling class to shape the ideological base of the particular time and its reflection in the historical texts. Several Marxist thinkers including Benjamin had objections against the objectivity of historical truth. They were against the textualisation of history as it used to project the preferential version of the past. Althusser expresses the idea that literature is a very passive agent of the state to familiarise the state power and dominant class to its subjects. In short, for Althusser, literature is one of the agents to stabilise state power. Literature reflects the values, norms, rules, and regulations of the ruling class according to Althusser. Cultural Materialists were influenced by the class consciousness in the textualised form of history as it privileged the dominant classes.

The conceptual clarity of New Historicism is essential to conduct a parallel reading of literary and historical aspects in a text. New Historicists interpreted the interplay of power in the past society and how it repeated in the present world. Jonathan Dollimore writes about the anxiety of Queen Elizabeth when *Richard II* played forty times in the open theatre. The play reveals the cruelty of the monarch to the public. The theatre visibly presents the corruption of the autocratic monarch, her weakness as a ruler, and the interplay of power through the play *Richard II*. Queen's fear about the performance of a play in the public sphere points out the power of

theatre and literature to uncover various political structures in society. Certain social orders and culture at times are self-regulatory systems. It never requires any external coercion to maintain its order. Jonathan Dollimore in his *Political Shakespeare* says: “A famous attempt to use theatre to subvert authority was, of course, the staging of *Richard II* just before the Essex rising in 1601; Queen Elizabeth afterward anxiously acknowledged the implied identification between her and Richard II”(8).

All human endeavours including knowledge and cultural practices are constructed and not natural. New Historicist believed that there is no differentiation between text and context and it gives equal importance to both of it. Literature is entwined with history and politics. Cultural Materialism never advocates political neutrality as no cultural manifestation is ever non-political. New Historicism is a very significant interdisciplinary achievement in the history of theory. In the 20th century, with the advent of various theoretical movements, the barriers among several disciplines have gone. Disciplines like history and philosophy, history, and literature have identified similarities in many areas. The convergences of ideas of history, philosophy, and literature have given impetus to a new interdisciplinary approach. This broader approach is the back born of the historiographic metafiction. Historical fiction as an interdisciplinary genre enjoys the freedom to represent the voice of side-lined. R.C. Majumdar, renowned Medieval Indian historian observes the lack of proper historical narratives about Nur Jahan, the most powerful Mughal princess. It sheds light on the domination of patriarchal voices in Mughal historiography. Thus historical fiction narratives are capable to break the stereotypical power structure of the traditional historiography.

New Historicism was immediately accepted in the wider intellectual circle because of its double potential of theory and practice. New Historicism gave the academia new possibilities to leap over the borderlines separating history, art, politics, and anthropology and it intrudes in the concept of power hierarchy that affects the practical lives of people. It is a new interpretative strategy that studies the relation between history and literature. There is a renewed tendency to discuss the social, political conditions and historical influences in literary productions. J. Hillismiller in one of his speeches specifically pointed out that the literary studies in recent years had shifted its orientation from theory towards the functioning of culture, politics, and institutions upon the lives of people.

New Historicism focused on the status of history in literary text and the theorists were preoccupied to understand the implicit relationship between literature and history. This new reading strategy postulated that imaginary recreation of the past in the literary works can supplement academic history. Some popular television serials like Amar Chitra Katha and periodicals based on historical events and historical figures brought history to millions of households. In these periodicals and teleserials, history is presented as entwined with romance, intrigue, the scandal of the historical events. It was a mix of myth, history, literature, and oral tales. Amar Chitra Katha has taken advantage of the creative faculty of a writer to imagine history through his art. It was a huge success in creating children's curiosity to know the past. Television serials and periodicals on historical events provide a fictional platform from which the audience could reimagine and reinvent historical events. Here comes the complementarity of both fiction and history. At this juncture, New

Historicism provides a theoretical background to explain the interaction of cultural products with historical contexts. It examines the way by which cultural aspects including literature and art negotiate with the historical events of the time. New Historicism constantly prioritises the idea that we create the past from the present. It is an inevitable and unavoidable practice too.

Stephen Greenblatt, the proponent of New Historicism expressed that the social world is formed and reshaped by the text it produces. Conventional historicists want to emphasise the factual accuracy of the discipline of history, whereas New Historicists concentrate on the reconstruction of history by including the subjective experiences of the ordinary people. This view enabled them to consider legal documents, anecdotes, travel writings, anthropological narratives, and literary text as potential historical sources to interpret the past. Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have considered oral tales, the stories behind the historical monuments, foreign traveller's accounts, interpretations of Mughal paintings, annals and chronicles, and various other interpretative historical texts to reconstruct the Mughal past. For them, history is a set of records outside the text too. New Historicist did not limit their arguments around 'text' and 'cotext' only, whereas they enlarged their magnitude of debates towards literature in history. They raised their voice against the contradictions and disruptions in history. In an interview with *The Fantasy Book Critic*, Sundaresan says:

When I began to write my two novels I could not find any fictionalised accounts of the lives of Nur Jahan and Jahangir, or indeed, very much historical fiction from India at all. A fictional account allowed me to explore

the sights and sounds and tastes and smells of that period. I wanted to see for myself how characters would have reacted to the deaths of beloved family members, betrayals by courtiers and sons, how they loved and hated. In other words, how they lived.

In a New Historicist reading of the literary text, both the literary and historical elements are treated with equal importance. It believes that even the literary narratives are capable to provide new insight about the past because it is embedded with the socio-political and historical atmosphere of the time. H. Aram Veeseer in *New Historicism* has identified and listed the key assumptions of New Historicism as:

- 1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
- 2) that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
- 3) that literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably;
- 4) that no discourse, imaginative or archival gives access to unchanging truths nor express inalterable human nature;
- 5) Finally, a historical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (xi)

John Brannigan in his text, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* defines, New Historicism as “...a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important contexts for texts of all kinds”. (6) New Historicists are concerned with “the role of the historical context in interpreting

literary text and the role of literary rhetoric in interpreting history” (4). Literary studies from the 1980s onwards were concerned more with the historical, social, and political conditions and the impact of literature in interpreting these conditions. New Historicism can be a synonym of cultural studies too, for it studies text as a cultural sign of a particular time.

The on-going process of verification, completion, erasing of certain historical facts, and rewriting of historical narratives show the fact that the historical world presented before us is incomplete and full of gaps: same as fiction. These gaps in the historical evidence point to the lack of exact and proper access to the past. The nature of these gaps is in a sense epistemological. Alex Rutherford’s *Raider’s from the North* is about Babur’s conquest of India and his reign as the first Mughal emperor. The most valuable and trusted source for writing this was *Baburnama*, the first Islamic autobiography written by Babur. The manuscripts of this personal memoir of Babur have a break from 1508 to 1519. The novelists as well as the historians alike filled this gap through a poetic recreation of it or an intelligent guess. The historiographic research gives the scope for the imagination to the writers of historical fiction to keep their eyes on the gaps of the known factual history.

New Historicism was against the text centred approach. For them, a work of literature is not an accidental enterprise for entertainment but a representation of “historical forces”. The New Historicist reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* links the tales of the travellers with the discovery of the new world. This kind of reading argues that Shakespeare's plays can be a “timeless” literary creation and the context

in which the play is written can even influence the contemporary studies of colonialism. History itself is not a homogenous entity. It is a network of various intersecting elements. The New Historicists have taken Foucault's concept of "panopticon" and "surveillance" to explain this complex process. Foucault writes that power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (*Power/Knowledge* 30). As a philosopher historian, he was interested to study the exercise of power historically. The concepts of "panopticon" and "surveillance" concern with the coercion that the state exerts to maintain discipline on its subjects. It is the power of the state to "subject" individuals.

The major philosophers who problematised history as a discipline are Hayden White, Linda Hutcheon, and Foucault. White made an extensive study on the concept of the reconstruction of history in his *Metahistory* and discusses how history was written in the nineteenth-century by focusing on structures of historical imagination. He concluded that history is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them" (2). He confronts the conventional idea of history and representation of the past by detailing the poetical aspects of historical imagination. Linda Hutcheon in her innovative study *A Practise of Post Modernism* defines the contemporary historical novel as almost similar to history itself and she considers history as a novelette practise. Historians and narrative theorists, Hayden White, Paul Vegne, E. J Hohshaum observed that both history and tradition were constructed but repeatedly created as

interpretations. That is, both are the outcome of language. The insight opened up a new field of inspiration for the novelists.

All historical novels do not explain the problematic relationship between historical truth and narrative subjectivity. At the same time, historical fictions strive to focus on the blurred frontier between fact and imagination. It is a way to reconstruct the past, complete it through supplementing with imagination. Historical fiction influences our perception of the past and influences our idea of the present. This genre has been viewed as a very serious endeavour to contribute the contemporary debates over the nature of historiography and the perspectives of the past. The gamut of the genre of historical fiction is extensive and its borders are indistinct comprising detective stories, romances, horror stories, thrillers, and books of children.

Till the 18th century, history was embedded with philosophy. Later Benedetto Croce proposed the idea that a history is an independent unit distinct from both philosophy and science. Modern historiography adopted imagination in the domain of history. The portrayal of history in literature also underwent an identical pattern of evolution as happened in the field of history. In the Indian context, several recent Indian English novelists, Salman Rushdie as its key figure have shown interest in the past. History according to Hayden White is a “verbal structure in the form narrative prose discourse” (*Metahistory* 9). History as a verbal discourse follows a distinct mode of emplotment. Hence, the text may emerge as historical romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire. Each form shows an affinity for a particular mode of ideology. Elaborating this idea, White writes in *Metahistory*:

In history I have argued, the historical field is constituted as the possible domain of analysis in a linguistic act, which is tropological in nature. The dominant trope in which this constitutive act is carried out will determine both the kinds of objects which are permitted to appear in that field as data and the possible relationships that are conceived to obtain among them...These pre-critical commitments to different modes of discourse and their constitutive tropological strategies account for the generation of the different interpretations of history which I have identified. (430)

Michel Foucault in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” had observed the dynamic nature of history a decade ago: “The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and retracing the past, as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled...History becomes effective to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being”(153). Indu Sundaresan’s and Alex Rutherford’s Mughal historical fictions are an attempt to provide a more comprehensive past as Foucault observed.

The radical historical philosophers who challenged the existing historiography were many. The very important among them are Foucault, Hayden White, and Linda Hutcheon. The philosophical positions of these theoreticians and their views regarding the conventional historiography have influenced fiction writers to write fictional narratives about the past. They have written about the “return of history” through a poetic reconstruction. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, and social theorist have been one of the most leading figures with his concepts of power, knowledge, and historical discourse. His influence is perceptible in almost all

theoretical fields such as post-structuralism, post-modernism, feminism, Marxism, postcolonial theories, and philosophy of history. His chief interest lies in the fields of history of ideas, historical epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of literature. He made an everlasting impact on the theoretical world. He constantly wrote and popularised the concepts of biopower (biopolitics), disciplinary institutions, discourse analysis, genealogy, governmentality, gaze and power-knowledge, panopticon subjectivisation. Foucault's concepts provide a proper impulse to break the traditional world view.

Foucault proposed discontinuity as the key principle in the study of the past. Mark Poster in *Foucault, Marxism, and History* explains Foucault's concept of discontinuity:

Foucault attempts to show how the past was different, strange, threatening. He labors to distance the past from the present, to disrupt the easy, cosy intimacy that historians have traditionally enjoyed in the relationship of the past to the present. He strives to alter the position of the historian from one who gives support to the present by collecting all the meanings of the past and tracing the line of inevitability through which they are resolved in the present, to one who breaks off the past from the present and by demonstrating the foreignness of the past relativizes and undercuts the legitimacy of the present. (74)

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that the element of discontinuity is counted as a basic formulation in the analysis of the past. He departed from the concept of a total history to general history. This is quite similar

to the postmodern idea of a turn from “Grand Narrative” to “Meta Narrative”. A total history would strive to tie all events into a particular centre, whereas, a general history tends to allow “dispersions”: that would accommodate multiple perspectives. For him, such a rapidly changing past cannot be represented linearly. Hence, the Foucauldian analysis about the possible discontinuity of the past reflects in the historical metafiction. Thus historical fictions carry the responsibility to enlarge the mind frame of the readers to encompass a more plausible past. Foucault places discontinuity as the core element in the analysis of the past.

According to Foucault, the historian would try to avoid discontinuity by rearranging the historical raw materials such as incidents, discoveries, documents, and decisions to an organic order. Both Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford challenged the traditional history and they “speak of series, divisions, limits, differences of level, shifts, chronological specificities, particular forms of rehandling, possible type of relation” (11) as Foucault observed. Rutherford, through *The Empire of Mughal* series clearly expresses the discontinuity of the Mughal history, the lack of proper historical evidence, exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from the realm of history and Rutherford points out the limitation of the academic history. Rutherford observes that the documentary resources cannot reproduce the past, as the past itself is beyond it and history deciphers only the remaining traces left by the past.

Hayden White was a leading American intellectual and theoretical historian. His work *Metahistory* (1974) is considered as his magnum opus. He was a renowned scholar who held the view that history is a subjective art based on crafting

narratives. Hayden White continued his studies in the narrative interpretation of history started by Paul Ricoeur. White postulates that historians use three kinds of methods to gain different kinds of “explanatory effects” such as explanation by formal argument, explanation by emplotment, and explanation by ideological implication. These three strategies give an explanatory effect on historical discourse. Thus he equates history as an endeavour like storytelling. Later, White tried to reinforce and improve his theory of narrative and history in his successive books; *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978), *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effects* (2000) and *Fiction of Narrative Essays on History, Literature and Theory 1957-2007* (2010). The serious discussions that these books put forward directed to formulate many conceptualisations in the domain of historical, political, and social discourses.

In his introduction to *Metahistory*, Hayden White makes a deep analysis of the European classical historical thoughts and he observed, “... the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse” (ix). He maintains that the deep structure of the written history and its contents are “generally poetic and specifically linguistic” (ix). According to him, a historian “prefigures the historical field” and fills the data to explain the course of events. White calls this prefiguration in the name of four types of poetical language as a metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. He argues that the traditional historiographers while trying to tie history with the objectivity of science paid little attention to analyse its artistic or imaginative components. Historical metafiction uses the poetic license to imagine a more perfect past.

The figurative modes employed and the linguistic reproductions give each historical text the components of metahistory. White argues that thinking is the backbone of all linguistic reproductions. The philosophers like Sartre, Foucault, Levi-Strauss had stressed the fictive characteristics of historical consciousness. White distinguishes the emplotment of events in a historical text and a fictional text as:

Unlike the novelist, the historian confronts veritable chaos of events already constituted, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting a story of a particular kind. That is to say he “emplots” his story. (*Metahistory* 6)

White stresses the imaginative turn of history here. White talks about the nature of emplotment of events by a historian and a novelist. A historian solely depends on the historically unprocessed data whereas novelists are independent to deny such limitations by inventing events to suit their narratives. Even though the construction of the plot is common for a historian and a novelist, their method of construction, objective, and arrangement of events in it have different operational strategies to suit the purpose.

White uses Frye’s classification of structure of the plot in the *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) to classify the structure of a historical text. Following Frye, White classifies it into four; romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire. By using Frye’s classification White reveals the essential interrelationship of literary and historical

narratives. In a sense, by allotting the plot structures to a historical work, White stresses the significance of history fiction nexus. The tight compartmentalisation may not be practical since both carry similar representational methodologies. He further suggests that a historian employs his freedom to represent a story in a particular style to enhance the desired explanatory effect. White's revolutionary concepts about the emplotment of history, the role of imagination in the textualisation of history stresses the significance of the reconstruction of history and also it raises doubts against the practicing history. Historical fiction with its mixture of fact and fiction attracts the readers. Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford have shown faithfulness towards the historical sources and at the same time, they have used fictional elements. In one of her interview with the blog, *A Writer of History* Sundaresan observed the commingling of fact and fiction in historical fiction as:

But I do know that I wanted to write in this genre for a very specific reason, in that there is so little literature in the world that deals with Indian history and explores it in a fictional manner as faithfully as possible, and because I think that history is best and most easily interesting only when told in a fictional context, with all the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of a bygone era.

Linda Hutcheon is another academician working in the field of literary theory related with postmodernism, history, and the philosophy of history. She is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of English and of the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. In her influential work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she analyses the occurrence of historiographic metafiction,

intertextuality, parody, and self-reflexivity in the historical text. Historiographic metafiction is a term coined by Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s. This term is used to denote works of fiction that combine the literary devices of metafiction in writing historical fiction. Linda Hutcheon further asserts that historiographic metafiction is also distinguished by frequent allusions to other literary and non-literary texts. She studied in detail the influence of postmodernism in the discipline of history and historiography.

Linda Hutcheon in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* tagged postmodern historical novels as “historiographic metafiction” since they employed the theory of contemporary historiography and problematise the distinction between history and fiction. She explains her reason for the coinage of the term as, “historiographic metafiction puts into question, at the same time as it exploits the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real. This is why I have been calling this, historiographic metafiction” (92). Linda Hutcheon is attracted to the concept of “postmodernism” when it hit all walks of life in the 1980s. Her three books on the topic of postmodernism – *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) *The Canadian Postmodernism* explore the overlapping of postmodern discourse in various fields like historical, philosophical, psychoanalytic, feminist and Marxist. In the analysis of postmodern historical novels, she put stress on the metafiction elements such as intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and non-linear narrative. Linda Hutcheon defines historical metafiction in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* as:

Historiographic metafiction is one kind of postmodern novel which rejects

projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event. It also suggests a distinction between “events” and “facts” that is one shared by many historians. Since the documents become signs of events, which the historian transmutes into facts, as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted. Finally, Historiographic metafiction often points to the fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. (122-123)

History, for Linda Hutcheon, is a “cultural issue” and it is “tied up with an entire set of challenged cultural and social assumptions”. Before the discussion of Ranke’s ‘scientific history’ literature and history were treated as the same. The recent inquiries in the fields of literature and history stress more on the similarity of both shares than the differences. Hutcheon observes:

...recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalised in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the text of the past within their own complex textuality. (105)

Scepticism of historiography was raised by the contemporary philosophers

mirrored in the postmodern historical novels. For Linda Hutcheon, historical fiction offers flexibility and elasticity of boundaries of history and fiction. A reader of historical fiction enjoys “the pleasure of a double awareness of both fictiveness and a basis in the “real”...” (107). Like the story tellers, historians can also exclude events of the past. Hutcheon asks the question “where are the women in the traditional histories of the eighteenth century” (107). The marginalisation and the wiping of women from the historical text is an example of deliberate exclusion of certain past. Indu Sundaresan highlighted this issue in her *Taj Trilogy* novels.

Linda Hutcheon is quite aware of the radical changes that postmodernism unleashed in the philosophy of the twentieth century. The real past might be away from the written past. She postulates that historiographic metafiction, “often enact the problematic relation of writing history to narrativisation and, raising the same questions about the cognitive status of historical knowledge with which current philosophies of history are also grappling”(93).

New Historicists draw attention to the interconnectedness of literary works; that a literary work is not a product of a single author, but it is a product of social negotiations and other non-literary texts. This parallel reading of literary and non-literary text brought into discussion the concept of intertextuality. Intertextuality is a literary device that creates an interrelationship between texts and generates related understanding in separate works.

Intertextuality is a reference to other texts within a text. The referenced text can be anything like novels, films, songs, advertisements, mythology, or history. The meaning of the text cannot be limited within the text. Historical fiction is a

genre, which mixes history and fiction, facts and imagination depend heavily on intertextuality. When history undergoes a series of construction and reconstructions, it confides on considerable sources and footnotes. Each of these data might be taken from some other sources. Hence the traces of many unacknowledged resources reflect in a historical text. Intertextuality subverts the claim of the text as a self-sufficient entity. It highlights the view that the literary text interblends with non-literary text too. The historical and social determinants can also be an intertext. Any historical text is the outcome of the social and historical signifying systems. Thus historical fiction foregrounds the traces of other texts knowingly or unknowingly. As Foucault says: “The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 23)

Intertextual elements in a text redefine the boundaries of the text and blur the outlines of the text. The earlier concept of history as facts and fiction as imagination is redefined in this postmodern scenario. The boundaries of history and fiction have transgressed. Historical fiction supplements history through its imaginative reconstruction of the past. The traces of the past can well be imagined and scientific verification of the sources or the course of an event is impractical. The intertextual relationship of the fictive world of the novel and the limitation of the recorded historical events challenge the concept of historical truth.

Bakhtin’s concept like ‘polyphony’ and ‘heteroglossia’ exactly points towards the plurality of voices. Polyphonic history is just the opposite of the

historical “monody”. Peter Berk in his article “Cultural History as Polyphonic History” says that polyphonic history is polyglot rather than monoglot, and it is presented as a dialogue rather than a monologue. It tells stories from a different perspective than a single Grand Narrative. Multiplication of the voices expressed in the narrative or multiple perspectives is a landmark change that happened in social philosophy in the 20th century. This phenomenon is equally applicable to historical texts too.

History is multidimensional and multivoiced. The transgression of the boundaries of history and fiction points towards the necessity of imagination in historiography too. Literature supplements history by imagining a more plausible past. History should be interrogative and dialogic rather than monologic. Postmodern philosophy of history is not an attempt to negate the existence of history as a discipline but it is an attempt to broaden the horizon of history to rethink the past through all possible ways. The historical fictions of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan explore different perspectives of Mughal history and the possibilities of the reconstruction of the Mughal past from multiple angles.

Chapter III

Her Story Paradigms of the Mughal Historical Women

Postmodern philosophy has its resonance in developing a new historical thought. The enquiry into the nature of history as a discipline has revealed its inadequacy and limitation in representing the past. History is not a mirror held up against past reality. Historical fiction draws attention to the possibilities of knowing the probable past. Contemporary historical philosophers have rejected the concept of history as an empirical and objective discipline whereas they acknowledged history as a literary composition. Postmodern historical novels are labelled, “historiographic metafiction” because it allows multiple voices and alternative histories by neglecting or subverting the “grand historical narratives”.

This chapter is an attempt to articulate the limitation of history as it marginalises females as a non-historical subject. Gender hierarchy, domination, and subordination are societal as well as cultural constructs. During the reign of the Mughals, the imperial women of the court played a pivotal role in the administration. Mughal historiographers have not adequately represented the political interference of Nur Jahan, Jahanara and the influence of other royal women in the Mughal harem in controlling the administration of Mughal Empire. The historical fictions of Indu Sundaresan present Mughal history from the standpoint of a woman. These novels are written against the hegemonic patriarchal rendering of Mughal India. The novels select for the study subvert academic history and it tries to give voice to the suppressed. Historical fiction is a liberating genre, for it allows the

reconstruction of history from the viewpoints of women and other marginally represented groups. The postmodern historical novels problematise the distinction of fact and fiction. The transgression of boundaries of history and fiction is a pertinent issue in contemporary historical fiction. The new historical narratives attempt to recast the historical females in the past and the inherent gender politics of the conventional historiographers who misrepresented women in history as passive subjects.

In recent years, the unheard voices of women in history have become more visible and indisputably appeared in the historical discourse. Formerly rejected and subordinated female figures have thrived in the new reconstructed history and its penetrating repercussion can be felt in contemporary fiction. The repeated rewritings of history focusing on the unheard, marginalised and underprivileged sects have upheld historical discourse as more inclusive and open-ended. These female figures of the past are also accepted and interpreted within the ambit of historical fiction. In modern times, authors have worked to project the influential female historical figures as the centre of their writings both in the literary and historical narratives. The blurring of the boundaries of literature and history expanded the scope of exploration of the multidimensionality of the historical discourse. It is a reality that the male historiographers have established the framework of history as a discipline, in which women have been ostracised. The conventional historical text is a male preserve and written for a male readership that has depicted the patriarchal world. Hence, history has neglected female experiences and disregards females as historical subjects.

The philosophic conceptualisation of New Historicism has shown no sympathy for the category of gender discrimination in the historical text. New Historicism concentrates more on the historical context, author's milieu, and objectives of the writer. Hence, the interpretation of the role of women in the historical process was not its focal point. But the advent of Feminist New Historicism demands a reconstruction of the past from the present. The feminist rereading of history highlights the role of the marginalised especially women in the remaking of the past. Feminist New Historicism deviates from the traditional historical hermeneutics and claims the heterogeneity of history. Feminist historians, in their attempt to reread the historical text, find neither the presently practiced history nor the methodology of social history allowed the scrutiny of gender hierarchies and its operations systematically. The methodological parameters available within the conventional social history paradigms are not sufficient for the feminist historians to examine the construction of gender hierarchies. While facing this limitation, they tried to develop strategies to explain the ways these hierarchies define social roles and positions in favour of males. Thus, Feminist New Historicism promises to reconstruct history to highlight the significance of women in the making of the past.

The novels analysed in this chapter are *Shadow Princess*, *The Feast of Roses*, and *The Twentieth Wife*. Indu Sundaresan explores the politics of gender in history by highlighting the unique and charismatic characteristics of women historical figures such as Nur Jahan and Jahanara. Women writers who affirm feminist perspectives as their prime preoccupation have experimented with different narrative

techniques to represent women's contribution in different genres of literature. Indu Sundaresan has preferred the genre of historical fiction to vindicate the patriarchal foundation of history and the historical neglect of women through her novels.

Indu Sundaresan through the *Taj Trilogy* discusses the diminishing space of women in the history of a nation constructed by the male historiographers. The select novels for the study demand a revisionist history to address the partiality and imperfections in the historical discourse. The significant historical textbooks about the Mughal dynasty ignore the contribution and the political interference of the Mughal princesses and queens. This is obviously because of the patriarchal domination in historiography. The histories of various countries and cultures are written by men about what men have achieved over the years. Women's participation in the historical process is sidelined and marginalised, masculinity is foregrounded and women as partners in the evolution of society and the emergence of dynasties and empires are completely ignored. Indu Sundaresan, in her *Taj Trilogy* Novels, attempts to imagine and construct the possibilities of women's lives, experiences, and involvement in the public domain of the Mughal Empire. The authentic history of Mughal India gives privilege to the dominant masculine voices and neglects the marginalised voices of women; hence, the historical figures such as Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and other imperial women are repeatedly avoided from the fulcrum of the conventional history.

Joan Scott explains the meaning of gender as, "Gender is the social organisation of sexual difference. But this does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical difference between women and men; rather

gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences”(11). Historical text can be understood or read “as a participant in the production of knowledge about sexual difference” (11). History’s representation of gender in the past is the basis for the present construction of the difference between man and woman. The basic foundation of history textbooks is written out of the belief that men and women are different. Hence, it perpetuates the concept that women are intellectually inferior, subordinated to men, and not a valuable historical subject. A re-reading of such a conventional historiography “requires attention to the assumptions, practices, and rhetoric of the discipline, to things either so taken for granted or so outside the customary practice that they are not usually focused for historian’s attention”(Scott 12).

Sundaresan has penned six books so far. Her *Taj Trilogy* novels are *The Twentieth Wife*, *The Feast of Roses*, and *Shadow Princess*. She has to her credit a collection of short stories titled *In the Convent of Little Flowers*. Her novel *The Splendor of Silence* is set in the backdrop of India. *The Mountain of Light* is another historical novel based on the story of the Kohinoor diamond. Sundaresan has won many awards and recognitions. Her first novel in the Taj Trilogy, *The Twentieth Wife* won The Washington State Book Award and it has been converted into a popular television series called “Siyaasat”. She has received the Light of India Award for her meritorious contributions to literature. Her historical fictions are so popular and it has been translated into some 23 languages across the world. The novels of the *Taj Trilogy* have been translated into Tamil, her mother tongue by her mother, Madhuras Sundaresan. Sundaresan’s presentation of female figures of

the past in the Taj Trilogy reminds the readers about the power and authority exerted by the patriarchal society to erase and silence women. Before embarking further into the analysis of the novels, it is significant to have a glimpse of these select novels.

The Twentieth Wife, the first novel in the series, is about the charismatic empress of the Mughal Empire: Nur Jahan. Sundaresan redefines the significance of female discourses in the male-dominated classical historiography. Nur Jahan enjoyed power and privilege in the Mughal court like an empress. Drawing attention to various historical sources, Sundaresan has skillfully woven an engaging story about the most ambitious Mughal queen. She thoughtfully excavated the mute history of this forgotten Mughal empress.

The Twentieth Wife portrays the life of Nur Jahan from her birth to her marriage with the Mughal king Jahangir. It is Jahangir who bestows upon her the title Nur Jahan, the light of the world. The history of Nur Jahan is muddled with facts, myths, and propaganda. The novel *The Twentieth Wife* begins in 1577 when Mehrunnisa is a newborn in her impoverished family. She is not so popular with the westerners like Mumtaz Mahal or Cleopatra. Sundaresan portrays the desirous nature of Nur Jahan in the novel *The Twentieth Wife*. Balwinder Kaur in her review of the novel *The Twentieth Wife* in *The Tribune* writes:

When tales are told about empires and kingdoms, they are usually about kings. But *The Twentieth Wife* by Indu Sundaresan is about Mehr-un-Nissa, better known as Nur Jahan. This is the story of a woman who reached through the bars of her gilded cage and governed a nation. The author brings

to life this unforgettable and enigmatic figure who occupies a unique place in history.

The Feast of Roses is the second novel in the *Taj Trilogy* which depicts Nur Jahan's life as the wife of Jahangir. She was the twentieth and the last wife of Jahangir. It eulogises the gradual development of Nur Jahan towards the role of an empress. She was audaciously bold to face the stiff resistance of the military chieftains and the royal ladies at the court. Sundaresan sketches the picture of Nur Jahan as a mighty empress of India who could even control the day to day affairs of the vast Mughal Empire. Nur Jahan even enjoyed the exclusive authority and power to mint coins with her picture in that. She even attended jharokha (Emperor's public audience) with Jahangir to assist him in the administrative affairs of the country which was never attended by any female before. Nur Jahan was well aware of the restrictions on women in seventeenth-century India. She even thinks why the other wives of Jahangir including Jagat Gosini have never come up demanding any role in the administration of the country along with the Emperor.

In the light of the postmodern historical philosophy which demanded reconstruction of history from multiple perspectives, Sundaresan tries to redefine Nur Jahan in her novel *The Feast of Roses*. The historian Abrham Eraly writes in his *The Lives and Times of the Great Mughals* about Nur Jahan as, "but there was one fatal flaw in her. She was a woman...and in the prejudice of the age women had no public role, and ambition was the prerogative of men" (86). Hence, it is evident that history as a grand narrative has imperceptibly constructed a structural framework for the subjection of women in a hidden manner to foreground its covert

phallogocentricity. Nur Jahan's contribution to the Mughal administration was excluded from the historical texts only because of her gender.

Shadow Princess, the third in the series is about 17th century India and it depicts the unbelievable charisma of Jahanara in uplifting the shattered Emperor Shah Jahan after the death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. Sundaresan explicates the competition of Shah Jahan's daughters, Jahanara and Roshanara to win the heart of their father and to get control over the harem. With an aptitude and fascination for history, Sundaresan creates a story that mixes fact and imagination and brings the lives of Indian women, their struggles for power, and its consequence. In *Taj Trilogy*, Sundaresan depicts the pictures of strong women who partake, the responsibility of administration and shaped the future of the country in the male dictated world. After the unexpected death of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan depended on his eldest daughter Jahanara for everything. Jahanara was just seventeen years old when her mother died and Shah Jahan depended on her for support in the last years of his life. Sundaresan presents the figure of Jahanara as a soothing sympathiser with her father in the times of his adversity. She instilled confidence in Shah Jahan to attend the jharokha but she could not appear along with him in the meeting place because women were not allowed in a patriarchal society to participate in the political affairs of the country. Jahanara acts as a mature character at her young age and consoles her siblings even though she suffers greater pains at her heart, "Her eyes had smarted with a flash of tears, but she had brushed them away impatiently. She did not have the time for this sort of weakness; who would look after them if she began to cry again" (*Shadow Princess* 18).

Historical philosophers such as Hayden White, Keith Jenkins, Alan Munslow, and others have expressed serious concerns about the objectivity and rationality of history. These thinkers argued in favour of the broadening of the discipline of history to include the discussion of the women of the past. Female as a historical subject is never acknowledged by the traditional historiographers. Joan Kelly writes:

Throughout historical time, women have been largely excluded from making war, wealth, laws, governments, art, and science. Men, functioning in their capacity as historians, considered exactly those activities constitutive of civilization: hence diplomatic history, economic history, constitutional history, and political and cultural history. Women figured chiefly as exceptions, those who were said to be as ruthless as, or wrote like, or had the brains of men. (2)

Mughal Queen Nur Jahan (1577-1645), the twentieth and last wife of the fourth Mughal emperor Jahangir is one such historical woman, about whom many controversies revolve in the context of Indian history. In every history text on Mughal India, all the chapters are named after the Mughal kings and not even a single chapter is allotted to elaborate the women of the time.

Satish Chandra, a very popular historian of Mughal India, observes, “The precise political role of Nur Jahan during the period is not clear. She sets fashions of Persian tradition at the court and during her time, Persian art and culture acquired great domination at the court... (175). Here, the author tries to attach her with the domain of domesticity and associates her with the feminine curiosity about a foreign

art and culture to undermine her political existence. Chandra writes, “But Jahangir was not dependent on the “junta” or Nur Jahan, as is also borne out by the fact that nobles who were not favourite of the “junta” continued to get their normal promotion and the rise of Shah Jahan was due to his personal qualities and achievements rather than the backing of Nur Jahan” (176). Here, the historiographer presents Nur Jahan as a politically weak royal lady who has no involvement in formulating the administrative policies of Mughal India. The dominant historiographers of medieval India were not ready to acknowledge the political supremacy of Nur Jahan. However, all of them had identified her as a lady with an indomitable spirit and well versed in the affairs of the court.

It is this kind of bias and misrepresentation of women that Indu Sundaresan tries to redress through her novels. Mughal Empire is considered one of the most affluent and prosperous empires in the history of India. Mughal dynasty is noted for the unusual talent of the rulers who ruled more than two centuries and seven generations of talented administrative organisation. The official Mughal history eulogises the major Mughal Emperors such as Babar, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, and to a lesser degree, Bahadur Shah Zafar. These monarchs occupied the throne from time to time and their accomplishments as the emperors of Mughal India have been lauded and documented in the archives of history. But it is difficult to name any queens who have been celebrated in the historical records of their own accord. Sundaresan points out this subjugation of Mughal queens in the afterword attached to the novel *The Twentieth Wife*:

When one thinks of the six main Mughal Emperors, it is usually in these

terms: Babur founded the empire; Humayun lost it, was driven out of India and returned to reclaim it; Akbar, inheriting the throne at the age of thirteen, consolidated the empire; Jahangir added few kingdoms to the legacy his father left him, but his romantic exploits are legendary; Shah Jahan built the Taj. There are few mentions of the women these kings married or of the power they exercised. *The Twentieth Wife* seeks to fill that gap. (387)

Sundaresan's *Taj Trilogy* portrays the complete misrepresentation of the Mughal harem, its bold and high-spirited Mughal queens and princesses. *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses* are based on the life of Mehrunnisa, better known as Nur Jahan and *Shadow Princess* on Jahanara, the daughter of Shah Jahan. She dexterously weaves the enchanting tale of Nur Jahan and Jahanara in these novels. Sundaresan has ingeniously interblended fact and fiction to portray the lives of Nur Jahan and Jahanara. Her interest to revisit the past of India is instrumental in creating the fascinating tale of one of India's most controversial women; Nur Jahan. After her marriage to Jahangir, Mehrunnisa became Nur Jahan, the light of the world. The luxuries in the court life have not dulled her eyes, instead, she gradually expanded the boundaries of her influence as a skilled diplomat. Later, she evolved as a seasoned politician with extraordinary capabilities to intervene in state affairs.

Indu Sundaresan mentions the dearth of available historical materials on the life of Nur Jahan. She faced great difficulty in collecting required information and she writes it in *Shadow Princess*:

When I began reading and researching facts about the life of Mehrunnisa, Empress Nur Jahan, for my first two novels, I found only brief mentions of

her in seventeenth-century Mughal sources. Even Emperor Jahangir remarks on her fewer than a handful of times in his memoirs; a couple of references are telling, true, but for the history of her life, before she married Jahangir and after, I had to rely upon the small allusions in the accounts of the merchants from the British and Dutch East India Companies and other travellers' tales. In some, Mehrunnisa is the ideal wife and companion; in others (court documents from Shah Jahan's reign); she is the epitome of evil-cunning, sly, dominating and overly ambitious. (361)

Hence, despite the contradictory and derogatory references about her in many historical books, Empress Nur Jahan was noted for her exceptional personal qualities. She was charming, dynamic, exceptionally beautiful, highly educated, and an extremely courageous lady. Sundaresan felt that her tale had remained silenced and muted in the dominant patriarchal discourse of history. It is through the genre of historical fiction that Sundaresan reconstructs the charisma of Nur Jahan and her accomplishments in the Mughal world of luxury and intrigue. Along with this, she excavates the uniqueness of the lives and times of the great Mughals.

As a woman writer, Sundaresan explores the role and prominence of Mughal royal women to bring forth the character of Nur Jahan in such a way that she has the agency to dictate the fortunes of one of the most powerful empires in the history of India. Mughal women remained invisible and mute because of the patriarchal structure of society during the time. But the women of royalty wielded great power within the harem and some highly influential women like Nur Jahan and Jahanara contributed significantly to literature, architecture, politics, fashion, and culture of

the time. Mriduchhanda Palit writes:

“ . . . the political content of Mughal women’s perceptions remain neglected even as examples of their acumen in politics and commerce abound; for instance, Nur Jahan Begum, Emperor Jahangir’s queen, played a pivotal role in the administration of the empire during his reign and was the only Mughal queen to have her face inscribed on a coin of the realm” (201).

Nur Jahan is known as Mehrunnisa before her marriage. She was born in the city of Kandahar amidst her family’s travel from Tehran to India to the court of Akbar, to seek better economic and political fortunes. Her father was Mirza Ghiaz Beg, a Persian nobleman. In the novel *The Twentieth Wife*, Mehrunnisa is the frontispiece of the plot, and it opens with the birth of Mehrunnisa in the desert of Kandahar to poor parents. The novel begins with the close description of the birth of Mehrunnisa detailing the hardships of the refugees, “A few tents tattered and old, crowded in a tight circle at the edge of the outskirts of Kandahar. Camels, horses, and sheep clustered around the camp, seeking warmth and cover from the storm”(2). Mehrunnisa, the third child of Ghiaz Beg and Asmat Begum was borne “when his fortunes were at their lowest” (4). Ghiaz Beg, an erudite man was the son of Muhammad Sharif, a courtier to Shah Thahmasp Safavi of Persia. Her parents, Ghiaz Beg and Asmat Begam choose to name her ‘Mehrunnisa’ - meaning “Sun among Women” (*The Twentieth Wife* 5). Sundaresan narrates one of the popular versions about the life of Mehrunnisa that her parents left her in the desert because of their poverty and her father’s friend Malik Mazud with whom they travelled in the caravan has taken her back from the roadside.

Mehrunnisa was married to a Turkish adventurer Ali Quli Beg, to whom Emperor Jahangir had given the title “Sher Afgan” which means “tiger slayer”. Mehrunnisa had a daughter Ladli in Ali Quli Beg. Jahangir subsequently appointed Ali Quli Beg as the jagir of Burdwan in Bengal. But soon Sher Afgan fell under the displeasure of the emperor. He was killed in an encounter with the commanders of the emperor. Historians like Satish Chandra and L.P. Sharma have expressed the view that Jahangir had not met Nur Jahan before their marriage. Sundaresan in *The Feast of Roses* portrays the contrary idea:

“How many years have passed now since the emperor first saw her?” Sharif asked.

The first time? Seventeen, I think. Mahabath said. She was seventeen then. Not yet married to Ali Quli, although her betrothal had been finalised.

Sharif rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “The emperor tried to dissolve that betrothal and did not succeed.” (*The Feast of Roses* 24)

There are several rumours about the death of Sher Afgan. S.M. Edwards and H.L.O. Garret remark:

Jahangir sends his foster brother Kutbu-d Din to arrest Sher Afgan to the court. He resisted and in the scuffle which followed both he and Kutbu-d Din met their deaths. Sher Afgan’s widow was sent to court where she was placed for a time in the care of Ruqayya Sulthana, one of Akbar’s widows” (59).

Satish Chandra writes, “Sobre historians do not believe Jahangir was

responsible for the death of her first husband” (278). She became a part of the Mughal court in the year 1607 and lived a life of anonymity under the watchful eye of Rukiya Begum. Some historians believe that in 1611, at the celebrated Meena bazaar, Jahangir met the thirty-five-year-old Nur Jahan and he was captivated by her mesmeric beauty. In *The Twentieth Wife*, Sundaresan presents this event as, “Four years after their husband died, who could have foreseen that the emperor would see Mehrunnisa in the palace bazaar and he would marry her?” (25). She was added among the inmates of the select harem of Emperor Jahangir. Gradually her influence and privileges increased in the court. Jahangir married her soon and she received the name Nur Mahal, ‘the light of the harem’ and later distinguished her with the name Nur Jahan - ‘the light of the world’. Ruby Lal in her attempts to reread the history of Nur Jahan writes:

Between 1614 and 1627, the year of Jahangir’s death, Nur served as her husband’s co-sovereign, a decisive player in courtly and succession politics, and a commanding strategist. She defended her subjects against oppressive landlords and otherwise championed social justice. At the height of her power in the 1610s and 1620s, princes and courtiers sought her advice and followed her commands.”(15).

Soon after Jahangir’s marriage with Nur Jahan, her father was raised to the office of the Chief Diwan. Other family members were also benefitted. Her brother Asaf Khan “was appointed the Khan-i-Saman, a post reserved for nobles in whom the emperor had full confidence” (Chandra 129). Satish Chandra, a very distinguished historian of medieval India, in his book *A History of Medieval India*,

presents diverse arguments about the political role of Nur Jahan. He posits the controversies over her position in the court as:

Some modern historians believe that along with her father and brother, and in alliance with Khurram, Nur Jahan formed a group or 'junta' which managed Jahangir, so that without its backing and support no one could advance his career, and that this led to the division of the court into two factions- the Nur Jahan 'junta' and its opponents. It is further argued that Nur Jahan's political ambitions ultimately resulted in a breach between her and Shah Jahan into rebellion against his father in 1622 since he felt that Jahangir was completely under Nur Jahan's influence. However, some historians do not agree with this view. They point out that till 1622 when Jahangir's health broke down; all the important political decisions were taken by Jahangir himself (279).

Satish Chandra presents the two arguments and mentions the obscurity of the historical documents about her life and influence in the Mughal court. Yet he writes, "Nur Jahan was the constant companion of Jahangir and even joined him in his hunting expeditions since she was a good rider and a sure shot. As such, she could influence Jahangir and many people approached her to intercede with the king on their behalf. Under the Mughal rule, no woman had reached such an important position earlier" (279). She was the constant companion of Jahangir and assisted him in hunting and sports expeditions. S.M. Edwards and H.L.O. Garret in their book on Mughal history quote the passage from Jahangir's diary *Tuzuk – i- Jahangiri*:

My huntsman reported to me that there was in the neighbourhood a tiger which greatly distressed the inhabitants. I ordered his retreat to be closely surrounded by a number of elephants. Toward evening I and my attendance mounted and went out. As I had made a vow not to kill any animal with my own hands, I told Nur Jahan to fire my musket. The smell of the tiger made the elephant very restless and he would not stand still and to take good aim from a howdah is a very difficult feat. Mirza Rustam, who after me has no equal as a marksman, had fired three or four shots from an elephant's back without effect. Nur Jahan, however, killed this tiger at the first shot (60).

This passage brings forward the courage that Nur Jahan exhibits to enter into the domains of the patriarchal world. Divergent views and arguments are expressed by different historians about Nur Jahan's involvement in the court affairs, her influence upon Jahangir, her superiority to control the royal zenana, and her diplomatic relations with the East India Company. Historians like L.P.Sharma argued that Prince Salim had no relations with Mehrunnisa before their marriage in 1611. Dr. Beni Prasad is one of the important historians who wrote that Jahangir did not know Mehrunnisa as a prince. Hence, he denied Jahangir's involvement in the death of Sher Afgan. There is a popular belief that Jahangir hatched a plot to kill Sher Afgan but such a conspiracy is not mentioned in any official sources of the time. The historians, including Satish Chandra and S.L. Sharma, agreed upon the political involvement of Nur Jahan. John F. Richard describes the rise and fall of the Mughal Empire, in which he mentions Nur Jahan in a very sketchy manner. Nur Jahan is the only woman who occupies a textual place in this book. This reference of

Nur Jahan may be because Jahangir's era is inextricably intertwined with her multidimensional contributions in the Mughal court. John F. Richard observes, "For over a decade, between 1611 and 1622, Jahangir relied heavily upon advice from Nur Jahan and her colleagues" (103).

The historian's observation about the ladies quarters (harem) of the Mughal court is a reflection of the androcentric parameters of historiography, "Ideally, the harem provided a respite, a retreat for the nobleman and his closest male relatives—a retreat of grace, beauty, and order designed to refresh the males of the household" (Richards 62). The historians of Mughal India emphatically commented about the domesticity of Mughal women and public spheres are presented as male preserves. Women's limitations, incapacities, biological inferiority, and illiteracy were pointed to as the reason behind her exclusion from history. Joan Scott in her *Feminism and History* writes, "Feminist historians have offered examples from many centuries and countries to counter contemporary claims that women are by the physical constitution and physical temperament, weaker, more passive, more concerned with children, less productive as workers, less rational, and more emotional than men"(3).

The women who participate in imperial affairs were often considered immoral and a social outcast. Sundaresan depicts this prejudiced mindset of the patriarchal world in the novel *The Twentieth Wife* through bringing out the discussion of the military commanders of the Emperor about Nur Jahan's appearance in the court along with the emperor, "You saw what happened at this morning's Jarokha. She stood front of us, like a woman of the streets" (23). Here

the novelist tries to dismantle the traditional male-oriented political narratives by redefining the female subject Mehrunnisa; the sun among women, who are cognizant about the subjugation of women in the Mughal court. Her ascension to power created many “internal tensions” in the court.

L.P. Sharma follows the traditional method of analysing the historical documents of Mughal emperors and their administrative strategies. His study on Mughal history has not included the power dynamics of Nur Jahan, Jahanara, or the other Mughal royal ladies who are influential in court politics. L.P.Sharma depicts Nur Jahan as a “desirous women who tried to keep the power of the state in her hands” (134). He observes that Nur Jahan formed a political group by herself and the dominant male members of the court were also a part of it, “Many nobles at the court felt dissatisfied with the increasing influence of a woman in administration and therefore, were opposed to Nur Jahan and her group” (135). He remarks that “the interference of Nur Jahan proved harmful to the empire” (136). His description of Mumtaz Mahal is also very cursory and inadequate. Historians have sarcastically comment about the negative impact of Nur Jahan upon the Mughal Empire.

L. P. Sharma has presented the literary and artistic capability of Nur Jahan as, “She was fond of poetry, music, and painting. She wrote verses in Persian. She had an inventive brain and devised new dresses, ornaments and styles of fashion and decoration” (138). It is L. P. Sharma who paid a little attention to elaborate on the life and political role of Nur Jahan than the other historians of medieval India such as Satish Chandra, Garret, and John F. Richards. Even then, he did not write a chapter to discuss in-depth and breadth the contributions of Nur Jahan as a Mughal

queen. L.P. Sharma summarises the political career of Nur Jahan as:

She started appearing with the emperor in Jharokha Darshan; her name was engraved on some of the coins and later on the orders of the emperor were signed by her also. Thus practically the administration was taken over by Nur Jahan and no important decisions concerning the state could be taken without her consent. Jahangir, who was gradually becoming accustomed to ease owing to age and indifferent health, was also not averse to delegate his authority to his intelligent and hard-working queen. He used to say that he had handed over kingship to Begum Nur Jahan in return for a sir of wine and half a sir of meat. (360)

Mahabat Khan, an important noble in the court of Jahangir, tried to end the influence of Jahangir and he plans a conspiracy against the king to capture the throne. Nur Jahan was quite aware of his secret plan and checked on his promotions. She feared that Mahabat Khan might throttle her dream of putting Shahryar, her son in law on the throne by supporting the claims of Prince Parviz as the next heir of the Empire. Nur Jahan thus decided to break this alliance at any cost. “When Mahabat Khan had been staying in his Ranthambhor castle with the Prince and with his Rajput forces, both Asaf Khan and Nur Jahan started poisoning the Emperor’s mind against the minister framing charges of embezzlement and disloyalty against him” (Findly 264).

Women portrayed in the fictional world of Sundaresan’s Taj Trilogy are not presented as helpless damsels in distress; instead, they are able stateswomen negotiating in the political space. Sundaresan in the novel *The Twentieth Wife*

presents Nur Jahan as a clever diplomat and a seasoned politician, whom the experienced Mahabat Khan fears, “Mehrunnisa is somehow different. Her presence in the zenana will be a threat to me- and maybe even to you” (*The Twentieth Wife* 272). Mahabat Khan was one of the ablest commanders of Jahangir. He could easily control the revolt of Shah Jahan against his father Jahangir. It is believed among historians that Nur Jahan deliberately attempted to cease the power and privileges of Mahabath Khan, “Nur Jahan’s manoeuvres succeeded and Mahabath Khan fled away for safety just after a month” (Sharma 362). Historians like L.P. Sharma believe that the involvement of Nur Jahan created a schism in the relationship between the most trusted noble of the court, Mahabath Khan, and Emperor Jahangir.

In the last phase of Jahangir’s life, he lost control over the Empire because of his ill health and drug addiction. Many historians accused Jahangir as a weak Emperor who showed no interest in the administration. From 1620 onwards he was losing his health also. His ever time passion for taking a break to Kashmir did not bring any desired impact upon his health. He visited Kashmir in March 1627 and on the way back he died on 7th November 1627. He was buried in Lahore where Nur Jahan constructed a beautiful monument on his grave.

The feminist historians try to reveal the patriarchal foundations of male-centred history, which never identified women as historical subjects. The traditional monolithic history with its strong adherence to patriarchal norms reduced history, “his story” and relegated women’s role in the evolution of society or the historical process. The practitioners of gender history have encountered many complications because it worked within the existing parameters of the discipline. It is important to

analyse the processes behind the formation and maintenance of gender hierarchies. The women historians have done a collective approach to the existing power structure to include women.

If a woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it's time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her own very teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside.

(*Laugh of the Medusa* 887)

The select novels of Indu Sundaresan for the study fixate on the feminist approach to gender and history. In the fifteenth and sixteenth-century women were dispelled from the political sphere due to the strong masculine structure of the society. But it is indisputable that women of royalty managed the imperial affairs diplomatically through their connection with the emperor. Mughal rule in India contributed to such charismatic royal women who could control the political affairs of the state. The Mughal women were involved actively at all court functions, including wars and expeditions. Some powerful ladies had business dealings with domestic and foreign merchants behind the veil. It has been documented in the chronicles that women in the imperial household were often as powerful as their husbands acting as patrons of architecture, art, and science and intervenes in political matters.

Alex Rutherford, while recreating the Mughal world through *The Empire of*

the Mughal series presents an array of royal Mughal ladies and their interference in the imperial affairs. *The Tainted Throne*, the fourth novel in the series is completely dedicated to discussing the charisma of Nur Jahan as an Empress of the Mughal Empire. Nur Jahan became a controlling authority and took part in all the political negotiations of the court. The major Mughal historians have identified the Nur Jahan's significance in the public space but historiography neglected to elaborate more about the political accomplishments of Nur Jahan.

Tazkiras is a set of collective biographies and it forms a particular genre of Mughal writing. The research in the field of Tazkira literature proved that they are social repositories that provide new insight into the Mughal court culture. Tazkiras are largely ignored by historians, and its reference is absent in the historical chronicles. In contemporary times historians realise the importance of human experiences, the emotional lives of individuals, and their collective memories in recreating a complete sense of the past. History can be supplemented through the proper analysis of memoirs because biographies are not simply the exploration of one's lived experiences, but it contains the constant interaction of the individual self with the socio-cultural forces in the outside world. The two Tazkiras - *Zakhirat-ul Khawanin* written in the 17th century by Shaikh Farid Bhakkari and *Ma'asir-ul Umara* written in the 18th century by Shah Nawaz Khan represent the life of Nur Jahan and her influence at the court. These two Tazkiras observe the gender hierarchies in society and a shift in the role of women in the political process of the Mughal Empire. Shivangini Tandon in her article "Negotiating Political Spaces and Contested Identities: Representation of Nur Jahan and Her family in the Mughal

Tazkiras” observes the significance of this genre of literature to study the Mughal past:

The tazkiras were forms of biographical dictionaries that were written in the Mughal period to record for posterity the lives of influential nobles, saints, sufis and scholars. Historians have largely neglected these but as bearers of social memories, they are unusually important sources for the study of social perceptions and mentalities. In some of these tazkiras, in what is clearly a noticeable difference from court chronicles, we notice detailed descriptions about imperial women. (42)

Bhakkari’s tazkira allots a separate chapter to analyse Nur Jahan’s life and the influence of her family at the Mughal court. Shivangini Tandon writes that Bhakari portrays Nur Jahan as, “A self-sufficient human agent, one who was not, despite her gender, dependant on her spouse or father. The important point here is that Bhakkari also mentions in his tazkira other imperial women as well and this suggests that he recognizes them as political agents in their own right...” (42). The coins and imperial orders that Nur Jahan issued shows the extension of the sovereignty that she exerted in court politics. Interestingly both the tazkarikas have presented Nur Jahan as an Empress with immense personal potential. Nur Jahan “routinely constructed expensive buildings—rest houses for travellers (sarais), gardens, palaces and tombs” (Findly 46).

Virginia Woolf in her “A Room of One’s Own” writes about the inadequate representation of women in history and she urges women to write about the history of women. She says that the life of an average woman in the past is still a myth, for

history has never attempted to write about it. One important problem of writing history from the perspective of women is to collect proper historical data to support the assumptions. History with such an intention values the neglected historical experiences of women. Joan Scott writes about the reconstruction of women's history as, "herstory has had many different uses. Some historians gather evidence about women to demonstrate their essential likeness to historical subjects to men" (25). Another methodology associated with the "her story" paradigm is to challenge the existing notions of historical progress. They do not consider the Renaissance period as truly a rebirth of knowledge since it was not a renaissance of women.

The rise of radical feminist movements in the 1980's substantiating the subversion and exploitation of women in all facets of life exposed the futility of patriarchal history. Gender history developed as an offshoot of the feminist agenda and argued that femininity and masculinity are not natural but a social construction. The objective of feminist historians is to recover the lives of women from obscurity, uncover the historical significance of some important female figures in history, and to recognise the contributions of women towards the development of society over the generations. Women were neglected from the historical gaze. Gender history has explored the possibilities of creating a new reading of history from the perspective of women. The scholars of gender history redefined the role of femininity and sought to address the normative gender constructions over time. Feminist historians have developed their own conceptual and methodological strategies to study the role of women in the past.

The conventional Mughal history is constructed upon a ubiquitous

stereotyping of Mughal women in politics, but Mehrunissa becomes judicious about the existing patriarchal norms regarding gender roles which neglected women's voice in political issues:

Mehrunissa sat behind him in the zenana balcony, watching as the Emperor dealt with the day's business. Sometimes, she almost spoke out loud, when a thought occurred to her, when an idea came, then she stopped, knowing that the screen put her in a different place. That it made her a woman. One without a voice, void of opinion. (*The Feast of Roses* 5)

Mehrunissa's life becomes an open battle with these oppressive ideologies, "Would he (Jahangir) defy these unsaid rules that fettered her life as his Empress, as his wife, as a woman?"(6). She remembers, "All her life she had wanted the life of a man, with the freedom to go where she wished, to do what she wanted, to say what came to her mind without worry for consequences"(6). Mehrunnisa develops herself as a resourceful woman who participates in the domestic and political landscapes of her time.

Women's history, now known as gender history has debated about the historical construction of gender roles and identities. It has envisaged history as a patriarchal discourse foregrounding the domination of masculine power. The gender historians are backed by the postmodern philosophy of "multiple histories" demanded an inclusive reconstruction of the past, which can offer a holistic history. The recent exploration of women's history and gender history has enriched historical discourse, devised new perspectives, produced new debates, and brought new areas for enquiry.

The tides of postmodern concepts of social and cultural history were favourable to the success of women's history. It raises pertinent questions about the rejection, invisibility, and misrepresentation of women in mainstream history. Gender history can be seen as a part of women's resistance and survival. Her story has opened up a new innovative avenue for a new wave of history assuring women centred view of the world. The conventional historiography has banished the appearance of women in the public sphere and subverted her only in the domestic realms. But the recent researches have brought the unheard stories to the forefront. Soniya Rose in her *What is Gender History* defines gender history as:

Gender historians are concerned with the changes over time and the variations within a single society in a particular period in the past with regard to the perceived differences between men and women, the make- up of their relationships, and the nature of the relations among women and men as gendered beings. They are concerned with how these differences and relationships are historically transformed and how they are transformed. Importantly they are also concerned with the impact of gender on a variety of historically important events and processes. (2)

The domains of politics and domesticity were not the only space where Mughal royal women marked their identity. They played a prominent part in developing spiritual life in the Mughal times such as worshipping holy persons, visiting their tombs, and pilgrimage to the shrines of mystical saints. Jahanara's empathy for Sufism and Islamic mysticism is an excellent example of women's participation in spiritual spheres. Jahanara was an ardent disciple of Mullah Shah

Badakhshi who introduced her to the Sufi order in 1641. She penned the biography of Moinuddin Chishti and Mullah Shah, which speaks about her vocation as a follower of Sufism. She built her tomb in the Nizamuddin Dargha complex.

Sundaresan mentions Jahanara's practise of visiting the Durgas and she, "meditated at the Dargah of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, a Sufi saint of the Chisti order who had died in the early part of the fourteenth century" (*Shadow Princess* 263). Jahanara's commitment to Islam's mystical branch, Sufism acted as a model of empowerment that helped the unmarried Jahanara's political acumen. Her active engagement with Sufism and the mystical believes of Islam made her a broadminded political advisor. Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan was a passionate follower of Sufism. In the novel *Shadow Princess*, Sundaresan writes, "her (Jahanara) interest in Sufism had been fuelled by Dara, who had given her books to read, allowed her to sit behind a curtain when the holy men came to visit him and discuss their philosophies, read poetry with her"(264).

Sundaresan tries to write a "lived experience" of the Mughal imperial women and to place them in the social and historical context of seventeenth-century Mughal India. Women's political power, visibility, and empowerment were not well addressed or understood by the male historiographers of Mughal India. Gender history began to appear in the 1960s and developed in the 1970s. Even before it women's involvement in historical incidents had been written, but it was not an in-depth representation. Women had been ignored and neglected by mainstream historians. This may be because "historians viewed history to be almost singularly about the exercise and transmission of power in the realms of politics and

economics, arenas in which actors are men” (*What is Gender History* 3). Even the social historians were not acknowledged women as historical subjects or valuable agents in society. They have wrongly understood “men are the universal agents of history”(4). The conventional historians never thought about the individuality of women or the existence of women as active social agents. The gender historians like Joan Scott argues that the establishment and maintenance of patriarchy create ambiguities and contradictions in society in terms of a fair gender expression.

The irresolvable relation of politics and gender makes a passive and unconscious acceptance of an “androcentric” social order, which positions man as the historical subject. Scott posits that “gender and politics are to be understood as mutually constitutive “(4). Women’s history has documented the nature of women's workforce, their marital status, and their income level. This exploration of the women’s experience of the past revealed their active participation in labour unions and strike. Many historians argue, “...wage-earning enhanced women’s status: others thought women were exploited as cheap labour force” (27). Feminist historians thought that the romanticised depiction of female domesticity is never an effective means of challenging patriarchal structures in history. Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton comment:

Feminist history has an overt agenda of political equality for men and women and seeks to democratize historical discourse by not only recovering women as active participants in the making of history but also decentring the male subject and challenging the patriarchal ways of thinking and institutions that are presented as neutral, rather than socially constructed(149).

Indu Sundaresan presents the historical significance of Princess Jahanara in the last book of the *Taj Trilogy: Shadow Princess*. Sundaresan presents Jahanara as a pardha clad unmarried royal lady who participates in the socio-religious public space not as a spectator but as a powerful motivator in the novel *Shadow Princess*. The novel depicts her position in the imperial harem and her influence upon the king Shah Jahan. The social history approach towards Mughal history gave only a relegated and peripheral visibility of imperial women. Most of the memoirs of Mughal elitist women were not a proper source for the “official” historiographers. Hence, the unprecedented power wielded by the royal Mughal women was never a part of formal histories. Jahanara Begum is presented in the novel as a sceptical thinker who raises questions about the accepted boundaries of domesticity for women, public and private domains, and women’s hand in political spheres. She overcame the stricture of societal attitudes, the traditions at the court and accepted the Timurid Mughal legacy. As an afterword to the novel *Shadow Princess*, Sundaresan writes about the retelling of the life of Jahanara Begum as:

The Mughal Empire is crumbling. With the death of his beloved queen Mumtaz, Emperor Sha Jahan slowly loses interest in everything, while his sons conspire and scheme to gain control of the empire. Princess Jahanara is only seventeen when the weight of the imperial zenana is thrust upon her. Shah Jahan’s favourite daughter, she is the most important woman in the harem and is forced to remain at the Mughal court all her life, caught up in the intrigues and power politics of her siblings, sacrifice her own desires for the sake of her father. (413)

Keith Jenkins observes, “Although millions of women have lived in the past, few of them appear in history that is history texts. Women, to use a phrase, have been hidden from history that is, systematically excluded from most historians’ accounts” (7). Afshan Bokhari argues :

Aside from the scholarly strides taken in the field of women’s studies since the latter half of the twentieth century, the elite and common Muslim woman and her self-representation in the public realm had been either dismissed or at best marginalized by historians and confined to a domestic sphere where aside from her role in reproduction remained invisible and ineffectual in the annals of history. (27)

Princess Jahanara (1614-1681), is the eldest daughter of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and his beloved wife Arjumand Bano Begum popularly known as Mumtaz Mahal. This remarkable princess who is very close to her father after the death of her mother has played a prominent role in the history of India by being a close confidante of her father. Soon, she became a source of energy for her grieving father. Jahanara exercised great intervention in the Mughal court. Safia Iqbal writes:

Shah Jahan’s daughter Jahan Ara wielded much power in the government. She played a crucial role in the unfortunate family war of succession. She often granted honours and Khilats (robes of honour) to local and foreign dignitaries, and her good offices were sought by local and foreign ambassadors and traders alike. (88)

Jahanara’s active involvement in making her siblings and her grieving father

participate in the funeral rites of Mumtaz Mahal in a befitting manner is presented in the novel, “Bathe first, you must be clean and eat a little, and when we go to Zainabad Bagh to lay our mother in the ground, we will consider ourselves with the dignity befitting our rank and our status” (18). She is not merely a passive spectator but an active participant and she defies the conventional rules of religion and society.

Women’s contribution to history has not been well documented. After the accidental death of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan gets consolation and strength from his eldest daughter Jahanara. Jahanara becomes his ablest advisor in political matters and the Emperor reposes his confidence in his favourite child. Mahabat Khan, the Khan-i-Khanan of the court contemplates in *Shadow Princess*:

The oldest princess, he thought, Jahanara Begam. Now they would all depend upon her, lean upon her slender shoulders for counsel, advice, and strength. Who else was there?.... The emperor’s own mother was dead; and he had not been close to his father’s other wives- especially Mehrunnisa, the last one- so which woman could help him carry his burdens other than this child of his?. (33)

It is a historical fact that males and females have been dependent on each other from times immemorial but the patriarchal social structure adores the males and undermines the significance of women. Had the farsighted Jahanara not been there to upkeep her beloved father in his toughest time of misery, the history and future of India would have been a different one. At a certain point, Shah Jahan was willing to relinquish the throne out of his grief. Still, Jahanara’s timely interference

and counsel helped the king to take a more rational decision, “You cannot give up the empire, Bapa. We are all so young, so untried . . . and you have fought too long for this crown” (69). She fears that the abandonment of the throne by her father might lead to a topsy - turvy situation in the country. She further advises her father to take a wise decision to avoid anarchy and bloodshed in the kingdom. Jahanara warns him against regency and strongly advises Shah Jahan to take up the administration of the Empire. Jahanara, at the age of seventeen, demonstrated surpassing talent to govern the Empire and also in judging the aftereffect of the Emperor’s prolonged inactive period of grief:

‘Think, Bapa., the boys are so young and likely to be easily led by the amirs at court. Where will you be? Who will pay attention to an emperor who has deposed himself?’

‘Does it matter so much, Jahan?’

‘Only as much as the empire does. If the nobles array themselves into cliques, the land will be fragmented.’

‘A regency would also be unwise. There is no precedent for this, Bapa.

Would you be willing to allow another man to counsel your son in matters of state?’. (*Shadow Princess* 71-72)

Jahanara, with her exceptional political acumen, saved the Empire from the power mongers and she could easily influence and trust Prince Dara. Shah Jahan had seen Dara as his successor. She believed that it is her responsibility to convince her father to continue wearing the crown, “...she realized that a crisis had been averted. And it was of her doing” (73).

Simon De Beauvoir, a French feminist critic who writes about the position of women in history in her most influential and classical work *The Second Sex* published in the year 1949 makes the celebrated proclamation, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”. She talks about the social and cultural conditioning of the gender roles which mark women as the “other”, “Now what peculiarly signalises the situation of the woman is that she - a free and autonomous being like all human creatures - nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other” (33). Judith Butler problematises the clichéd operations of gender. She argues in favour of opening up new possibilities of the existing gender hierarchy. Butler writes the book intending to “uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions” (5). The existing patriarchal norms of the society believe in the hierarchy of gender and the exclusion of women from all domains of social life. She critiques “the pervasive cultural condition in which women’s lives was either misrepresented or not represented at all” (4). This perception is applicable to the novels of Indu Sundaresan.

Jahanara’s immense power and authority as the Padshah Begum of the harem of Shah Jahan have been unusual in the history of Mughals in India. In *Shadow Princess*. Sundaresan writes, “In the Mughal harem, the most powerful woman was the one most dear to the emperor, and in this case, for the first time in the history of the Mughals, it was the daughter and not the wife” (142). Usually, a Mughal Emperor bestows the title of Padshah Begum upon the most trusted chief wife of the Emperor. But a new tradition was created in the Mughal court by appointing

Jahanara as the Padshah Begum of the harem. Jahanara's assertive authority and power, her diplomacy, public participation, and her contribution to the seventeenth-century Mughal India might have come from the influence of her Central Asian legacy. Lisa Balabanlilar in her book *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire* writes about the legacy of the Central Asian Timurid dynasty which paved the way for the Mughal imperial women as a model to engage in the public domain.

Elite women of the Timurids and Mughals like their female ancestors among the Turks and Mongols of Central Asia participated fully, hunting from horseback howdah from a drawn cart. It is unsurprising that when Humayun fled to Iran still under the political control of Turcoman tribal groupings, the Safavid Sha's sister joined their hunting parties, armed and mounted.

Herodotus and Xenophon had both noted that Iranian royal women historically were hunters and among Central Asian Turks a woman had long proved herself worthy of her royal husband by riding, shooting and hunting.

(89)

This observation makes it clear that both Nur Jahan and Jahanara followed the traditions of their predecessors. She was acknowledged as the Padsha Begum of the Mughal Empire between 1631- 1681. She was also given the title Begum Sahib (Princess of Princesses). Mumtaz Mahal had an untimely death in 1631 when Jahanara was only 17. Jahanara was a patron of art, architecture, poetry, and painting. She was a poet. Shah Jahan took her advice at times and entrusted her the royal seal. She was interested in Sufism along with her brother Dara Shukoh. During the last days of Shah Jahan, Jahanara joined him in the house arrest at Agra fort.

Mughal Harem is an important institution like the Jagirdari or the Mansabdari systems. The key sources of information about the Mughal Harem come from the foreign traveller's accounts but many of those accounts are exaggerations. Gulbadan Begum's (Emperor Babur's daughter) *Humayunama* gives a detailed description of the Mughal Harem, though the main objective of the text is an exploration of the administration of Babur, Humayun, and the early part of Akbar's reign. The Mughal Harem was a heterogeneous institution, resided women from different nationalities and ethnicities. The word "harem" is the same in the meaning of the Persian word 'Zenana' and the Sanskrit word 'Anthapura' which means the inner apartment of the house.

Ruby Lal presents harem as a political space, "Harem, for the domestic life of early Mughals, is perhaps most usefully conceptualised as a realm in which an array of old and new convergences between the perspective and practice come together to play a central part in the making of Mughal subjects – men and women" (*Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* 5). The author focused her study "upon the visibility of imperial women and their power" (8). She critiques the lack of historical narratives about the influence of the royal women in the Mughal administration: "Mughal private life and the harem appears here as nothing but a caricatured arena of fixed behavioural patterns, of unchanging and unmediated sexual and physical pleasure, a particularly static "female" domain of which a "history" is rarely conceivable" (10). In the Mughal court harem is an apartment exclusive for women. It is a forbidden place, where women are arranged based on their closeness with the emperor. Three levels of security are ensured in the premises

of the harem. The guards of the innermost circle are women. Abul Faizi in his *Akbarnama* noted that there are 5000 women in Akbar's Harem. These lady guards used bows, arrows, and short daggers to ensure security. Its inmates are wives, female relatives of the emperor, infants, stepmothers, aunts, concubines, sisters, and daughters of the emperor. The harem has been organised hierarchically. The chief authorities are the wives and female relatives of the emperor and the other inhabitants in the harem are below them.

Women move out of the harem as they liked, but many women travelled for affairs of pilgrimage to local shrines, hunting, and sightseeing with the Emperor. They always moved out in beautifully decorated palanquins or on the back of the elephants. Inside the Harem, they led a luxurious and comfortable life. The Harem had gardens, fountains, and water channels attached to it. There were various departments within the Mughal Harem that fulfilled the basic needs of its inmates. The food was provided from the Royal Kitchen known as *Maktabh* and the *Akbar Khanah* provided drinking water and wine. The *Ritab Khanah* was in charge of supplying bread, and the *Maywa Khanah* provided fruits to the household. Things of personal use of the women such as Beautiful dresses, jewellery, fancy articles and other household items were provided by the Imperial *Karkhanah*. (Wikipedia)

Mughal royal ladies are presented as Pardha clad secluded women. Contrary to this stereotypical image, Mughal women participate in high-level court politics. The historical text provides very limited knowledge about the Mughal royal ladies and their involvement in public affairs. The wise ladies in the Harem used their

capacity to exploit a certain political situation to their advantage. Akbar sought his wet nurse Maham Anaga's assistance to get free from the powerful tutelage of Bairam Khan. She helped him by forming a power circle consisting of her son and son in law. Soma Mukherjee mentions the importance of women in Mughal court:

The Mughal age not only witnessed the glorious achievements of its emperors and princes, but also that of princesses, queens, and other ladies of the royal Mughal harem. The ladies of the Mughal dynasty were almost as remarkable as their men and in certain cases, even more, cultivated. These beautiful, educated, and extremely talented women not only contributed towards the social, cultural, literary, artistic, and economic fields but also yielded great power, played a dominant role in contemporary politics. (10)

In the novel *The Feast of Roses*, Sundaresan presents Nur Jahan as an advisor to Jahangir in the affairs of the court. She attends the Jharokha which is an exclusively male domain of power and she participates in taking decisions, "Perhaps it would be best if this matter was decided later on. This man already has a mansab of six hundred horses, raising it now would do little good" (11-12). Jahangir considers her advice and accepts it as a decision. The queens in the harem from time to time are influential upon the emperor in different ways. Though they are hidden behind the veils, their impact on the administration is unavoidable.

Many of the Mughal royal women right from the time of Babur to Aurangzeb have directly or indirectly influenced the political course of events. They lived a life of luxury inside the harem. History reveals that the Central Asian women have played a key role in wars and combats along with the male warriors to

protect their kingdom. Since Mughals carry the tradition of Timur and Chengiz Khan, they allowed royal ladies to interfere in the political affairs of the state:

In the army of Timur, there are many dauntless and daring women warriors, efficient in the use of bows, spears, and swords. The same could be said about women in Chengiz Khan's time too. When the leader of the tribe died, his widow could assume all the rights of her husband and could even act as regent to her son if he was a minor. (Soma Mukherjee 114)

During the reign of Babur, women were allowed considerable rights in court affairs but they were not permitted to be sovereign. Babur's maternal grandmother Esan Doulath and Babur's mother Qutlug Nigar Khanum moulded the political career of Babur. Essan Doulath who had witnessed years of political ups and downs with her husband Yunus Khan assisted Babur when Babur lost his father at the age of eleven in 1494. Essan Doulath wielded the real administrative and political power and she reshuffled the old military officers to ensure the security of Babur as a boy king. She continued her assistance to Babur when he lived the life of a wanderer. Babur in his autobiography *Baburnama* describes her tutelage as, "Few among women will have been my grandmother's equals for judgement and counsel; she was very wise and far-sighted and most affairs of mine were carried under her advice" (17). He writes about her political diplomacy, "When it comes to tactics and strategy, there were few women like my grandmother Isan Daulat Begum. She was intelligent and a good organizer mostly, arrangements were made according to her stipulations."(2) Babur's mother Qutlug Nigar was a constant companion to him and she helped him to overcome resistance from Shibani Khan. Babur had fond

memories of her grandmother and he mentions it in his autobiography as, “Qutlug Nigar was with me in most of my guerrilla expeditions and throneless times” (13).

Humayun’s marriage with Hamida Banu Begum the daughter of a Persian Shia, Mir Baba Dost was politically beneficial for him. The Shia powers became his strong supporters and they stood with him in his difficult times. Babur’s eldest sister Khanzada Begum enjoyed an esteemed position in the court of Humayun. She was the first lady in the royal harem and had privileges in the political affairs of the court. “The political role that Khanzada Begum played during Humayun’s time was that of a goodwill ambassador and peacemaker, trying to settle disputes between Humayun and his brothers, Hindal, Kamran and Askari” (Soma Mukherji 122). During the reign of Akbar, a few famous and infamous women played critical roles in the administration of the time. Right from his accession of the throne in 1556, he was enclosed by certain politically ambitious women. His Turkish nurse Maham Anaga was foremost among them. His mother Hamida Banu Begum was a constant advisor in his early years. Akbar’s marriage alliances with Hindu and Rajput princess helped him to consolidate his power as a Mughal Emperor. Sundaresan details the unimaginable luxuries of the harem, the exclusive private space of the royal ladies, their extravagantly rich life, and the gifts they used to get from the emperor. Sundaresan gives a complete picture of the Mughal world explains its social and cultural dimensions.

A tingle of gold bangles made her look to one corner of the room. The empress sat on a stool as sleekly muscled slave girls, their skins coloured with the brown hues of the earth took off her jewels. A eunuch stood nearby

holding a silver tray on which the jewels were laid. In the centre of the room was an octagonal pool carved into the floor ...(*The Twentieth Wife* 37).

The chief queen of the harem is called Padshah Begum, a very powerful position. Mehrunnisa noticed that as a Padshah Begum Ruqayya is immensely powerful, “The title of Padshah Begum was not tightly bestowed nor lightly taken. Everything that happened within the harem walls, and quite a bit that happened outside, came to Ruqayya’s ears through various spies” (39). Ruqayya Begum was the empress consort or queen consort of the Mughal court from 1557-1605 as the chief wife of Emperor Akbar. In the novel *The Twentieth Wife* Sundaresan frequently mentions her to convey the considerable influence of Ruqayya on her husband Emperor Akbar and the role she played in negotiating the settlement between Akbar and his son Jahangir.

Rekha Misra gives a pen picture of the power exhibited by women in the Mughal era in her *Women in Mughal India* (1967). Mughal ladies at the court enjoyed many privileges. She observes, “The family of Babur which inherited the traditions of Chingiz Khan and Timur allowed their families sufficient political right and enabled them to share the political rights”(16-17). She mentions the important position of Maham Begum, the wife of Babur as, “She held a very high place in the harems of Babur, Humayun, and Akbar” (18). Babur’s marriage to Bibi Mubarika was an alliance with a clear political inclination. She was the daughter of an influential Yusufzai tribe of the Afghans. Misra emphasises the role of Bibi Mubarika in making strong ties with the Afghans and writes, “She strengthened Babur’s hold in Afghanistan” (18-19).

It is quite interesting to note that the Mughal kings though customarily keep their womenfolk behind the curtain, give significance to their opinions. The women in the private quarters; royal queens, concubines, and mistresses witness and participate in the court proceedings from behind a screen. On many occasions, these women express their ideas, suggestions, and sometimes wield influence on the king. In *The Feast of Roses*, Sundaresan narrates the ardent desire of Mehrunnisa to attend the public meeting of the king with the nobles, “I want to be with you in the balcony, standing in front of the nobles and the commoners” (8). Even though Jahangir was willing to consider her wish, but he asked, “It was never been done before” (8). The women in the zenana used to stay behind the walls of the harem. In *The Twentieth Wife*, Mehrunnisa observes:

Bapa came home with stories about his day, little tidbits about Emperor Akbar’s rulings, about the zenana women hidden behind a screen as they watched the court proceedings, sometimes in silence and sometimes calling out a joke or a comment in a musical voice. The Emperor always listened to them, always turned his head to the screen to hear what they had to say. (22)

During the reign of Humayun, his eldest sister Khanzada Begum enjoyed a prominent place in the harem of Humayun. Humayun used to visit Khanzada, the chief lady of the harem to seek her advice to solve complicated issues. Rekha Misra has noticed the strong influence of Mughal imperial women even in matters like court verdicts concerning their favourite nobles.

Gulbadan Begum was another important Mughal Princess, daughter of Babur and the half-sister of Humayun who exercised great influence in the imperial

household. She was in Kabul most of her life but later she came to India at the request of her nephew Akbar. She made a profound influence on the royal affairs largely because of her close acquaintance with Akbar and his mother, Hamida. Her biographical book, *Humayunama* is a commendable work on the life and times of Humayun by a Mughal woman. This effort of Gulbadan Begum is worthy to be noted as it well demonstrates the wisdom of Mughal women in an age that has imposed too many restrictions upon them. *Humayunama* is written in the form of a personal memoir. It is the only available book produced by a woman of Mughal royalty. Gulbadan Begum is well mentioned in Abul Faizi's *Akbarnama*. Thus *Akbarnama* accredits the political interference of Gulbadan begum in the Mughal Court.

Gulbadan explains the dynamic attempt of Hamida Banu Begum, the wife of Emperor Humayun and mother of Akbar in maintaining the relationship between Iran and Hindustan. Gulbadan writes, "Due to the efforts of Hamida Banu Begum the relations between Iran and Hindustan always remained good" (240). These are some insights that approve the active role of women of royalty in shaping the Mughal Empire during 16th century India. Gulbadan writes the biography because of the strong insistence from the part of Akbar. She records:

There had been an order issued, 'Write down whatever you know of the doings of Firdous-Makani (Babur) and Jannat-Ashyani (Humayun)'. At this time when his Majesty Firdaus-Makani passed from this perishable world to the everlasting home, I, this lowly one, was eight years old, so it may well be that I do not remember much. However, in obedience to the royal command, I set down whatever there is that I have heard and remember. (10)

Sundaresan skilfully weaves fact and fiction in a very interesting manner in the novel *The Twentieth Wife*. She narrates the context of Prince Salim's (Jahangir) marriage with Man Bai, daughter of Raja Bhagwant Das of Amber in a pure imaginative plane. Sundaresan portrays the large scale marriage preparations at the court and brings out the childhood wonder of Mehrunnisa about the court, and then Sundaresan turns to draw the historical actuality. She writes, "But most marriages are political. In this case, Emperor Akbar wishes to maintain a strong friendship with Raja, and Bhagwant Das similarly wants close ties with the empire. After all, he is now the vassal to the emperor" (*The Twentieth Wife* 22).

The Mughal emperor's marriages were political alliances. Babur's marriage to Bibi Mubarika was also with clear political interest. She was the daughter of a Yusufzai tribe of the Afghans. The marital alliance with Bibi Mubarika became instrumental in strengthening Babur's hold in Afghanistan.

Mehrunissa in the novel *The Twentieth Wife* is conscious of the patriarchal domination which subjugates women in the Mughal court. She feels irritated with the system of discriminating against women by not allowing them to take part in many events. Mehrunnisa has to stand and watch Prince Salim's wedding from the zenana balcony, "It was unfair that her brothers were allowed to be present at the courtyard below while she had to be confined behind the purdah with the royal harem" (27). Throughout the novel, she is portrayed as a rebel with identity and unassuming courage right from her childhood. Her meeting with Padshah Begam Ruqayya and the continuous interaction with her made visible alterations in the personality of Mehrunnisa. She got an opportunity to get closer to the internal

politics of the zenana and the courtly life. Mehrunissa learns from the visits of Ruqayya Begum, Akbar's favourite wife that the title of Padshah Begam was a powerful position and everything that happened within the harem walls and outside, came to Ruqayya's notice through various spies.

As an anti-conventional lady who resists following the existing codes of conduct for the women, Mehrunnisa even accompanies her brother to Nashakhana once disguised as a boy. She does not follow instructions given to her by her mother regarding how a lady should behave in the family and outside. Kamla Bhasin, in *Exploring Masculinity* observes, "In pursuit of the "masculine", men generally become active, aggressive and domineering, and women become receptive, subservient and nurturing" (14). Mehrunnisa is courageous enough to accompany her brother Abul to hunting and visiting Nashakhana (Public Houses), a place strictly forbidden for women. She dreams a life where she does not restrict herself by any external rules. She believes in the equal status of women with men and she wants to do everything that her brothers do. Sundaresan narrates the witty remarks of her brother:

I will tell Bapa that you went with me three nights ago. Dressed as a man, with kohl- painted moustache and got drunk on three sips of wine. That I had to carry you home early. That my friends still ask after the pale-faced youth who has such a weak stomach that "he" puts even a baby to shame.... Be thankful Khadija did not wake up and wonder why you weren't in bed. Bapa would have beaten you for sure if he found out. (*The Twentieth Wife* 41-42)

She dares to challenge the patriarchal norms and wishes to widen her

prospects rather than put herself behind the veil. When her brother Abul criticised her for her infatuation for prince Salim, Mehrunnisa's bold reply was "if I wanted to marry him, what would stop us?"(41). Sundaresan portrays Mehrunnisa's dream of becoming an Empress of the Mughal dynasty as a leitmotif throughout the novel *The Twentieth Wife*.

There are various instances in the novel *The Twentieth Wife*, where Mehrunnisa questions and challenges the gender roles prescribed by the conventional society. She often asks her father, "Why a woman has to stay in the house when a man can go and come as he pleases" (45). Asmat, the mother of Mehrunnisa, acts like a stereotypical woman who wants to confine her daughter to the domestic space. Asmat is a typical stereotype of the subjugated woman conditioned by the concept of patriarchal domination and happy in her marginal existence. Ghiaz, more or less broad-minded, is afraid of losing his daughter's clever assistance in his official responsibilities in the court if she is forced to stay behind the veil. Mehrunnisa recognises that more restrictions will be imposed upon her in the future, "The older she became- she was now fourteen-the more Bapa and Maji imposed restrictions on her... These restrictions would be part of her life from now on, for she was a woman" (48). Ghias and Asmat, the agents of patriarchy, imposed the rules of masculinity upon her. She is restricted and warned, "Do not go out too much; keep your voice down; pull your veil over your head when a strange man, one not of the family, comes to visit" (*The Twentieth Wife* 48).

Mehrunnisa gradually learns the etiquettes for a Mughal queen from her frequent visits to Ruqayya. Further, she learns many useful qualities of a

noblewoman from Ruqayya such as, “A woman must not be completely reliant on a man, either for money or for love” (63).

Mehrunnisa admires and learns that Ruqayya is tactful in keeping her position safe and making people bow before her power. Ruqayya serves as a mentor to Mehrunnisa. Her resistance to accept the male defined female role can be interpreted as an attempt to bring the marginalised to the centre. She recognises the need to consider the voices of women even in the matters of administration. Mehrunnisa believes in the potential of women to displace the dominant structure of society. She tries to understand more about the “zenana life, Salim’s likes and dislikes and the situation at court” (69). Sundaresan portrays the indomitable spirit of Mehrunnisa and her resistance against the prevailing domination of masculinity, which neglects or violently controls the ambitions of women at any cost.

In the novel, *The Twentieth Wife* Sundaresan narrates that her parents abandoned her amid the Kandahar desert and the child was restored to them by Malik Masud. But historians deviate from that story about the life of Nurja Jahan. No major historians of the Mughal India have written that. L. P. Sharma in his *History of Medieval India* acknowledges the help from Malik Masud, the leader of the caravan in which the family of Mehrunnisa was travelling to India and Malik Masud presented Ghiaz Beg before the emperor Akbar. Mehrunnisa on her frequent visits to the royal harem and her favourite Ruqayya Begum get accustomed to the real power, politics, and the influence of royal ladies behind the court life. She learns that it is the female who advises the emperor to run the Empire, the royal ladies behind the veil control the emperor in taking decisions; important decisions

like conquering new territory, are discussed with the most influential royal woman in the harem. The captivating influence that the royal women exert upon the king fascinated her. Kamla Bhasin observes the mutual reliance of men and women:

As we cannot live in the world without the full range of masculine and feminine energies, each sex has been helplessly dependent on the other half for its survival...Men have desperately needed women to provide them with nurturing intuitive wisdom and emotional support, without which they unconsciously know they would die. (14)

Mehrunnisa comprehends that women of the zenana play a dominant role in shaping the administration. Mehrunnisa recognises that even if the Emperor is the symbol of power and an absolute supreme, the cooperation of others especially women is an unavoidable prerequisite for the maintenance of his power. However, it is a reality that interactions and negotiations linked women and men as partners or participants in an on-going contestation that played a decisive part in the politics of the royal court. In an article Sheetal Lalotra writes:

The women in the zenana exercised direct power and used men as a means of accessing authority. These women could sometimes restrict men's power over imperial, social, and economic resources. One can gather that the royal women combined their astute economic instincts with their politically nurtured pious activities to strengthen the Empire, temporally as well as spiritually. Women of the royal zenana not only played an important role to set things right for the king by being participative socially and politically but also served as the lifeline of the Empire, in carrying out reconciliation among the members of the family. (237)

In *Humayunama*, Gulbaden Begum describes the significance of royal ladies in the harem to influence the king. From Babur's time onwards women of the harem exerted a tremendous influence upon the emperors. But the major historians of medieval India have not discussed at length about their contribution. Babur, in his memoir, writes about his maternal grandmother, "She was very wise and farsighted, and most of my affairs were conducted with her advice" (23).

Sundaresan portrays Mehrunnisa as a bold woman who voices her opinions and judgements based on her knowledge. To Mehrunnisa, the proposal of Ali Quli from her father is a swan song to her hidden dream of ruling the Mughal Empire and marrying Prince Salim. She could not conceal her anguish and she retorts to her father, "Why?... "Why could it not be Salim?" (77). In the novel *The Twentieth Wife*, Sundaresan narrates that Prince Salim is captivated by the beauty of Mehrunnisa but Emperor Akbar suggests Ali Quli's marriage to Mehrunnisa on Ruqayya's advice. Mehrunnisa is unhappy to know about her marriage to a soldier Ali Quli Khan and it was against her wish, "Ali Quli was every inch a soldier from his sunburned skin, unkempt beard and harsh laugh to his calloused hands more used to holding a mace or sword than a book of poems" (79). The decision regarding her marriage and the choice of a husband is made by the males in the family under whose patronage she is living. Her marriage is an imposed one.

Historians raise controversial ideas about the marriage of Jahangir with Mehrunnisa and the death of Sher Afgan, the husband of Mehrunnisa. Sundaresan takes a deviation from the much-accepted version of historical records in presenting the context of Mehrunnisa's marriage with Ali Quli (Sher Afgan). Some historians

think that Jahangir saw Mehrunnisa in 1611 for the first time and in that same year, he married her. Before that Jahangir had no relations with Mehrunnisa and Jahangir had no hand in the death of her husband, Ali Quli. The historians such as Dr. Beni Prasad, Dr. R.P. Tripathi, and Dr. L. P. Sharma supported this view. On the contrary, historians like Dr. Ishwari Prasad and Dr. A.L. Srivastava maintained the view that Jahangir loved Mehrunnisa when he was a prince, but Akbar did not permit him to marry. These historians believe in the role of Jahangir in the murder of Sher Afgan. L.P. Sharma writes that Sher Afgan was charged with the displeasure of the emperor and he appointed a new governor Qut-ud-din. Sher Afgan died in the battle with Qut-ud-din and his followers. Both Mehrunnisa and her daughter Ladli were sent as prisoners to Agra. "Mehrunnisa was appointed in the service of Salima Begum, widow of Akbar. Jahangir chanced to see her in one of the Nauroz festivals and married her in the same year" (Sharma 357).

Sundaresan narrates Mehrunnisa's ill-fated marriage with Sher Afgan. Ali Quli who believes in the subservient role of women in society exerts the control of a strong patriarch. However, Mehrunnisa resists Ali Quli's anticipations of womanhood and dares to move out of the marriage by demanding a divorce from Ali Quli. In *The Twentieth Wife*, Ali Quli is portrayed as a male chauvinist who believes in the complete submission of women before men. The mismatch between the two personalities explodes into a big fight as he alleges her of being barren. Ali Quli thinks that he is superior in terms of intelligence and personal capabilities to his wife, so he cannot digest the critical thinking of Mehrunnisa:

You talk too much for a woman, Mehrunnisa – as if you were a queen as if

you expected to be a queen. Yet where is the gold in your veins? Who are your ancestors? What lands did they conquer? Where are the monuments to their lives, the tombs of their deaths? And who is your father? a Persian refugee. (*The Twentieth Wife* 116)

Marriage, for Mehrunnisa, is a weapon of man to oppress woman. Simon De Beauvoir writes, “Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and woman. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them” (300). Mehrunnisa did not get love, affection, and respect from her husband that pained her most. Whenever she tries to clear her point of view regarding some issue, her husband was quite indifferent, “I did not come to you for advice, Mehrunnisa, merely to inform you of what I was doing. Even that seems to have been unnecessary” (*The Twentieth Wife* 179). He held up his hand when she opened her mouth:

Keep quiet and listen. Confine your interests to the house and the children you are supposed to have. . . . I will talk to you as I wish. I am your husband. I know your father is a powerful courtier; I know he is respected by the Emperor. But it is under my roof you live. You are my wife, not any more of your father’s daughter. Is that clear?. (179)

Thus, the completely constrained marital relations of Mehrunnisa resulted from the asymmetries of power in gendered relations. In a traditional marital relation, women’s freedom and dignity stand in subordination to the controlling agency of men. Ali Quli wants Mehrunnisa to be a submissive lady. Simone de Beauvoir observes, “History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands

all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchy they have thought best to keep the woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her, and thus she has been definitely established as the other” (171). Hence, a woman’s dependence on a man is seen as a means to subordinate her. If any woman defiles the conventional codes of behaviour, she is blamed as morally weak. Ali Quli’s misbehaviour and disrespect towards his wife is indicative of the typical patriarchal bias that denigrates women and the androcentric world view.

Mehrunnisa becomes a widow as Ali Quli dies in a military attack carried out by the troop of Jahangir. She is called by Jahangir to stay in the royal harem along with her daughter. Different historical viewpoints are there about the death of Ali Quli, but Sundaresan narrates the popular belief that Jahangir murdered him because Ali Quli was the only hindrance for Jahangir to marry Mehrunnisa. So Jahangir entrusted this task to the governor of Bengal. Sundaresan, however, portrays Ali Quli as a traitor who joins with Prince Khusrau, Jahangir’s eldest son is plotting against the emperor. The author deviates from academic history here in the novel about the death of Ali Quli and presents it convincingly to the readers. She presents this alternate concept in such a manner that Ali Quli emerges before the readers as an impulsive soldier who himself is responsible for his death. Ruby Lal remarks, “Mughal family into which Nur married had a tradition of strong and prominent elder women- assertive royal wives, influential mothers and aunts, whose opinions were valued.” (*Empress: The astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan* 35). Nur Jahan inherited her inquisitiveness from her Central Asian tradition of great female ancestors.

Thomas Roe, a British ambassador to India sees Nur Jahan as a symbol of courage and quick wisdom. The English traders in the court of Shah Jahan such as William Hawkins and Thomas Roe wrote about the influence and control of Nur Jahan over matters of foreign trade, immediately after her marriage with the emperor. William Hawkins in 1611 noted that he has to win the favour of Nur Jahan to conduct a smooth commercial connection with the Mughal court. Nur Jahan soon formed a clique which includes her brother Asaf Khan and father Ghiaz Beg. Thomas Roe called this configuration of power a “faction” in his travel memoirs.

In Jahangir’s memoir, *Tuzuk- i- Jahangiri* he recalls the personal care that Nur Jahan has given to him. Many such references are there as he told the matters of his illness only to Nur Jahan, “ ...than whom I did not think, anyone was fonder of me”. In his memoir for the year 1621, he describes the habitual care that Nur Jahan has given to reduce his drinking habit and to follow the orders of court physicians and accept their medications in time. Niccolo Manucci who comes from Venice during the reign of Aurangzeb has elaborately written about the influence of Nur Jahan over her husband.

Ellison Banks Findly, distinguished professor of religion, Asian Studies and an expert in Indian and Chinese textile art forms at Trinity college in her influential book *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* states that she wrote the book on Nur Jahan to “recover her lost reputation” and “discover a more authentic and more unblemished persona behind the traditional delineations”(6). Findly analyses the foreign travellers account on Nur Jahan and remark, “ like other prominent women of the medieval period- Razia Sulthan, Rani Durgavathi. and Chand Bibi for

example – Nur Jahan came to power through the auspicious of a male relative who recognised in her great personal strengths and skills necessary for a sovereign”(3).

Nur Jahan’s time is marked by her exceptional fortune of the good historical circumstances, “by luck, perhaps, she happened to be married to the most powerful man in India, and she happened to live at a time of great cosmopolitan and international diversity: Europeans, for example, made their considered appearance on the subcontinent during her time and trade in luxury items was in record high” (Findly 4). Her exceptionally intimate relationship with Jahangir helped her to influence him to take certain political decisions favourable to her. In each century after her, many fascinating Nur Jahan stories appeared in films, novels, and the public consciousness. Nur Jahan was a fond wife and an intelligent queen to exploit the circumstances and structures of power without tarnishing her integrity and dignity.

Traditionally in the Indian culture, a widow in her thirties with a girl child is not envisaged to get any public space. But Nur Jahan was an exception; she wielded great power and privilege because of her charisma and cleverness. She continues a part of India’s myth-making culture but never illustrated widely in the academic history of India. Findly summed up the magnificent nature of Nur Jahan as:

... she stood outside of the traditional Indian prototypes of circumstance, role and sentiment. Her image did not inherently conform to enduring cultural models but rather came to be seen in the form of a distinct personality, singular in its talents, consuming in its ambitions and passionate in its tastes... finally it may be that as Nur Jahan worked her way through the

social and cultural conventions of her day, she came to be seen as pushing these conventions to their greatest limits. (4)

Chandra Pant in his book *Nur Jahan and Her Family* observes the fact that Nur Jahan exerted great political power with the help of her father and brother. He focuses more on the clique or 'junta' that she formed. Pant, in analysing Nur Jahan mentions the clique or 'junta' that she formed along with her brother and her unprecedented influence in the court, "She maintained a fleet of ships, thus indulging in foreign trade. She dabbled in indigo and embroidered cloth trade. She granted favours to English as she was eager to send her goods on English ships outside India" (120).

In *The Feast of Roses*, the second book in the trilogy Sundaresan narrates the political life of Nur Jahan after her marriage to Jahangir. Her achievements as a queen, her political and diplomatic acumen, her role in the war for succession in the court of Jahangir, her agonising downfall after Jahangir's death, her exile to Lahore on Shah Jahan's ascension to the throne, and her death in 1645 have been portrayed in the novel *The Feast of Roses*.

Thomas Roe was appointed as the first ambassador of England to the Mughal court in 1615. His observations of Mughal India formed the cornerstone of the Indian historiography about early modern India. The chronicles produced by the court historians form the other prominent source of the Mughal historiography. These court histories focused on the life of the emperor, his family, major battles during the period, court nobles, and administration of that time. During the Mughal period, the Persian language flourished in the court under the patronage of the

emperors, hence, these chronicles are written in the Persian language.

Mehrunnisa accepts her new name with a sense of pride and gratefulness to the King because, to her, it is a symbol of her privilege as well as of the importance she holds in the life of Jahangir. Instead of resisting the change in her name, she loved it as a gesture of the emperor's affection towards her. At the beginning of *The Feast of Roses*, she thinks:

She was Nur Jahan. "Light of the World." In her reposed the brilliance of the heavens. Or so Jahangir had said when he had given her the title the day they were married. *From today my beloved Empress will be called Nur Jahan.* No longer just Mehrunnisa, the name her father had given her at birth. Nur Jahan was a name for the world, for other people to call her. It was a name that commanded, that inspired respect and demanded attention. All useful qualities for a name to have. The Emperor was telling the court, the empire, and the other women of the imperial harem that Mehrunnisa was no trifling love. (4)

Nur Jahan takes pride in her new name and the apparent power it brings to her. It gives a new identity to her as a Mughal queen and an acceptance as the most beloved wife of Jahangir. When Nur Jahan visits Ruqayya Begum, the dowager empress, she deliberately calls the old name, but Mehrunnisa uses her new name to assert her power. Even though, she respects and owes a lot to Ruqayya for her present position, "I will never forget the debt I owe you. But I am now Nur Jahan. Perhaps I will allow you to call me by my old name. But I am no longer Mehrunnisa. *You must not forget that*" (17).

The patriarchal domination maintained women on the margins and side-lined their existence. The royal women of the harem were subjugated, but paradoxically, their influence upon the king was immense. They worked very carefully with the emperors and played key roles in taking some important decisions. Sundaesan says, “. . . the harem and the court had to work in tandem to run the empire. While one operated behind the scenes to influence the Emperor, the other worked at the court in full view of the nobles” (*The Twentieth Wife* 280). Thus women had played an important role in determining the course of history but ironically, it is not properly acknowledged in the discipline of history. Women have only a peripheral existence in the masculine world order.

Mehrunnisa displays her contempt for the masculine hegemony by resisting and defying the existing social structures and practices. The news about her presence with the Emperor in the court to take key decisions disturbs not only the nobles of the court, but it raised the anger of Jagath Gossini, one of the wives of Jahangir and the dowager empress, Ruqayya Begum. Ruqayya cautions Mehrunnisa, “A woman’s place is in the harem, behind the zenana walls. Even I never asked Emperor Akbar for such a favour” (*The Feast of Roses* 18). The fear of men in the increasing power of Nur Jahan is evident from the discussions among the court nobles. Despite their malicious comments about Nur Jahan, they are seriously worried over her assertive involvement in the court politics. Their talk about Jagat Gossini’s attempt to curb the power of Mehrunnisa reminds Helene Cixous's observation, “Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against

themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs” (878). Jagat Gossini, the mother of Shah Jahan and the Padsha Begum is an able lady endowed with multifarious talents including hunting. Jagat Gossini articulates her discontentment when Nur Jahan intervened in the court politics along with her husband.

Jahanara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shah Jahan has a good understanding of the statecraft even in her teenage. Jahanara was well versed in diplomatic dealings, and she owned a ship and traded independently. Gulbadan Begum in her Memoir on Babur praises Jahanara for creating a rare model of female patronage and diplomacy. Sundaresan reconstructs the experiences of Jahanara and presents her as a visible historical subject active in the patriarchal Mughal world. Either Jahanara or Nur Jahan competes with the emperors to assert supremacy over them as they find individuality in their ways. Both of them had a ‘victor’ image with an intrinsic capability for self-realisation. Judith Newton asserts the need to “frame alternate histories thereby suggesting lines along which we will have to rethink what significant ‘events’ in fact are and how historical periods might be newly delimited if gender is to be written into our histories” (112).

Sundaresan highlights the character of Jahanara since she takes up reigns of the palace which would have otherwise fragmented under Shah Jahan, an indolent widower who became indifferent in the administration. She acts as a post-feminist subject articulating individual choices and judgments. When Mumtaz Mahal’s unexpected death occurred, Jahanara realises “that something had changed in their lives from this moment” (*Shadow Princess*¹⁴) with great composure. Jahanara, a seventeen-year-old teenager is presented as a pillar of will power and determination,

she refuses to be a mere spectator and handles her unexpected burdens efficiently and courageously. She carries up the role of an empress after the death of her mother rather than the position of a protective sister. As she was endowed with the innate capacity of administration, her adaptation to the new position was quite smooth.

Indu Sundaresan presents Nur Jahan and Jahanara as ‘takers’ and later as ‘initiators’ through her ‘new rebellious writing’ of the *Taj Trilogy*. She makes the historical fiction genre an effective weapon to open up new discussions about the historical importance of Nur Jahan and Jahanara. In an interview with *The Tribune*, Indu Sundaresan untangles her views about the strong and courageous women protagonists of her fictional world, “All my work is constructed around female protagonists and I always want to explore in these women the possibilities of stepping beyond society’s restrictions and to see then what would happen, how they would react, what would really matter to them”.

A critical study of the historical, literary, and artistic contributions of Nur Jahan and Jahanara reveal their multidimensional personality that emerges from the “invisible”. It is important and unavoidable to rediscover the histories of Mughal royal women. This provides a sharpened lens through which the other marginalised royal women could also be analysed. The interblend of fact and fiction enabled Indu Sundaresan to make an in-depth study of the forgotten female historical characters and she provides a perceptive analysis of the lesser-known women of the past. Revisiting the past with an objective of a reconstructive initiative is a step taken towards the representation of hitherto neglected and voiceless sections of society who have largely been excluded by historians, scholars as well as the general public.

Sundaresan's historical fiction in the Taj Trilogy takes a step forward to the re-evaluation of the Mughal history in the light of vital concerns related to the recovering of women's historical significance in the evolving historical process. These novels are a kind of writing back or counter-narrative to the patriarchal histories that have been the established norm down the centuries.

Chapter IV

The Reconstruction of the Mughal World in *Empire of the Moghul Series*

Historical fiction confronts the unidirectional, fragmented, and conventional modes of manifestations in academic history. Historical fictions undermine this mode of representation of the past instead, it proposes a new reading strategy discordant to the traditional principle of the 'historical'. When narrating the past events as the focus a historical novel achieves something beyond the scope of the conventional historical discourse. Historical fiction meditates over academic history to draw a more possible human life in the past and it challenges the traditional historical text from the angle of women, indigenous community, post colonials, and other marginalised sections. Rutherford's historical novels in the series *Empire of the Moghul* provide an intricate monarchical history of the Mughal times. The historical novels of Alex Rutherford present a wide and complex range of narrative construction and a tenable social history of the Mughal world. In postmodern times, the interrelation between history and fiction is considered complementary and reciprocal.

India has a rich and dynamic history and culture, spanning back to the emergence of human civilization. It begins with the Indus Valley Civilisation with its spell bounding cultural artefacts along the Indus River and in farming communities extending over to the Arabian Sea coast. The history of India is the total of the repeated foreign invasions and the assimilation of the migrating people

with the diverse cultures that exist in India. The history of medieval India is a complex record of foreign conquests, subjugations, and the rise of the political authority of Muslim Kingdoms. Mughal Empire was one of the largest early modern empires in South Asia that stretched over the northern part of India. Babur, a warrior chief from Central Asia who defeated the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi in 1526 in the First Battle of Panipat has established Mughal Empire in India. Mughal Empire reflects the heritage of the Timurid dynasty and the word 'Mughal' is derived from the Arabic and Persian word 'Mongol' which emphasises the Mongol origin of the Timurid dynasty.

The novels of Alex Rutherford on Mughal history offer a vantage point to have a bird's eye view of the domestic and public spaces of the Mughal Empire. Rutherford tries to reconstruct the Mughal reign in India by providing a kaleidoscopic picture of almost all aspects of Mughal administration. The novels in Alex Rutherford's *Empire of the Moghul* series attempt to salvage the day-to-day life of the Empire. The vast Mughal Empire, at its most powerful times, controlled wealth and materials unprecedented in the history of India and extended over the entire subcontinent. From 1556 to 1707, during the heights of its opulence and glory, the Mughal Empire was a centralised administration with the emperor as the unquestioned authority, a vast array of nobles and military personnel, money, royal historians, court physicians, and architects, and foreign trade that has no prequel in Indian history.

Rutherford's novels highlight the dynamic interaction between history and fiction and draw out the perception of how fiction interprets history and how fiction

conceives the idea of the past. History, in the traditional sense defined as a record of the “real” past. Generally, people do not doubt the authenticity of historical discourses. The clichéd comments such as the First Battle of Panipat is a great one and Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi with his thirty thousand soldiers are very common. Academic history gives us dates, numbers, and material conditions. In contrast, it neglects the social dimensions, culture and the way of life of the people, religious practices and position of women, cultural and material artefacts, climate changes, nature, preparations for war and annexations, individual aspects of the Emperors, power relations and social movements. Rutherford reconstructs the reign of the Mughal dynasty by including every possible detail about the Mughal world. Rutherford’s novels in the *Empire of the Moghul* series have a close affinity with the parameters of social history or the history of society. Social history attempts to provide an alternative vision of the past with society as its major focal point. Social history deviates from the dominant political history towards a more subjective exploration of social life. Rutherford constructs not only the political aspects of the Empire but they stress social facets as the core dimension in the novels of the *Empire of the Moghul* series.

The Mughal dynasty and their administration are still worthy of study, precisely because present-day India has been primarily constituted by the events during the historical era that commenced with Babur’s conquest of the northern region of India in 1525. Alex Rutherford extracts multifarious views about the possible way of Mughal administration and the lives of people under them in India. Rutherford presents the dynastic political accomplishments and their major setback along with the social and cultural domains of the Mughal Empire. He represents the

under-explored areas of the Mughal history such as imperial households, the luxuries inside the royal seat of power, the lives of women in the zenana, the creation and dissemination of imperial ideologies, and the manifestation of royal power. Each novel in the quintet is designed to discuss the reign of each Mughal Emperor and the socio-political spheres of the time.

The key points of difference between traditional historicism and a new reading of history lie in their respective understanding of the discourse of history. Traditional historicists view history as universal and objective whereas New Historicists regarded it as cultural. New Historicists believe that a literary text is understood in relation to the social, political, and cultural conditions of the society in which the text is produced. As New Historicism foregrounds the cultural production of the text, subjectivism plays a vital role in the making of history. Rutherford has made a keen study of the biographies and autobiographies of the emperors and princesses to identify the key social and cultural parameters of the time. Rutherford's construction of the Mughal world through his *Empire of the Moghul* series becomes extraordinarily adorable because of its wide references to all the possible sources of the Mughal past apart from academic history. Hence, Rutherford, through the genre of historical fiction has rendered a more plausible Mughal world. Rutherford has portrayed the luxuries of the court, the cuisines of the imperial kitchen, the royal wedding celebrations, battles and annexations, sons plotting against the father to seize the Empire, the intervention of the royal women in the internal politics of the court, the hunting habits of Mughals and their interest in the horoscope.

The literary imagination or the “literisation” has contributed to shaping the “historical discourses” of contemporary times. The study of the corpus of the novels in the *Empire of the Moghul* series shares the interest of Alex Rutherford in representing the social history of the time. Alex Rutherford in their Mughal series follows the strategy of highlighting the accomplishments of Great Mughal Emperors like Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, and the social, cultural impact of their administration in the public as well as private domains. Since a historian’s interpretation of the past could be an influence of his / her own cultural and linguistic codes, a historical fiction writer takes the extra step to imagine the past by drawing out the social, cultural, religious, and linguistic specificities of the time. The novels in the Mughal series contain a readable overview of the biographies of the major Mughal Emperors.

Michael Preston and Diana Preston are keen travellers and well known for their historical fictions. Their combined research into the medieval history of India and the mind-blowing aesthetic appeal of the Taj Mahal led them to travel over the early history of the magnificent Mughal Empire. They have conducted vast excavations to collect all the materials about medieval India and read each chronicle of the Mughal period to grasp the history of the architects of the Mughal dynasty for their fiction work *Empire of the Moghul*. In their attempt to trace the legacy of the first Mughal Emperor, the boy king Babur, Rutherford has explored Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, Iran, and the blue domes and minarets of Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The *Empire of the Moghul* series consists of six books that narrate the epic rise and fall of one of the world’s most powerful and luxurious dynasties, which

ruled India for almost 200 years. Alex Rutherford, as a travel writer takes writing an adventurous endeavour. Diana Preston, in one of her interviews with *The Hindu*, narrates the extra miles they have travelled to write their quintet *Empire of the Moghul*:

Our greatest love is India, where we've spent at least a year of our lives. Our research into the building of the Taj Mahal for our non-fiction book *A Teardrop on the Cheek of Time* led us to explore the early history of the dynasty which built the Taj – the Moghuls. To help us get inside the heads of the founders of the Moghul dynasty for our fiction quintet *Empire of the Moghul*, we've read all the chronicles of the time. Over the years we've also retraced the steps of the Moghuls from the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan – home to the first Moghul emperor, the boy-king Babur – to Iran and the blue domes and minarets of Samarkand in Uzbekistan, across the red deserts to the Oxus River, over the Hindu Kush to Kabul and Afghanistan and down through the Khyber Pass to the plains of northern India.

The Empire of the Moghul series novels depicts the saga of two hundred years of Mughal rule in India. The quintet begins with *Raiders from the North* which deals with the life and tales of Babur, the founder of the Empire in India. Babur, the descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamburlaine, belongs to the Mughals from Central Asia. In the sixteenth century, Babur sweeps down from Central Asia into India to establish the Mughal Empire. *Brothers at War* depicts the life of the second Mughal emperor Humayun and his relentless struggle to win back his empire. Alex Rutherford not only delimited his narration about the traitorous battle and

conspiracies but equal significance has been given to explore the character of Humayun in this novel. Humayun, the heir of Babur squanders away the throne exiled from the empire. The life long struggle of Humayun to reinstate his lost empire with formidable military strength and the gradual evolvement of Humayun from a young drug-addicted emperor to a seasoned politician has presented in the novel.

The third book in the series is *The Ruler of the World* which tells the story of Akbar, the third ruler of the dynasty who unexpectedly ascended to the throne after the death of his father. Even though, very young, he proved himself an illustrious ruler and suppressed all dissident voices against his reign. The novels in this series are the result of thorough research, the treacherous conspiracies, and the sight and sounds of the Mughal court depicted in the novels without any flow. The novels in this quintet have seamlessly developed an interesting insight into the rise and fall of the glorious Mughal dynasty. *Tainted Throne*, the fourth in the series is about the death of the Mughal Emperor Akbar and Jahangir's ascension to the peacock throne. However, Jahangir is hot on the trail by his rebellious son Khusrau; Jahangir in the novel is presented as an emperor who tries to nip every dissenting voice in the bud. Khusrau's life had spared, but later when he stood up against Jahangir, his eyelids were sewn.

Alex Rutherford travelled widely throughout India, especially the strongholds of Mughal territory to expose the overwhelming presence of Mughals in the country. However, as a foreigner, Rutherford makes an impartial attempt to unveil the portraiture of the major Mughal monarchs and their reign. Rutherford

reveals their travelling experience in India in the writer's blog as:

Over the years, we've travelled all over India from the Rajasthan deserts to the Dal Lake in Kashmir. The tremendous Moghul monuments of northern India – Humayun's tomb and the Red Fort in Delhi, Akbar's tomb, the Taj Mahal and the Fort in Agra - overwhelmed us. We became increasingly curious about their creators and started to read the Moghuls' diaries and chronicles. They revealed a compelling dynastic saga combining the high emotions and rich cadences of grand opera with enough edge-of-the-seat historical drama to fill a dozen big-screen epics and inspired us - after writing a non-fiction book on the story behind the Taj Mahal - to write these novels.

A keen interest in travelling helped the authors to delve into the soul of India and it became one of the prerequisites for them to understand the country other than the historical sources. A moderately independent concept of official historiography or "Namah" has emerged during the Mughal time under the Persian influence. Akbar initiated the practice of commissioning official court historians to document the history of his vast empire giving them access to the state records. At the same time, biographical sketches of the emperors with profound historical interest also came into vogue. The Mughal Emperors continued the practice of appointing official court historians until the reign of Aurangzeb.

The prime sources of Mughal historiography are chronicles, palaces, official orders, biographies and autobiographies, paintings, court bulletins, foreign traveller's accounts, coins, seals used in the court, royal tombs, and religious kinds

of literature. Alex Rutherford has done keen research into the history of medieval India to write it down as historical fiction by covering all aspects of it. These historical fictions on Mughal India can consider as a social history of medieval India and the Mughal dynasty. Diana Preston, half of the writing duo in one of her interviews with *Fantasy Book Critic* observes:

We read research by other writers and historians into aspects of Moghul history from military strategy to customs in the harem to the food of the period and spent many hours in Oxford University's Indian Institute Library. But our chief focus was on the original source material and we are fortunate there is so much. Some of the emperors wrote their own accounts and almost all employed court chroniclers. We have been able to draw the major events - battles, coups, deaths, executions - and the principal characters from the sources that have survived. As well as Babur's own account of his life the *Baburnama* - the earliest autobiography in Islamic literature - and the *Akbarnama* written by Abul Fazl, Akbar's chronicler, which covers Babur, Humayun and the Moghuls' early days as well as Akbar, we also have, for example, the *Humayunnama* written by Babur's daughter Gulbadan and the account by Humayun's cupbearer, Jauhar. The physical and emotional detail of the Moghul period is superbly captured in these chronicles and for the later Moghul emperors, in other surviving letters and diaries that convey the sheer excitement of events as they unfold.

The novels in the quintet follow a specific kind of historical fiction. While resorting to the popular ingredients of fiction, Rutherford reinforces the Mughal

historical reality with utmost care. It makes a tight rope walking between factual discourse and fictional discourse but it never crosses the border. Alex Rutherford tries to highlight the historical reality through the means of agreed-upon conventions of fictionality. The novels in this series are different from the pseudo factual historical novels which simulated the events of “real life” and imitated the documentary effect.

Rutherford, while writing the *Empire of the Moghul* series engrosses in the task of writing back women into the pages of history to create a more comprehensible experience of the Mughal past. Historians have meagrely represented or misrepresented the noble women of the zenana. Abraham Eraly in his epic saga *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* gives an interesting picture about the six major Mughal Emperors. Still, it is criticised as an unbalanced and partial view of the author and the text neglects the contributions of the royal women in the running of the Mughal administration. In the preface of *Emperors of the Peacock Throne*, Eraly seems to be prejudiced in describing the gender roles in the Mughal India, and he quotes Herodotus, the father of history “that the actions of men may not be effaced by time...” (xv), the one female character who escaped the sorting process of the author is Nur Jahan. The females of the imperial zenana, who intervened in the political affairs of the court are excluded in the narratives of Eraly can be contemplated as the “invisible females” behind the curtains. While describing the initial stages of Mughal invasion in India, the Battle of Panipat, and the establishment of the dynasty by Babur, Abraham Eraly traces his familial heritage and concludes, “Nothing much is known about Babur’s mother, except her name,

Qutluq Nigar Khanum, and her Mongol lineage. Babur himself has little to say about her. But there is a lively, candid profile of his father in his memoirs” (5). On the contrary, Babur himself mentioned the incredible role played by his mother Qutluq Nigar Khanum and grandmother Esan Daulath in moulding his political personality. In the initial part of his memoir, he has given a significant introduction about his matrilineal side.

Rutherford’s narrative successfully unfolds the political role of Babur’s grandmother, mother, and sister Khanzada Begum. In *Raiders from the North*, Rutherford presents Babur as constantly resorts to these three women and that he consults his grandmother before taking important political decisions. Rutherford in the *Empire of the Moghul* series indeed represented the Mughal royal women more convincingly. He has made considerably a fair representation of an array of the noblewomen like Qutluq Nigar Khanum, Esan Daulath, Gulbaden Begum, Hamida Banu Begam, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Maham Anga, and other significant women. Craig A. Lockard states:

In north India, both Muslim and Hindu women were often kept in seclusion, expected to be chaste and obedient to fathers and husbands in a patriarchal and patrilineal society. Yet some Mughal court women exercised influence. Khanzada Begum (1478- 1545) Babur’s older sister, successfully interceded with rebellious brothers to end a family split to keep Babur’s son Humayun on the throne avoiding bloodshed. (418)

Khanzada Begum, Babur’s sister becomes the close advisor and confidante of Humayun in his years of adversity. Rutherford in the novel *Brothers at War*

renders Khanzada as a capable woman to interfere in the political decisions of Humayun and writes:

In the meantime, he would visit his aunt Khanzada to seek her wise advice on his choice of officers for his expedition and, even more important, to discuss with her his views on another question. Was it safe while he was away on a campaign to leave his half-brothers in their various provinces – Kamran to the northwest in the Panjab, Askari in Jaunpur to the east, and Hindal to the west in Alwar ?. Might they use the opportunity to rise against him?. Should he give them commands in his army and take them with him so he could keep an eye on them? (24)

It is important to study the significance of domestic space at the Mughal court to understand the centrality of this space in the making of the Mughal court. Both Mughal men and women are equal participants in creating the court traditions, royal rituals, genealogies, and establishment of the system of governance. The very structured and institutionalised form of the Mughal domestic sphere played a key role in the shaping of a new Mughal monarchy. Rutherford has given significance to the royal ladies of the harem and their involvement in all the novels of the quintet. In their attempt to reconstruct the Mughal past, Rutherford has mentioned Babur's mother and grandmother, Nur Jahan, Maham Anga, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara, the wives of the Emperors, wet nurses, and many other royal ladies. The revisionist historical analysis of Mughal royal women reveals their eventful interventions in the political domain. In the beginning of the novel *Brothers at War* Babur's sister Khanzada, a courageous woman who marries the staunch enemy of Babur to end the

threat from Uzbeks, advises Humayun to take up the challenges of the Empire. She counsels him, “Humayun, do not forget that your name means “fortunate”. Fortune will be yours if you will be strong in mind as well as in body and seize it. Banish foolish self-doubts of yours. Introspection may become a poet or a mystic, but it has no place in the life of an empire” (8). However, Humayun anointed as the Emperor of the mighty Mughal Empire he respects and accepts the royal women of his court. Mughal royal women enjoy privileged and elevated positions in the political domain and the women of royalty are considered equal to their male counterparts. The conventional historical rendering of Mughal women disappoints contemporary readers because it provides an unjust depiction of women and other subaltern identities. Gradually, the Mughal imperial women emerged more powerful and visible.

The changing political situation and power of a new dynastic regime are indexed in the domestic sphere in several ways: not only in the titles and honours bestowed upon women and other members of the household, but also in the ascription of the roles and performance of the activities, and indeed, in the living quarters assigned to them. When the term harem comes to be applied regularly to the women of the royal household (in Akber’s time), it indicates a changed social and political situation. The term now also comes to describe the residential quarters of the women – a practice that was hardly possible in Babur’s peripatetic time and still not noticeable in Humayun’s. It is in Akber’s time that a demarcated “sacred incarcerated” sphere emerges as the space of the Mughal domestic ...life. (Lal 4)

Rutherford closely observes the Mughal social life which includes a variety of things such as the dress, cuisines, cosmetics, perfumes, festivals, kitchen, and utensils, sports and games, pastimes, social etiquette, modes of travel, the position of women, and other marginalised sections, the practices of religion, art and architecture, different languages and education. The royal women played a key role in developing these cultural artefacts of court life. The biographies of Emperors and the personal memoirs written by the Mughal princess such as Gulbaden Begum and Jahanara constitute important sources to know about the paradigms of the interference of royal women in the administration. The history that focuses upon the unexplored aspects of the Mughal reign opens up new avenues in the field of social history. The reconstructive historians observe the vitality of Central Asian women to contribute to political affairs. Central Asian women enjoyed considerable freedom to intervene in dynastic politics. Dr. Rukhsana Iftikhar in an article writes:

In order to understand the prominent role of women at the Mughal court it - has to be borne in mind that women in the Central Asian region from which the 'House of Timur' originated enjoyed considerably more freedom and were more active than those in the central Islamic regions. Alanquwa, the mythical female ancestor of Chingiz Khan, played an important role in the prehistory of the Mughals. The chief wife of Timur, the founding father of the Mughal dynasty was also a highly independent lady. In the more recent history, there was Babur's maternal grandmother Isan Daulat Begum, the wife of Yunus Khan, who after the death of Babur's father managed everything for her grandson. (45)

Indian women have made innumerable contributions to the evolution and growth of the social and cultural spheres of the country. During the reign of the Delhi Sultanate, Sultana Razia became the only woman ruler to interfere in the political affairs of Ilbari Sultans. The Sultanate period also witnessed some notable women, who courageously interfered in the politics of the court. The princesses, queens, and other women of the Mughal women's quarters made their contributions during the Mughal time. They were as remarkable as their men were and in some cases, they surpassed them. Historical books on Mughal Empire have seldom acknowledged these illustrious women. *Baburnama* and *Humayunama* speak about the imperial women and their intervention over the affairs of the state. Nevertheless, these portrayals of women are meagre and concise. Even though royal women in the court were compelled to wear pardha and restricted in the harem but that does not mean that their status in the court is limited.

Joan Wallach Scott in her book *Feminism and History* (1996) remarks, "Countering stereotypes has built a tension into the writing of women's history" (1). Historians argue that women had marginalised from history due to their incapacities and limitations to engage with the public space. Countering these attacks she claims, "Feminist historians have offered examples from many centuries and countries to counter contemporary claims that women are, by the physical constitution and physical temperament, weaker, more passive, more concerned with children, less productive as workers, less rational, and more emotional than men"(3). The historians of academic history have treated the harem as a non-entity and only a place of luxuries and entertainment. Alex Rutherford incorporates the hitherto

sidelined aspects of the Mughal court life to the mainstream discussion in his historical novels. Rutherford immerses well in every historical detail to construct the story. In *Ain –i- Akbari*, Abul Fazal writes about the Imperial harem of Akbar as:

His majesty has made a large enclosure with fine buildings inside, where he reposes. Though there are more than five thousand women, he has given to each separate apartment. He has also divided them into sections and keeps them attentive to their duties. Several chaste women have been appointed as superintendents over each section...(44)

The emperor protected the inmates of the harem with money and gifts, “The salaries are sufficiently liberal. Not counting the presents, which his majesty most generously bestows, the women of the highest rank receive 1610 to 1028 rupees per month” (Abul Fazal 44). Rutherford in his fictional narrative on the luxurious court of Akbar and his imperial capital city of Fatehpur Sikri occasionally describes the harem. When he details the magnificence of the harem of Fatehpur Sikri, Rutherford mentions the presence of harem inmates from Tibet and Afghan as:

The main entrance of the harem lay through a curved sandstone archway, protected, as he had ordered by elite Rajput guards. Within the complex the women were attended by eunuchs – the only men other than Akbar himself allowed inside it – assisted from women from Turkey and Abyssinia, selected for their physical strength. (*Ruler of the World* 212)

Rutherford portrays Hamida Banu Begum, Akbar’s mother, and Gulbaden Begum, Akbar’s aunt as two powerful women who play pivotal positions in

moulding the political career of Akbar. In the novel *Ruler of the World*, Hamida raises her criticism against the over the protection of the women's quarters and she complains about the isolated structure of the harem, "of course, we must be protected, but we don't need to be shut away like prisoners" (214). Both Gulbaden Begum and Hamida contemplate the glorious past of Mughal royal women as:

You forget who we are – not just royal women but Mughal women. In past times, we accompanied our warrior husbands, brothers, and sons in their quest for new lands. We rode hundreds of miles on mule or camelback between makeshift encampments and remote mud-walled settlements. We ate with our menfolk. We played our parts in their plans – as advisors, ambassadors, and mediators. (*Ruler of the World* 214)

Hamida again comments on the endurance of Mughal royal women and asserts, "We have lives of our own" and "we will listen to the council meetings as has always been our custom ... and later give you any advice we see fit" (215). Hamida and Gubaden articulate the significance of Mughal royal women to contribute to the greatness of the Mughal Empire.

Rutherford's fourth novel in the series *The Tainted Throne* revolves around Mehrunnisa, better known in her later title Nur Jahan. Nur Jahan was the widow of Sher Afgan, whose real name was Ali Quli Beg. The widowed Mehrunnisa took refuge in the Mughal harem in 1607. Some historians believe that Jahangir had a hand in the murder of Sher Afgan. The renowned historian and biographer of Jahangir, Beni Prasad after he studies various Indian and European records on the Mughal era points, "There is nothing to prove that Jahangir had ever seen Nur Jahan

before her first marriage. While there is every reason to believe that he sought neither the life nor the wife of Sher Afgan. The emperor's marriage with Sher Afgan's widow came off in the way numerous marriages took place" (iv). Both Indu Sundaresan and Rutherford in their attempt to reconstruct the Mughal world affirm in their narratives that Jahangir had known Nur Jahan before her first marriage. Jahangir married her in 1611 and renamed her Nur Jahan or the light of the world. She could break the restrictions imposed upon the woman in the patriarchal royal setting. Besides the attempts of obliteration of women's contributions in history, Rutherford discusses the grand stature of Nur Jahan in the Mughal court. Indu Sundaresan through her Taj Trilogy novels recreated the powerful involvement of Nur Jahan in controlling the empire. Sundaresan draws the image of the extraordinary life of Nur Jahan and her acumen in politics, commerce, and diplomacy.

Rutherford in the novel *The Tainted Throne* depicts Nur Jahan's direct involvement in deciding the political affairs of the court. Rutherford presents a Jesuit priest in the novel *The Tainted Throne*, Father Ronaldo who mentions the authority of Nur Jahan in controlling the administration. The Jesuit priest raises his grievances to Prince Khurram about Nur Jahan's involvement in the foreign ties of the Empire, "A recent decree granting our merchants the right to trade in indigo bore her (Nur Jahan) seal. We were surprised, but amused it must be because the emperor was ill" (301). Rutherford attached a postscript to the novel *The Tainted Throne* in which he writes, "Jahangir was indeed obsessed with Mehrunnisa, later known as Nur Jahan, who used her influence to gain personal power and became de facto ruler of Hindustan – a remarkable achievement for a woman of that period" (423).

The royal Mughal women occupied in the fictional world of Rutherford's novels are portrayed as capable of acquiring selfhood and empowerment through their involvement in the public domain. Novels of Alex Rutherford adhere to the academic history and the known facts of Mughal History while doing so, the novelist relied upon the artistic truth and took the license of a fictional writer.

The select historical novels of Alex Rutherford are centred on the Mughal reign in India and these novels are contrasted and studied by involving a parallel reading with select historical texts and autobiographies, memoirs, and biographies of the Mughal Emperors and queens. Fiction writers in their works confront issues connected with history and historical theory and examine how history meets fiction. Historical fiction is such a hybrid genre in which fact and fiction are inextricably intermingled and increasingly indistinguishable. Rutherford's *Empire of the Mughal* provides "novelistic biographies" of six major monarchs and their queens. Historical fiction is a hybrid genre as it contains elements of historical reality and imagined reality. In contemporary times, the boundary between fact and fiction is unquestionably blurred. In a normal historiographical process, the historian is preoccupied with the task of constructing a text but here the historian cannot invent. Historians often delve into generalisations and analytical comparisons that have no connection with the real past. At this juncture, a historical novelist has more freedom to interpret the past through his narratives.

Rutherford emphasises the official sources and records that helped them to build up the Mughal series. Historical fiction gives the writer the freedom to choose the material as it charms him/her and highlight those features that seem appropriate

in the narrative. However, Rutherford took the privilege to make essential falsifications in the portrayal of the historical characters and historical facts with a condition that is maintained within certain limits. The writers of historical fiction are free to accept certain deviations to heighten the dramatic effect but not to the extreme of making them completely unrecognizable or false. The most significant autobiographies that shed light on the study of the Mughal period were *Baburnama* written by Babur and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the autobiography of Jahangir. Beveridge, who translated *Baburnama* considers it as an indisputable historical source of ample literary values. *Baburnama* is a unique document in history in which he chronicled important historical events and the various other assignments he undertook in different capacities. The journal of Babur was originally written in Turkish, his mother tongue, and its Persian translation appeared during the reign of his grandson Akbar.

Babur systematically updated his diary and kept it meticulously. Alex Rutherford has used *Baburnama* as a valuable text to recreate the early days of Mughal advancement in India. Unfortunately, the records of eighteen years have been lost, as Babur did not write anything about some years in the autobiography. Alex Rutherford indicates that *Baburnama* is relatively a dependable source of knowledge regarding the establishment of the Mughal dynasty in India. As the novels of Alex Rutherford retrieve the Mughal past of India, it heavily depends on different sources of Mughal history. Therefore, it is worth to understand the nature of history and historiography during the Mughal times and the interference of the Mughal Emperors to document the important events of the court.

In India, during the Mughal period, a new kind of historiography emerged—that of official histories under the Persian legacy of the Mughals. The greatest Mughal Emperor Akbar inaugurated the practice of appointing official historians at the court and the practice is continued till the reign of Aurangzeb. Though the personal memoirs of rulers and other individuals are not an authentic historical text, they can be regarded as literary works of historical importance. The personal memoirs of Babur and Jahangir, the biographical sketch on Humayun by Gulbadan Begum are some prominent writings of this kind. Babur's *Tuzuk* or *Baburnama* is an indisputable historical record that Beveridge (translator) considers a priceless and invaluable source of historical merit.

Jahangir's personal memoir *Tuzuk-i- Jahangiri* gives the record of twenty-two years of Jahangir's administration. Political, administrative, and military transactions of the Mughal Empire during the time of Jahangir are reflected in his memoir. A keen observation of the men and their manners, social and spiritual life, epidemics, the visits of the foreign travellers and the British Ambassadors in the court, Nur Jahan's influence, and some important court occurrences are chronicled in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* which sheds light on the historical ambience of his time.

Mughal's interest in history entered a new dimension with the ascension of Akbar. Four types of histories were written about the reign of Akbar. Out of the four, two were official histories written under the patronage of Akbar; they are the *Tarikh –i- Alfi* (Millennial History) and the well-known *Akbarnama* by Abul Fazal. The unofficial histories were *Tabaqat-i- Akbrai* of Nizam ud- Din Ahmad and *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh* by Badauni. The Mughal historiographers were all

courtiers, so the emphasis was always to depict the affairs of the court and it eulogised the emperor who acted as the omnipotent ruler of his territory. The history of the time revolved around the elitist culture of the ruling class, the lower class, and their life hardly ever found a reflection in these chronicles.

Satish Chandra held the view that after 1920, Indian historians turned their attention towards social history along with the traditional political and administrative aspects of the government. However, social history was not a serious affair and was not established as a significant branch of historical research before. It is considered just as an appendix of the overarching economic and political history. The power relations existing in the society, patriarchal supremacy, the position of women and other marginalised sections, and the lives of common people were hardly a subject for historical investigation for the traditional historians. Rutherford's absorbing narratives on Mughal history has melded facts with fiction and resoundingly reimagined the Mughal world. This history-fiction nexus is an innate characteristic of many postmodern novels. Rutherford as an innovative historical novelist has effectively used the parameters of social history to provide a "picture window" of the Mughal court life.

Akbarnama and *Ain-i-Akbari* gives the most detailed, accurate, and authentic picture of the Mughal Empire. The practice of writing personal memoirs and official chronicles continued under the administration of Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* or *Jahangirnama* is the autobiography of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir which is the chief source of information for historians to record the history of the reign of Jahangir's time. He wrote *Jahangirnama* in the

Persian language and Jahangir strongly adhered to the tradition of his great grandfather, Babur. Jahangir went to a further extent to include details like his reflections on art, politics, and about his family other than the political history of his reign. Jahangir mentions his illness, regular treatment by the court physician and he writes about the hunting skills of Nur Jahan in this memoir. Abdul Hamid Lahori wrote *Padshahnamah*, a detailed account of the reign of Shah Jahan, which covers the socio-political and cultural life of the time.

Tuzuk I Baburi or *Baburnama*, the autobiography of Babur is the prime historical source to know about the socio-economic and cultural conditions of India during the time of the invasion of Babur. This autobiography gives fairly an accurate pen picture of Babur's battles and struggles to invade India and to sustain in a new land. It is generally been believed that the information provided in *Baburnama* is neither an exaggerated account nor written flamboyant to please the readers. Autobiographical writings can act as source material for historians to construct knowledge of the past and reveal traces of the past. Babur presents himself as a unique figure in the pre-modern Islamic literature by portraying himself as an exceptional human being as the founder of the Mughal Empire. Dilip Hiro in the preface of his analysis of *Baburnama* states:

It contains descriptions of his domains and administrative setups, the battles and territories he won and lost the outbreaks of rebellions and their suppression, the rise and fall of his adversaries and allies, his banishment to a hill tract and near death, and the biographies of his parents and near relatives. It includes also his penetrating judgements of men of various ranks and

talents he encountered as a fugitive, a ruler, and a general- and as a poet and connoisseur of the arts. (xviii)

Baburnama is outstanding in content as well as in style, its range of the subject is impressive. It covers Geography, Astronomy, statecraft, military strategies and weapons, battles, flora and fauna, biographies and family chronicles, a pen portrait of potentates, courtiers, and artists, social mores, poetry, music and paintings, the personal entertainment of wine parties, tours of historical monuments and reflections on the human conditions. Babur's prose is astonishingly sinewy and lucid, devoid of hyperbole or embellishment.

The success story of this fabulously rich Mughal dynasty began when a twelve-year-old boy-king Babur ascended the throne in a small state of Fergana in Central Asia. The Central Asian Timur dynasty was extremely a larger one founded by the Persian Mongol conqueror Timur. Timur is also called Amir Timur or Tamerlane and he is one of the ambitious and undefeated military commanders in the history of the world. He had considered the heir of Chengiz Khan's Mongol Empire, and he restored the Mongol Empire. Timur was the great great great grandfather of Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India and he had died during his military expeditions against Ming China on 17th February 1405. Alex Rutherford also mentions the exact details as, "His final expedition was against China. He rode out with the thunder of two hundred thousand horsemen in his ears and victory would have been his, had Allah not summoned him to rest with him in Paradise (*Raiders from the North* 4).

The narrative of the novel *The Raiders from the North* begins in Central Asia

in 1494. At the beginning of the novel, Rutherford describes Babur's father revealing the heroic legacy of their ancestor Timur to his twelve-year-old son Babur. Many historians expressed the view that Timur was a barbarian and he executed thousands of people in Central Asia. However, in the novel he is described as a war hero and a man of generosity, "not that Timur was barbarian my son" (4).

Raiders from the North reflects the greatness of Timur, "And so it happened that our ancestor the Great Timur, the warrior whose name meant "iron" and whose horses sweated blood as he galloped through the world won a vast empire" (3). Soon after his ascension to the throne after the death of his father, the young Babur set out to conquer Samarkand, a neighbouring principality. As guided by his mother and grandmother Babur struggled to defeat Shaibani Khan to capture Samarkand but the result was tragic, he lost both Fergana and Samarkand. Babur, the dreamer of dreams wandered as a king without a kingdom through the mountains of Central Asia for several years. S. M. Edwards and H. L. O. Garrett write:

Originally the ruler of the tiny kingdom of Ferghana, which he (Babur) inherited from his father, he was soon expelled. Then followed several fruitless attempts to occupy Samarkand – another lost possession of the family. Finally, he established himself, after many vicissitudes as King of Kabul, and it was from Kabul that he set out on his first expedition to India in February 1519. (3)

From Kabul, his eyes turned to the most fertile regions of Indo Gangetic planes, known for its wealth and natural resources, which was then under the rule of the Afghan Lodi Dynasty. Babur made more invasions to India but he could not

make his ends satisfied. In 1524, Babur led a larger expedition to India and he got local support from Daulat Khan, Governor of Lahore, and Alam Khan, uncle of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. With the support of these two important officers of the Sultan, Babur could advance much farther with greater hope of success. Later, Babur could not make a strong alliance with Daulath Khan whom he called “rude and stupid” in *Baburnama*, he returned to Kabul and reorganised his military force. His final invasion of India began on 17th November 1525 which Babur describes in *Baburnama* as, “The sun being in the sign of the archer, we set out for Hindustan”(445). His army invaded through the way of Peshawar and Sialkot. The Battle of Panipat has been a historically decisive one as it inaugurates the era of the Mughal Empire in India which determined the future of the country for almost three hundred years. Babur describes his success of the Battle of Panipat in his memoir as:

When the incitement to battle had come, the sun was spear high: until mid-day fighting had been in full force; noon passed, the foe was crushed in defeat, our friends rejoicing and gay. By God’s mercy and kindness, this difficult affair was made easy for us! In one-half-day, that armed mass was laid upon the earth. Five or six thousand men were killed in one place close to Ibrahim. Our estimate of the other dead lying all over the field was 15 to 16000, but it came to be known; later in Agra from the statements of Hindustanis, that 40 or 50,000 may have died in that battle. (474)

Babur took charge of the imperial treasury of the Lodi Dynasty at Delhi and appointed a Governor and two military officials for the city. Babur could achieve decisive victories against Rajputs and Afghans. Alex Rutherford presented the role

of Babur's mother and grandmother in shaping him as an able administrator. Esan Daulath, the grandmother "had Genghis Khan's spirit as well as his blood" (*Raiders from the North* 16). In the novel *Raiders from the North*, Wazir Khan, the chief military commandant of the court of Babur has presented as a loyal and most trustworthy officer even in the time of his adversity. He prepares for the coronation ceremony of the young Babur whereas Esan Daulath and Babur's mother Qutluk Nigar worked hand in hand to make Babur be a powerful king. Alex Rutherford pointedly writes about the diplomacy and farsightedness of Babur's grandmother Esan Daulath who secretly writes letters to invite the faithful tribal chiefs to attend the coronation ceremony of Babur:

We will not spend this night in mourning, lest our indolence brings even greater woes upon us. I know those we can rely on and those who are untrustworthy and deceitful. People think my old eyes and ears notice nothing but I see what goes on. I won't trust a scribe to write letters such as these. I will do it myself. Wazir Khan you will make sure that each reaches its destination safely. If anyone dares enquire, what they are tell them they are an invitation to the funeral feast. That is partly true, but they will also be invitations to the ceremony in the mosque that will serve as Babur's coronation. I am summoning every trustworthy chieftain who lives within half a day's hard ride here to Akhsi. I will ask them to make their way secretly silently to the mosque as soon as the funeral feast has begun. Babur, sit by me and hold on oil lamp close. (17)

Babur's significant victories and his campaigns came to a sudden close with

his accidental death on 28th December 1530, he was only forty-seven years. Babur's burial was at Kabul, in one of his favourite gardens and later Shah Jahan built a mosque on his grave. As an administrator, Babur was very compassionate and attractive, his memoir reveals his character as a man of imagination and a writer. His memoir becomes an epicentre for modern historians and writers to know about India and its people at the beginning of the sixteenth century. His unique autobiographical sketch *Baburnama* is evidence of his literary skills and scholastic accomplishments and it is the true classic of world literature.

Babur gives a vivid description of Ferghana, Samarkand, and Kabul in his memoir. Alex Rutherford while giving the pen picture of Babur's early life uses these descriptions of his memoir as a source. Rutherford describes the beautiful nature of Samarkand in *Raiders from the North*:

...and Samarkand lay on the great Silk Route between China and Persia, surrounded by fertile fruit orchards and the fields of wheat and cotton, the richest of all the Timurid possessions. It's a very name meant Fat City while the Zarafshan River, which ran past its walls was called Gold Bearing. (37)

Rutherford portrays Samarkand as a rich landscape with fruits and vegetation, "Partridges and pheasants were simmering in succulent sauces flavoured with pomegranates and tamarinds. Ripe melons bursting with juice sweet as honey and purple grapes with the bloom still on them were being piled on jewelled salvers. Babur's mouth watered." (100). Rutherford describes the ecosystem of the time, changes in the climate, flowers, fruits, and birds, and animals throughout the novel to provide a complete picture of the past.

The Mughal Emperors who adorned the royal throne of Delhi proved exceptional in the field of statecraft and initiated an effective ruling system. Apart from this innovative administrative acumen, these Central Asian Emperors were educated and well cultured. Almost all of them were patrons of art and architecture and kept bibliophiles, cultivated refined aesthetic sense, and were a connoisseur of fine arts. With these innate aesthetic as well as administrative qualities, they not only patronised great luminaries and visionaries of all fields but both Babur and Jahangir wrote a significant literary masterpiece in the form of autobiographies.

Alex Rutherford's *Raiders from the North* heavily relies on the archives, its records, and every possible historical source to draft the backbone of the fiction. The authors rigorously dig up all the archival sources. Using these historical records the novel projects forth a social history focusing on the internal politics of the court, royal women and their position, war, battles, Babur's ability to maintain the empire, his charisma as an emperor, and the relationship with other Kingdoms. Rutherford gives an account of the climate, nature, various kinds of fruits which develop a wonder for Babur and his crew in the new land of Hindustan. The first part of the novel gives an account of Babur's struggle to capture Samarkand, a Central Asian territory with the assistance of his very close military commander Wazir Khan, who is a fictional character and not a historical persona. The novel describes the boundless sufferings of Babur and his soldiers to conquer Samarkand, where Timur lay buried. Samarkand bears the footprints of his ancestors hence, capturing the city of Samarkand becomes his first venture as well as an immediate one after he became the king of a small principality of Ferghana. Rutherford writes, "When Timur had

died on his march to conquer China, his attendants had perfumed and preserved his corpse with rosewater, camphor, and musk before carrying it back in glory to Samarkand and laying it here”(101).

In 1483 Babur could conquer Samarkand but he lost it soon to Shaibani Khan. Timur once besieged Samarkand and later it became a springboard for Timur for his new empire-building ventures. “Timur had been thirty-one, more than twice his (Babur’s) age when he had seized Samarkand” (99). Rutherford gives us the portrait of Timur, one of history’s magnificent personalities in the novel *Raiders from the North*. Timur’s different titles reveal his greatness as a conqueror. Beatrice Forbes Manz adequately described the greatness of Timur as:

Tamerlane moved like a whirlwind through Eurasia and left a name familiar throughout the world. The record of his campaigns is long and vivid. From 1382- 1405 his great armies crisscrossed Eurasia from Delhi to Moscow, from the Tien Shan Mountains of Central Asia to the Taurus Mountain in Anatolia, conquering and reconquering, razing some cities, sparing others. His activity was relentless and unending. Throughout his life he kept his armies and the move- sometimes together, sometimes divided and dispersed throughout the countryside, but almost never at rest or home. His fame spread quickly to Europe... (1)

Timur erected his summer palace at Samarkand and transformed it into a remarkable city. Rutherford mentions the summer palace of Timur in Samarkand as a place of contemplation for Babur which reminds him of Timur’s greatness and his responsibility as a King of Samarkand to fly high to become the ruler of the world.

Rutherford writes, “The more Babur contemplated Timur, the more breath-taking his vision and ambitions seemed. It was easy to speak of himself as Timur’s heir, but when he considered what that meant, he felt humbled and exhilarated” (*Raiders from the North* 102).

The very thought of Timur and the sight of the huge palaces, great observatory where Timur’s grandson Ulugh Beg studied the solar system and the gardens ignite Babur’s dreams as a conqueror. Genghis Khan, the founder of Mongol Dynasty in Central Asia conquered Samarkand in 1220. In the the 14th century, the city became the capital of the vast Empire of Timur and he made it a city of luxuries. Samarkand was the capital of the Timurid Dynasty for 140 years. Samarkand is well known as a Centre of Islamic Scholarly Studies and in the 14th century, the city became the capital of Timur’s Empire that stretched from India to Turkey. Timur’s Mausoleum is known as the Gur -e- Amir (Persian for “the tomb of the king”) which is regarded as the model for the later Mughal tombs like Gardens of Babur in Kabul, Humayun’s Tomb, and Taj Mahal.

In the contemporary context, New Historicism acts as a new interpretative strategy in the analysis of history and literature. New Historicism as an innovative critical practice propagates an overt interest in remaking the past from the present perspective and making it more convenient to the contemporary world. It explains the capacity of a literary text to vindicate political, social, and cultural implications and to represent historical forces. Rutherford in their attempt to reconstruct the Mughal world stresses the reciprocity, flexibility, and mutual interaction of the historical and the literary. Like the deconstructive reading methods, New

Historicism also spread the idea that work is not an autonomous unit of meaning, but it is an amalgamation of unresolved conflicts and a variety of meanings.

The contemporary writers of historiographical metafiction took their poetical license to imagine a more comprehensive past. Rutherford embedded both the historical and the literary in his historical fictions. As an afterword to the novel Alex Rutherford writes about the composition of the novel, “ I have described the principal events in their historical sequence, though condensing, combining or omitting some incidents and compressing some timescales”(491). The New Historical turn and the historiographical metafiction based on the principles of this reading strategy transformed the way we understood literature. Alex Rutherford explains the poetic license that he took to construct the fictional frame of the historical events in the novel *Raiders from the North* in the afterword note:

Babur’s grandmother Esan Daulat – whose advice he says in the *Baburnama*, he relied on upon his youth -his mother Kutlugh Nigar and his sister Khanzada all existed, as did his traitorous half-brother Jahangir. Babur’s father indeed fell to his death from his dovecote at Akhsi when the battlements collapsed beneath him. Similarly, Babur’s main enemies – Shah Ismail of Persia, Sulthan Ibrahim of Delhi, and Uzbek warlord Shaibani Khan, who did carry off Khanzada, are also historical. However, I have used the liberties afforded to historical novelists to flesh out some of the other characters or to create new ones based on the combination of real people important in Babur’s life. Wazir Khan and Baisanghar fall into these categories, as indeed does Baburi – though in his memoirs Babur fondly of a market boy of that name. (492)

Rutherford upholds ambiguous and ambivalent viewpoints regarding the Mughal past in India and their cultural artefacts by incorporating textual details and the literary interpretative methods. Throughout the *Empire of the Mughal* series, Rutherford picks references about Mughal's interest in Astrology and the Mughal Emperors inherit it from their Central Asian ancestors. In almost all Muslim Empires, astrology constituted an important element in determining the course of the administration. Mughal Emperors appointed astrologers at the court to consult them. Annmarie Schimmel studies the cultural, military, and aesthetics of the Mughals and she contends:

Humayun, being a great believer in astrology, used to select the colours he wore according to the colour of the star, which ruled that day. On Saturday, on the day of Saturn he wore black, then golden yellow on Sunday, white or green on Monday, red on Tuesday, which was ruled by Mars, pale blue on Wednesday, ochre on Thursday, and white and green again on Friday. (168)

Mughals inherited their interest in horoscopy directly from their Central Asian ancestors. Rutherford mentions Humayun's interest in horoscopy in the novel *Brothers at War*, "Dressed in blood-red robes as befitted Tuesday, the day governed by the planet Mars, Humayun looked down at Mirak Beg's defiant face" (81). When Babur wants to go to Hindustan, the astrologers consulted the planets. Rutherford portrays it in the novel *Raiders from the North*:

At Babur's request, the court astrologers consulted the planets. Night after night, they studied their charts and scrutinised the infinite complex web of stars lighting the dark skies over Kabul. January, when the sun in the sign of

Aquarius, would be an auspicious time for him to launch his campaign, they pronounced, at last, stroking their beards. (281)

Mughal Miniature paintings that depict astrologers in the court during the time of certain celebrations show Mughal's interest in astrology. The court historiographers of Akbar also write about the superior position of astrologers at the court. These historical accounts prove Humayun's deep interest in astrology. The astrologers of the Mughal court used to prepare the horoscope of the newborn. Rutherford depicts Humayun's strong belief in horoscopy and his study of the horoscope of his son Akbar. Humayun's expertise in astrology is very popular which helped him to forecast the coming glory of his son. Rutherford concentrates on reconstructing the Mughal world from a social history paradigm, Rutherford has vividly portrayed Mughals' interest in stars and horoscopy. In the novel *Raiders from the North*, Rutherford narrates about the great observatory of Ulugh Beg, one of the largest observatories of the Islamic world.

The novel *Brothers at War* tells the biography of Humayun, Babur's favourite son and the second Emperor of the Mughal Empire. Humayun holds the inherited Mughal Empire successfully for ten years and he conquered Gujarat before he undergoes a fatal setback. The powerful Suri Dynasty and its leader Sher Shah Suri becomes a staunch enemy for Humayun. Sher Shah Suri defeated Humayun and exiled him. Humayun spends fifteen years in Persia as a political refugee at the court of Shah Tahmasp. After the death of Sher Sha Suri and his son Islam Shah, Humayun and his son Akbar reconquered Hindustan with the help of the King of Persia. In the historical note attached to the novel *Brothers at War*, Rutherford writes:

I was fortunate that the story of Humayun – warrior, stargazer. and the second Mughal emperor – is quite well documented, better than that of his father Babur ...The adventures, tragedies, contradictions, and eventual triumphs of Humayun's extraordinary life were captured by his half-sister Gulbadan, 'princess Rose body' in her detailed and affectionate account of his life – *Humayunama*. Humayun's attendant Jauhar also wrote a record of his master's life – *Tadhkirat al- Waqiat* – while Abul Fazal, friend, and advisor of Humayun's son Akbar, chronicled Humayun's reign in the first volume of his *Akbarnama*. (489)

Historians held the view that Humayun was a less able man when compared with his father Babur. He occupied the throne in 1530 after the death of Babur but in 1540 Humayun was exiled from India and he conquered the throne only in 1556 with the help of the Safavid Dynasty of Persia just before his death. Humayun followed the Timurid tradition and divided the Empire among his four brothers which was an unusual practice in India. At the beginning of his administration, he could win certain campaigns. The first major expedition after becoming the Emperor was against Muhammad Lodi. Humayun captures Jaunpur after defeating Muhammad Lodi and he won campaigns against Bahadur Shah, the king of Gujarat. The treachery of his half-brother Askari was persistent throughout his reign. Humayun had two prominent rivals, Sultan Muhammad of Gujarat and Sher Shah Suri (Sher Khan) of Bihar to the east.

Gulbadan Begum gives a well-balanced insight into the character of Humayun and his reign. It becomes the key source of information about the life and

times of Humayun. Even though Babur found Humayun as his rightful heir and the sovereign of the Mughal Empire, he divided the kingdom to the three younger princes, Kamran, Askari, and Hindal. S. M. Edwards and H. L. O. Garrett indicate, “His brother Kamran was already the governor of Kabul and Humayun was obliged also to transfer Panjab to him. This seriously weakened his resources at a time when men and money were badly needed. Kamran proved thoroughly disloyal throughout his brother’s reign” (13).

Sher Shah or also known as Sher Khan, the Afghan noble raised serious threats against Humayun and the Mughal Empire. Sher Shah defeated the Mughal army thoroughly at Chausa, with this Humayun lost faith in his nobility. Differences of opinion arose between Kamran and Humayun and the former left Agra with his army before the battle of Kannauj despite Humayun's pleadings. Sher Shah titled himself as the Padishah of Hindustan after his sweeping victory at Chausa and moved towards Agra to overthrow Humayun. Humayun aided by his brothers Askari and Hindal marched to Kanauj near Agra to confront the army of Sher Khan on 17 May 1540. His defeat before Sher Khan was complete, and then Humayun retreated to Agra. This Battle of Kanauj resulted in the exile of Humayun to Persia and he took refuge in the court of Shah Tahmasp for 15 years. Sher Khan established his Sur Empire with its capital at Delhi.

Humayun became quite conscious about the deplorable condition of his army and he suffered inexplicable losses at the Battle of Chausa. Rutherford portrays Humayun as injured in the battle: “The hakims had washed and stitched together the sides of the long deep wound in his hand and forearm, dressed it with ointments and

bound it in fine muslin bandages but he had refused their offer of opium to deaden the pain” (*Brothers at War* 121). The army of Humayun scattered around after the sound of defeat, “Everywhere, your men are retreating. Unless you too ride quickly away you will be captured or killed” (148). In the Battle of Kanauj on 17th May 1540, Humayun completely surrendered before Sher Shah Suri and Humayun retreated to Lahore, finally, he took refuge in the court of Sha Thahmasp of Persia. Rutherford fictionally renders the agony of Humayun in seeking asylum in Persia:

I have suffered many reverses. An imposter from Bengal, Sher Shah rules in my place in Hindustan, while my half-brothers have stolen Kabul and Kandahar from me and hold my infant son hostage. You too are an emperor – a very great one – and you will, I am certain, understand, and sympathise with my plight. I ask you to be gracious enough to receive me, my family, and my small force into Persia (*Brothers at War* 276).

The novel *Brothers at War* presents Humayun as a brave, aspiring, and determined Mughal Emperor who wishes to the extent the boundaries of his Empire. Humayun’s father Babur bequeathed him everything; the vast Mughal Empire, its boundless wealth, and a very formidable military force. Even though, throughout his life, Humayun as a very infamous stargazer has to face the ordeals like losing his empire, a lifetime in exile, and his death in a very fatal staircase accident. The depth of Humayun’s character which Rutherford portrays is truly commendable. Rutherford presents him as a determined emperor who wins back his empire and even in his adversities; he put maximum belief in his capacities to win back.

Rutherford mentions the conspiracy planned by Humayun’s brothers

Kamran, Askari, and Hindal to capture the throne immediately after the death of Babur. Diana Preston in one of her interviews contends that the Mughal dynasty encompasses within itself the seeds of destruction and “the story of the Moghuls is one of the sons plotting against fathers, brothers murdering brothers and half-brothers and of empresses and would-be empresses plotting, scheming and seducing. Re-creating this in a series of novels was irresistible”. Humayun, throughout his reign, faced the treachery of his brothers and half-brothers. In the Mughal Dynasty, succession was not a peaceful affair. In the novel *Brothers at War*, Baba Yasaval, an ebullient master of his horse warns Humayun about his brothers, “Scarcely, a fortnight after His Majesty your father’s coffin left for Kabul, the princes Kamran, Askari and Hindal met in a fort two days’ ride from here” (9). Rutherford provides subjective explorations of the individual characteristics in his historical fictions. Humayun divided the kingdom according to the wishes of his father Babur. His brothers inherited provinces, which later weaken Humayun’s position in his adverse times. Many of his brothers and half-brothers engaged in a treacherous plot against Humayun, Yasaval continues “... to take you prisoner and force you to break up the empire and yield some of your territories to them. They wish to return to the old traditions, majesty when every son was entitled to his father’s lands” (10).

It is a herculean task for a historical novelist to incorporate facts from popular history and to weave a fictional version of it. Alex Rutherford includes every minute detail of the empire as a social and historical indicator of the time. Rutherford portrayed Mughal’s indubitable interest in astrology in the novel *Brothers at War*. Humayun, before his expedition to Gujarat, consults the court astrologers to “calculate the most auspicious time” and he trusts in the predictions of

the astrologers. Rutherford confirms his trust in the stars as: “The assurance that he had the support of the astrologers’ star charts and tabulations in the timing of his invasion would be valuable to his confidence as he began his first campaign as emperor as well as to the morale of his army” (24).

Rutherford proves extraordinary skills in describing the war scenes in all the novels of the Empire of the Mughal quintet. The author’s imagination of all the possible hurdles in the battlefield is magnificent. In *Brothers at War*, there is a lengthy description of Humayun’s expedition of Gujarat which gives a very detailed illustration and appears as a moving picture before the readers. Humayun and his army men across the dried river bed at night climb the mountain and cliffs and the Emperor said, “The rock is fissured and soft enough for those going first to drive metal spikes into the cliff to make a kind of a ladder for the less skilled to climb” (39). In between the emperor takes the battlefield decisions and motivates the soldiers to accomplish backbreaking missions, “While our main forces make a frontal attack to occupy the defenders, we will make the climb and get into the fortress from the rear” (39). Rutherford explores the perseverance of Humayun and his soldiers in battles through his skillful narration:

Advancing through the bushes, the men crept more than half a mile before the vegetation thinned out and allowed them to make out a thousand yards in front of them the rear wall of the fortress – much lower than those at the front and sides and with no sign of guards. Crouching and taking advantage of the cover of the few remaining bushes and the darkness as some large clouds drifted over the moon, the men ran across the intervening ground to squash

themselves against the walls and sounds they made more than blotted out by the noises of battle coming from the front of the fort. Some of the men had brought ropes with them and, at an order from Humayun, Ahmad Khan seized one and began to climb up the wall at a corner, where it turned almost at right angles to follow the contours of the land. Within seconds, he had scrambled to the top using the same techniques as he had in the fissure and thrown down his rope to others to follow. Soon several other men had climbed up and more ropes were hanging down. (42)

Humayun wants to expand the boundaries of the Mughal Empire but he confronts with enormous difficulties to retain and consolidate the Mughal Empire in India. Humayun is obsessed with his conviction of stars that seems to be faulty in taking hold of reality. In the novel *Brothers at War*, Rutherford points out the flaws of Humayun as an emperor through the character of Khanzada Begum. She speaks to Humayun “you smile when I speak of the danger you are in” (76); and Khanzada continues to speak about the frailties of Humayun as; “You spend your days fuddled with opium. You used to be a ruler, a warrior. What are you now, but a dreamer, a fantasist?” (76). Munis D Faruqui observes:

Unlike Babur, Humayun never succeeded in getting the most powerful members of the nobility, his relatives, or his brothers – the most important appanage holders of his empire consistently channel local and regional loyalty upward to him. Furthermore – and this is especially true of his three brothers – they only barely acknowledged him as the prime leader among the leaders. Consequently Humayun’s access to the most important resources of

state formation – money, men, and information – was always severely constrained and dependant on the goodwill of others than was true for Babur, whose personal charisma and prestige as the founder of an expanding kingdom allowed him to overcome such difficulties. (53)

Humayun spends most of his life as an emperor for waging different battles to protect his kingdom. He has known as a generous ruler who shows much concern for his brothers even though they cheated on him several times. When Humayun took the bastion of the empire, he extended a “generous gesture towards his subjects by retaining the officers of the preceding reign in their respective posts and rewarding his ardent supporters by an increment of salary and conferment of titles” (*Humayun Badshah* 29). Historians had condemned Humayun’s misplaced magnanimity as a major flaw of his character as an emperor. Historians generally tend to present Humayun as a failed emperor.

S.K. Banerji in his *Humayun Badshah* writes, “Luck favoured him, and once more he sat on the throne of Delhi” (300). Still, in refuge at the Persian court, Humayun was hopeful and at the behest of Shah of Persia, he started to rebuild his army to capture Hindustan again. Shah Tahmasp extends his helping hands to Humayun, “I will give you an army and one of my best generals so that you may reclaim what has been taken from you” (*Brothers at War* 283). Humayun led his army towards Peshawar to recapture his lost empire and he could occupy Lahore by the beginning of 1555. Mughals defeated the Afghan ruler Sikander Shah in the Battle of Machhiwara. Humayun occupied Delhi in July 1555 and proclaimed himself as the Emperor of Hindustan. However, the ill fate followed him and he

died just six months later after falling from his observatory.

Alex Rutherford depicts the death of Humayun in his *Brothers at War* as, “but as he stepped down on to the first step, the toe of his leather boot caught in the fur edged hem of his long blue robes and he suddenly pitched forward into nothingness. He put on his hands but there was nothing to grab and he went plunging headfirst” (481). Humayun breathed his last after bequeathing one of the world’s largest empires to his favourite son Akbar whom history later recognised as Akbar the great.

The Enchantress of Florence, the tenth novel of Rushdie is a conflation of history, fantasy, and mythological narration about the Mughal court under the rule of Akbar the Great. Rushdie blends the actual historical characters and events with fantasy, magical realism, the tradition of oral tales and he uses an array of storytellers like the travellers and the adventures. Rushdie says, “The past was a light that if properly directed could illuminate the present more brightly than any contemporary lamp” (315). The plot of the novel centres on the reign of Akbar in his new capital city at Fatehpur. Rushdie elaborately tells the magnificent stories of the Mughal court at the Fatehpur Sikri and he wants to contend the fact that, by the close of the sixteenth century, the renaissance Italy had its reflection in Akbar’s India. Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence* appears as a "mighty specimen of a man, huge and strong. As a boy, he had killed a tigress with his bare hands ... a Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king: a contradiction in terms. Such was the greatest ruler the land had ever known" (41).

Rushdie in his *The Enchantress of Florence* intertwines history, fantasy,

myth, and fables to represent fluctuating realities of the oriental and occidental world. Rushdie, through the conflation of history with the imaginative realm, tries to repudiate the Eurocentric Renaissance narratives and offers a synchronous parallel history of the Mughal Dynasty under the rule of Akbar the great. The writers of historical fiction cleverly construct the real historical events into fiction to help the readers to salvage the past. Alex Rutherford, although through a distinct narrative style in his *Ruler of the world* presents the history of Mughals under the reign of Akbar.

Jalal - ud - din Muhammad Akbar, famously known as Akbar the Great was the third Mughal Emperor who held the royal office from 1556-1605 and a contemporary of Elizabeth I. *Ruler of the World*, the third novel in the internationally bestselling Mughal series of Alex Rutherford is about the third great Mughal emperor Akbar. The novel opens by giving a picture of Akbar's tutelage under Bairam Khan and the unexpected death of his father Humayun. Akbar's guardian Bairam Khan concealed the sad news of the accidental death of Humayun to get time for the preparation of Akbar's succession. At the time of the sudden death of his father Humayun, Akbar accompanied by Bairam Khan was waging a war against Sikander Shah in Panjab. Bairam Khan informally enthroned Akbar in a garden at Kalanaur on a newly constructed platform. Bairam Khan became the regent, the commander in chief of Akbar. Richard Von Garbe elaborates about the greatness of Akbar as:

A strong personality and a successful general, Akbar gradually enlarged the Mughal Empire to include nearly all the Indian subcontinent north of the

Godavari river. His power and influence, however, extended over the entire country because of Mughal military, political, cultural, and economic dominance. To unify the vast Mughal state, Akbar established a centralised system of administration throughout his empire and adopted a policy of conciliating conquered rulers through marriage and diplomacy. In order to preserve peace and order in a religiously and culturally diverse empire, he adopted policies that won him the support of his non-Muslim subjects. Eschewing tribal bonds and Islamic state identity, Akbar strived to unite far-flung lands of his realm through loyalty, expressed through a Persianised culture, to himself as an emperor who had near-divine status. (66)

Akbar is the first Mughal Emperor to be born in India and he rose to the throne of the Mughal dynasty at a very young age of thirteen like his grandfather Babur. The Novel *Ruler of the World* begins with an elaborate description of the hunting expedition of Akbar that reflects the Mughal hunting culture. Rutherford mentions Mughal's interest in hunting here. In the Mughal period, hunting was a leisure time activity for the emperors and it was useful for aiming at the battlefield. Rutherford's novels allude to quite a few such practices, hobbies, and habits of the emperors' queens and princesses that are helpful to uncover a lively Mughal world before the readers. Rutherford indicates the great expertise of Akbar and Jahangir in hunting. Alex Rutherford then moves on to describe the informal crowning ceremony of Akbar as the Mughal Emperor:

... on a makeshift brick stone hastily erected on a masonry platform in the centre of a Moghul encampment he had been proclaimed as the Emperor of

Hindustan. Still raw with grief at the sudden death of his father the emperor Humayun, he had stood awkwardly but proudly beneath a silken awning to receive the homage of Bairam Khan and his other commanders. (51)

Historians believe that Akbar's unofficial crowning ceremony was conducted on a makeshift stone under the guideship of Bairam Khan soon after the accidental death of Humayun. The major threat Akbar faced immediately after his enthronement was from Hemu, minister and heir presumptive of Islam Shah Sur. Hemu captured Delhi and Agra and proclaimed himself as Raja Vikramaditya. However, at the second Battle of Panipat on 5th November 1556, Akbar defeated the army of Hemu and recaptured the lost provinces of Delhi and Agra. At the initial phase of the Battle Hemu got a considerable superiority over the army of Akbar. The Second Battle of Panipat truly determined the future of Mughal power in India, S. M. Edwards and H. L.O.Garret write about the second historical battle of Panipat, "Hemu would probably have succeeded, but for a stray arrow which struck him in the eye and rendered him unconscious. The almost victorious Afghan army finding its leader no longer visible was seized with the idea that he was dead and fled in all directions without any further attempts at resistance" (23-24).

In the novel *The Ruler of the World*, Alex Rutherford depicts the young Akbar as a courageous, ambitious emperor who exhibits his unusual talents in controlling his men against the skilled army of Hemu in the Battle of Panipat and at the end of it, Akbar kills Hemu. With the help of his trusted advisor Bairam Khan, Akbar became triumphant in his first expedition after becoming the Emperor of Hindustan. The confident Akbar, "with one slash of his sword severed his head.

Shaking with rage, his face spattered with Hemu's hot blood" (71). Akbar could conquer his enemy completely and he ordered Bairam Khan to "display this creature's body around the camp. Send his head to Delhi and set it up to rot in one of the public squares as a lesson to all other potential rebels" (71). Rutherford deviates from the historical documents here as the historical sources indicate, Akbar was very young and he got the protection of his guards in the Battle of Panipat. Vincent Arther Smith, a renowned historian who wrote the biography of Emperor Akbar observes, "During the battle, the young prince had been kept at a safe distance in the rear and Bairam Khan left the conduct of the battle to his lieutenants" (39).

Akbar, to establish his sovereignty in the Mughal Empire determined to reduce the influence of his regent Bairam Khan over the court affairs. His foster mother Maham Anga and the nobles around him also fanned the flames of discontent in the mind of Akbar. Akbar decided to put an end to the domination of Bairam Khan, "I must be rid of his power over me. I must rule myself" (*Ruler of the World* 51). Vincent Smith also notices the influence of royal women in the fall of Bairam Khan at the court of Akbar: "Those natural feelings were stimulated and inflamed by the ladies of his household and various courtiers, who for one reason or another had grievances against the protector" (43).

Rutherford highlights the involvement of the royal women in the internal politics of the court. Akbar in the novel *Ruler of the World* speaks his mind to Maham Anga, his wet nurse to break the influence of Bairam Khan, "Maham Anga, what you have said convinces me even more that I must break his hold over me"(51). Maham Anga exerted great power and authority in the initial phase of the

administration of Akbar. Her son Adham Khan also enjoyed privileges in Mughal court. Historiographers who favoured patriarchy called this period a “petticoat government”. Powerful women in the past have always been neglected and unfairly recorded in the historical discourse.

Alex Rutherford, while analysing his fictional rendering of the historical personae of Akbar in the postscript of the novel *Ruler of the World* remarks, “As with all the books in the Mughal Quintet, the main military, political and personal events described in *Ruler of the World* all happened”(459). Akbar’s reign has marked by the presence of an increasing number of European merchants, priests, missionaries, and travellers in the Mughal court. Rutherford depended on foreign travellers’ accounts in developing the historical backbone of the novel *Ruler of the World*. European travellers enriched our knowledge of the Mughal past with their recorded observations and descriptions about the nature of the social and cultural life of the period. Francois Bernier who was a French philosopher and historian travelled extensively in India and recorded his experience in the Mughal court. He frequently compared the bleak Indian condition with the situation in Europe in his text *Travels in the Mogul Empire*.

The major flaw of the accounts of the travellers is that they employed European standards and strategies to understand a distinct country like India. Bernier in his records says that Emperor is the sovereign authority of the land and peasants are denied the right to hold land. Abu’l Fazl, the official chronicler of Akbar’s reign, presents the status of farmers by describing the land revenue as “remunerations of sovereignty” which proves the absolute authority of the Emperor in his dominion.

Rutherford, even though recognises the potential of the travel writer's account, raises the possibility of the foreign traveller's experience of the 'wonderment of the curiosities' in a country like India. Rutherford mentions the same idea in an interview with *Fantasy Book Critic*:

For the later emperors beginning with Akbar, we also have the accounts and letters of European visitors - merchants, mercenaries, and missionaries - to the Moghul, court. These reveal the visitors' open-mouthed wonder at the spectacle of Moghul wealth and sophistication beyond anything the European courts could offer. To Europeans, the magnificent Moghuls were like characters from an exotic legend. They fastened on every fantastical aspect of Moghul life - gems the size of duck eggs, the gold-leaf decorated food and rose-scented wine prepared for the imperial table, the number of wives and concubines the emperors enjoyed, and the other sensual aspects of Moghul life. A French doctor, exceptionally invited into the imperial harem to treat a woman there, wrote in amazement that he could not locate her pulse because so many ropes of pearls were wound around her arms.

In all historical novels, the discourses of history and literature come together thereby it produces a constructive dialogue between the past and the present. The process of on-going discussions, new evidence, and new research methodologies broaden our understanding of the past. Foucault in his *Knowledge/ Power* observes, it is unfit to consider history as a series of a monolithic set of causes and effects controlled by the historian and he demands the widening of the historical canvas. In the novel *Ruler of the World*, Rutherford marks the differences of Mughals with

other colonisers and foreign invaders who plundered India. Akbar, while he was signing a peace treaty with the King of Rajputs declares, “My people did not come to Hindustan as ravishers to despoil it and carry its riches back to our own lands. We came to claim what is ours ...I do not regard Hindustan as a subject land or its people as inferior to the Mughal class”(127).

Historians think that Akbar took religious tolerant policies to unite the people of the country together. Rutherford follows these historical records in presenting the character of Akbar. Akbar was acknowledged as the most liberal exponent of tolerance that essentially helped him in the consolidation of the Empire. While accepting the principles of Islam religion, Akbar was keen on making his ties with Rajput noblemen like Todarmal, Birbal, and Raja Mansingh. His marriage with the Rajput Princess Hirabai and his connection with Sufi mysticism further liberalised his thoughts.

Akbar’s religious tolerance is said to born out of his political necessity. Managing Rajput Hindu rulers became a dire necessity for Akbar to consolidate his power. In *Ruler of the World*, Rutherford discusses in detail Akbar’s marriage with the Rajput Princess Hirabai. While tying the knot with the Hindu Princess, Akbar ensures his plan of religious liberalism and permits the princess to continue the practice of her religion. Rutherford depicts the broadmindedness of Akbar who is even ready to permit the princess to continue her Hindu way of life in his court, “I respect her religion which is indeed the religion of many of my subjects... I will never force her to abandon her faith, and she may build a shrine to pray to her Gods within the imperial harem” (*Ruler of the World* 129). Vincent Arthur Smith

expresses that Akbar's marital alliances with Hindu Princess made its impact on his personal life as well as in his public policy. Smith observes, "The marriage with Amber Princess secured the powerful support of her family throughout the reign and offered a proof manifest to all the world that Akbar had decided to be the Padishah of his whole people – Hindus as well as Muhammadans (58).

Akbar was influenced by the teachings of Guru Nanak and Chaitanya who reawakened and prepared the country in favour of the ideals of tolerance and social reforms. Satish Chandra, while analysing the Mughal relations with the Rajput states of Rajasthan observes that Akbar's religious liberalism is the key principle behind his Rajput Policy. Chandra writes, "Akbar's religious liberalism is based on his belief that all religions are different roads to the same truth, and that the votaries of all religions should be treated based on justice and equality without discrimination, is considered to be the motive force of his Rajput policy" (354). Akbar abolished Jizya, a tax levied upon non- Muslims. His Din- i- Ilahi was controversial and faced severe criticism from the Muslim orthodox priests. Din- i-Ilahi was not a religion but it proposed a way of life. Rutherford includes these details in the novel to explicate the reign of Akbar. He was interested in Jainism, Sikhism, Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. he adopted some of their practices in his personal life. Rutherford depicts the transformation in the personae of Akbar:

The Mughal Empire will flourish only if all its subjects can prosper too. I mean what I say; I hereby declare an end to Jizya – the poll tax on non-believers. Because a man does not follow, the path of Islam is no reason to impoverish him. I also abolish the ancient tax levied since before Mughal times on Hindu pilgrims visiting their shrines. (*Ruler of the World* 208)

Akbar took time to understand the essence of Hindu religion and he studied the Upanishad and Ramayana. Rutherford renders the liberal attitude of Akbar in *Ruler of the World* and his growing interest in Sufi mysticism of Shaikh Salim Chishti. Rutherford discerns his obsession to understand the dynamics of various religions, for that Akbar “listened to the wisdom in the Hindu books” and the “principles common to all religions”, which enabled him to content the fact that “God belongs to us all”. Akbar expects the introduction of Din – i-Ilahi may teach “kindness, compassion, tolerance, and respect for all living things”. Rutherford portrays Akbar’s interest in maintaining historical records of his reign in *Ruler of the World*. He entrusts the task to Abul Fazl, “I wish the chronicle of my reign to be a testament to future generations. You must record the truth – the bad as well as the good. Don’t seek merely to flatter me”(151). *Akbarnama* contains 116-miniature portraiture of Akbar illustrated by different court painters, which demonstrate the Mughal School of Painting.

Mughal time represents the resurrection of the Islamic architecture in India. The incredible classical monuments of Agra built during the 16th and 17th century with the blending of Persian, Islamic, Turkish, and Indian styles surpassed in its beauty and marvel. Art and architecture flourished in India under the patronage of various Mughal emperors. Fatehpur Sikri, the headquarters of Akbar is the finest example of the syncretic architectural style of the Mughal period. The imperial capital was envisaged as a grand structure and its construction completed in the year 1570. Irfan Habib in his essay “Akbar and Technology” comments that his interest in craft is quite genuine and “Akbar had a natural inclination towards industrial craft

and this was undoubtedly a source of his concern with technological innovation” (129). Akbar’s Fatehpur Sikri exhibits the excellence of architecture and technology of Mughal time.

Akbar, who is called by Rutherford as the “ruler of the world” or “seizer of the world” displays an “extraordinary appealing personality and he possessed all the desired qualities of the warrior hero” (John F. Richards 44). Mughals under the reign of Akbar became one of the largest centralised states and the richness of the Mughals was proverbial. Akbar, the perfect builder of the Mughal Empire directed his army in a series of remarkable military conquests and the Mughal army won victory after victory every year. When Akbar died in the year 1605, he bequeathed such a magnificent Mughal Empire to Jahangir. As Rutherford observes in *Ruler of the World*: “When people talk about the great Mughal, it’s usually Akbar they mean” (457). Rutherford describes the enthronement of Prince Salim as Jahangir in the last part of the novel *Ruler of the World*:

...to the slow beating of kettledrums, Salim mounted the steps of the marble dais to the throne that awaited him in the Hall of Public Audience in the Agra Fort. On his finger was Timur’s ring bearing the emblem of the tiger that he had taken from his dead father’s hand nine days ago and placed upon his own. The eagle hilted Alamgir hung by his side and round his neck was a triple string of uncut emeralds intertwined with pearls that had once belonged to his great grandfather Babur”. (451)

Jahangir became the new Emperor of Hindustan in 1605. While taking the responsibility, he understood that the fate of “millions upon millions of his subjects

rested in his hands” (452). Jahangir which means the seizer of the world became the emperor of an empire with wealth beyond dreams. Jahangir, like his great grandfather, wrote a memoir - *Jahangirnama*, in which he frankly describes the major events in his personal life as well the history of Jahangir’s India. Jahangir has a dwindled historical reputation and often disdained when compared to his predecessors. Lisa Balabanililar studies the reason for the unpopularity of Jahangir in Mughal history and finds that his “misfortune to reign between two of the most successful scions of the dynasty” (1) may be one reason.

Jahangir is infamous for his addiction to wine and opium. Rutherford portrays Jahangir as a heavy drunkard and an indolent who often depends on Nur Jahan to run the administration. At the same time, Jahangir could ensure almost twenty-two years of relative prosperity, stability, political and cultural equilibrium in the Mughal Empire. Jahangir’s wholehearted patronage to art and painting throughout his life contributed to the development of the Mughal School of painting. Rutherford in the novel *The Tainted Throne* describes several commissions of imperial miniatures, portraits, and sketches under the reign of Jahangir, “The idea of capturing the images of those around him had pleased Jahangir and he had commissioned several portraits”(141). Sanjiv P. Sreevastava in his text *Jahangir: A Connoisseur of Mughal Art* studies the characteristics of Mughal miniature painting during the time of Jahangir. Srivastava, says that the time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan heralded the renaissance in Mughal painting. The socio-economic conditions of the time were favourable for the development of art and architecture.

The Mughals who succeeded the Afghan Lodi Dynasty in India showed

unprecedented interest in developing and promoting Persian literary culture during their reign. Apart from Persian, the mother tongue of Mughals Hindi, Bengali, and Panjabi literature also appeared under the patronage of Mughal emperors. Mughal India has been widely known for its distinguished achievement in poetry and eminent prose writings. This was possible because the Mughal emperors were ardent lovers of literary writings and they produced a vast literature.

The Serpent's Tooth (2013) presents the saga of Jahangir's son Shah Jahan who has taken control of the Mughal Empire after a bloody battle and the murders of his half-brothers. The novel discusses the construction of the Taj Mahal, its surpassing architectural styles, and his unending love for his wife in a unique way. Rutherford narrates the detailed plans proposed by Emperor Shah Jahan himself in the construction of the Taj Mahal and his selection of Ustad Ahmad Lahorie as the chief architect of the grand monument. Forty different types of gems were selected for Taj Mahal, many historians believe that many were selected personally by Shah Jahan. Rutherford in his nonfiction work *A Teardrop on the Cheek of Time: Story of Taj Mahal* discusses the creation of Taj, the ivory-white marble mausoleum on the bank of river Yamuna. The Taj Mahal complex is the best evidence of the Mughal architectural beauty and its aesthetic excellence. Mughals made a lasting impact in India not only in the domain of political affairs but also in the spheres of architecture, music, dance forms, monuments, and cuisine. Soma Mukherjee writes about the transformations in the cultural scenario of India with the advent of Mughals:

With the coming of the Mughals, many new elements were introduced to

the Indian society that mingled with the existing culture in course of time. They not only influenced the country in the political sphere but in almost all spheres of the social, cultural, and artistic life of Hindustan. Their influences in these spheres were great even after hundreds of years, the Mughal influence is still felt in their existing monuments, the Mughalai cuisines, the embroideries of gold and silver wire, the Zardozi and Chickenkari embroideries, the famous Kim Khwab silk brocade weaving of Banaras, the leather shoes and sandals of Kashmir, Delhi, Lucknow and Amritsar, leather water vessels of Bikaner, the Kashmiri shawls and carpets, or the Mughal influence in the Indian music and musical instruments like Tabla, sitar, sarod, sarangi, shenai, and santoor. (10)

Alex Rutherford, while reminiscing to the complex multi-layered past of India shares the opinion in an interview with *Times of India*, “I think India has always intrigued us so much with its complexity. There is layer upon layer of history, culture, diversity, languages, different architecture from different part of the country”. Michael Preston and Diana express the idea that “the Moghul dynasty carried within it the seeds of its own destruction”. The Mughals follow the Central Asian tradition of the Timurids, they have no law of primogeniture. Moghul princes fought each other, even killed their brothers, half-brothers, and plotted against their fathers for the crown. Mughal Monarchy is hereditary and the monarch is the supreme authority of the state. However, in the Mughal monarchical system, the eldest male member of the family may not be the next ruler. They did not follow the rule of primogeniture where the eldest son inherited his father’s crown.

The impact of Mughal rule in India is largely unavoidable and the political legacy that they had left influenced the succeeding rulers of the subcontinent. Even now the Prime Minister of India addresses the nation on 15th August from the Red Fort in Delhi, the royal seat of power of Mughal Emperors. The administrative setup, the land revenue system, cultural artefacts architectural style, Indian, Pakistani cuisines were all influenced by the conquest of Mughals in India, and these are the living documents left by the Mughals. The international travellers described India as a fabled land of richness because of the commercial, cultural and economic prosperity of the country. The Mughals like other invaders have not gone back to their homelands with the money and resources looted from India, instead, they settled here as the rulers of India and became the sons of the soil. The disintegration of the empire starts with the reign of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb's reign was the swan song of the Mughal Empire and his failure as an emperor triggered the factors of disintegration. The complete centralisation of power coupled with the vastness of the empire accelerated the decline of the Mughal dynasty.

In the contemporary world, historical fiction considers an academically respectable genre to reconstruct and reimagine the past in unconventional methods. The novelist of historical fiction explores "the systems of knowing" (Groot 2009, 125) the past and its reconstruction. As Southgate observes, "It is writers of fiction, who is a widely accessible form, have more recently provided historiographical illumination – who have, that is to say deliberately and explicitly shed light on history's darker corners, by revealing afresh the inevitability of its ideological involvement and its function as a vehicle for politics" (157). In this sense, historical fictions play a greater role in shaping and redefining, and reconstructing history.

Historical fiction allows the intermingling of fact and fiction as Diana Preston in her interview with *Sruti's Book Blog* says:

Fiction allows you to exercise your imagination, to interpret the silences, to invent subsidiary characters and events to help convey the personality of the main characters to the reader. The main characters, main places, and main events are all based on facts as far as we can discern them from the sources such as the *Baburnama* or *Akbarnama*. But we sometimes fuse several people who really lived into one, invent new characters and condense or omit some events to maintain the narrative pace.

In recent times, within the context of postmodern philosophy, critics of the discipline of history challenged the absolute distinction of fact and fiction and they held the view that “history itself is nothing more than an alternate form of fiction”. Beverley Southgate remarks; “... the boundaries between the two have been eroding; so that their respective territories now are in a state, if not downright warfare, then at least of interesting flux”(x). It is incontestably true that historiography remains a domain where ideology and politics have intertwined with each other. Historiography tends to satisfy the narratives of the dominant class, the circulation of power around them, and thereby strengthens the existing power hierarchies. Hence, historiography prioritises the dominant class, the philosophers of historical discipline questioned the validity of academic history. Gradually, critics like Hayden White pointed towards the possibility of the poetic nature of the discourse of history. Historical fiction intertwines both fact and fiction, redefines history, and imagines the possibilities of the past that is beyond the purview of history.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Literary narratives and revisionist narratives in historical discourses play a crucial role in interpreting the historical past. Redefining and restructuring the traditional rendering of the past dismantled the age-old conventions of historiography. It is conspicuous that exclusions, inclusions, and paradigmatic transformations are part of the trajectory of historical discourses. The unabating, revisions, discussions, and deconstructions have made history as a discipline open towards newer destinations. The historical fiction of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan can be interpreted as a kind of narrative history and it tries to augment academic history. Both the writers have illustrated their method in the treatment of the contentious relationship between history and fiction and the issues concerned with history and historical theory. Working within the framework of historico-literary postulations, the study has strived to synthesis the mutual contradiction and concurrence of both the historical and the literary.

The thread of history is the foremost factor that gives a uniform underlying pattern to the novels of Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan. The authors have identified plenty of possibilities for fictional narratives in Mughal history and the select novels for the study are teemed with such potential descriptions. Hence, the select historical novels for the study make a rare intermix of fact and fiction. The conventional historiographers either followed the strategy of “conscious ignorance” or “deliberate disregard” in the construction of historical discourse.

Apparently, historical fiction unveiled the untouched domains of historiography such as women and other marginalised sections. History as a discipline has exhibited not only its patriarchal prejudice but also its elitist standpoint. The twentieth century, however, expanded the horizon of the historiographical enquiry, which gradually has led to a flexible and more judicious approach towards the hitherto neglected classes, communities, underrepresented groups into historical records. This paradigmatic shift to include the history of the disempowered and marginalised sections of society, who remained excluded in the historical text, widened the domain of historical discourse.

The impulses of postmodernism, New Historicist theories, philosophy of history, and the concept of post-truth have provided a proper impetus for both Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan to make a deep investigation of the Mughal history which enabled them to identify the limitations of Mughal history. The thesis is an attempt to trace the significance of the historical fiction genre in salvaging the past. The introduction of the thesis is an attempt to define the historical fiction genre and the contemporary relevance and the significance of this hybrid genre. To understand the nebulous of history and fiction, the thesis has taken the theoretical positions of postmodern philosophers of history and the New Historicist theories. The first chapter enquires these ideological frameworks that form a catalyst to the historical metafiction. The second chapter is an exploration of the subservient position of women in the conventional rendering of the past. The chapter focuses to analyse the deep-rooted gender identity in history and Sundaresan's attempt of reconstructing the Mughal past from a feminist viewpoint. The third chapter traces Rutherford's

portrayal of the private and public spaces of the Mughal past to showcase the postmodern concept of inclusive history which widens the arena of the historical enterprise. Rutherford has effectively used the fusion of fact and fiction in their endeavour to reinterpret the Mughal past from multiple perspectives. Reconstruction of Mughal past incorporates more people and more incidents under the notice of the academic community and it will do justice to the past. Salvaging the past has become an important topic of discussion in recent times because the past turns out to be a prime resource for defining the present.

Sundaresan is definitely a reader's favourite novelist and she has added her reputation with the publication of each new novel. With her *Taj Trilogy* novels, Sundaresan has carved out a comfortable place for herself among the historical fiction writers. The select historical fictions of Sundaresan for this thesis present the subservient position of women in academic history and the exclusion of women in the historical narratives which are always a male preserve. For Sundaresan, the feminist rewriting of the Mughal past is a resistance to the masculinist discourses to subdue the voices of women. Sundaresan perceives that women are in a lamentable position in the male/ female binary and the subordination of women in all discourses including history has reinforced the sovereignty of man. Breisach states about the need for equal status to both male and the female in history as:

At the very core of progress resided the concept of emancipation that has energized the dynamics towards equality. Among the major obstacles in the way of emancipation has stood the male/female divide with its historical inequalities. For decades, the arguments used in favour of women's history

were indeed couched in terms of emancipation and other progressive ideas and ideals. Full justice for the cause of women was seen as an integral part of history's goal of universal emancipation, which entailed the advance of women from the condition of enforced silence to that of equality of voice. (184)

Alex Rutherford has not ventured a foreign "othered" gaze upon Mughal history. Rutherford's depiction of the Mughal history is not an exoticist perception as many western historians and historical fiction writers have done. Rutherford scrutinises the Indian historical sources as well as the foreign sources and resorts to the interpretative narrative strategy to present the polyphonic nature of the past. Rutherford's select historical fictions for the study try to bring home the concept of multiple histories which stress the dynamic nature of history. Through these novels, Rutherford explores the characteristics of the unparalleled Mughal dynasty and the glorious tale of the great victories and sacrifices. In the afterward attached to one of the novels in the series *Ruler of the World*, Rutherford explains their narrative style as, "However, all the time I have tried to be true to Akbar, who as I wrote the book, become very real to me. I was moved by the dilemma of a man, outwardly so successful and beloved by his subjects, whose relationship with those closest to him often failed" (460). The absorbing narrative style of Alex Rutherford adopts vivid personal accounts that underline the boundless scope of historical fiction. Rutherford reconstructed the Mughal past in such a way to illuminate many new areas of the Mughal Empire. Rutherford encompasses facets of social, economic, and cultural aspects of the Mughal past and a rational understanding of it in their reinterpretation

of the dynasty. Romila Thapar observes: “If the past is to be called upon to legitimize the present, as it so frequently is, then the veracity of such a past has to be continuously vetted” (xiv). Historical fictions focus on the new dimensions of the past to offer a more complete picture of it.

In recent times, both in history as a discourse and the philosophy of history, the accuracy of the long assumed distinction of fact and fiction has been denounced. The philosophers of history such as Hayden White considered history an alternate form of fiction. In the post-truth era, it is possible to define history as a confluence of “truth and tangled falsehood”. Historical theorists have critiqued historian's assertion of representing the truthful past. Furthermore, fiction can be historical evidence because it encompasses cultural and historical artefacts of a particular time. Southgate claims that, “...fiction can prove a useful source of evidence – as for historians of post-war Britain and their use of the ‘kitchen sink ‘ dramas of the 1950s and 1960s to illuminate some social attitudes of the time” (8). The historical novelist can provide such useful insights to the historiographers. This ambivalence is reconciled and addressed in historical fiction which explored the possibility of a hybrid genre to assimilate the ‘factual’ and the ‘fictional’. The convoluted boundaries between fact and fiction are eroding and hence, the specific territories of both are in a state of flux. This thesis attempted to address this postmodern philosophical maelstrom and to provoke further inquiry in this regard.

Both the historical novelists and the historiographers, while constructing their text make predilections in framing the narrative like formulating a beginning, middle, and end, giving prominence to specific events, particular personae, and

compels the readers to accept their explanation of events as 'facts'. New Historicism, as a new reading strategy, involves the juxtaposition of history and literary works. It questions the boundaries of history by offering a renewed attention to project the voices previously marginalised. New Historicism and discourse analysis are interdisciplinary reading strategies that analyse literary texts and its historical reflections. Both try to expunge the production of meaning in a given historical period and its interpretation. New Historicism disregards the monological interpretation of the past applied by historicism and intellectual history. New Historicism and discourse analysis reinforce the reciprocity and the mutual construction of the meaning of both the historical and the literary. Their interpretative procedures start from a position within history, society, institutions, politics, class, and gender conditions. They reinforce text analysis as a crucial part of the reconstruction of the past.

Historical fiction allows the readers to open up the window towards the past and it sets the mind thinking in historical images. Historical fiction with its close affinity with the readers and its proximity even with the haters of academic history came to be regarded as a very popular genre of fiction. The reader's blissful immersion in the historical fiction with its twists and turns and the aesthetic experience maximises their interest in salvaging the past. The moving images of the past before them situate the readers in a position to reimagine and deconstruct the dominant paradigm of historiographical practices. Historical fiction by and large was a more effective medium widely helpful to promote parallel historical narrative to adopt a more inclusive strategy. Fiction writers who

are unconstrained by the factors like truthfulness, reliability of the variables, and rigorous disciplinary boundaries might be fit to provide a more complete image of the past. As creative writers are endowed with ingenious qualities to pick alternative events, they can present a veracious past through their historical fictions.

Indu Sundaresan could unveil the peripheral appearance of Mughal women in history through her *Taj Trilogy*. It is a challenging task to write a fiction based on the Mughal royal women because it needs arduous research and a keen investigation of all the available sources. Indu Sundaresan as an expatriate writer settled currently in the United States has used the University library of Delaware to know more about Mughal queens, empresses, and the harem. While many novelist and historiographers continue their narrative following the patriarchal tradition, neglected and discarded women as an anonymous entity. The select historical novels of Indu Sundaresan reconstruct the history of women by bringing light to the contributions of women in the evolution and establishment of the Mughal Empire. Indu Sundaresan shed light on the forgotten women in history who moulded the fate of the Mughal Empire. She gives a glimpse of the engrossing lives of Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and the other major and minor Mughal royal women who have participated actively in the internal politics of the court. Sundaresan has successfully recast the private and public spheres of the Mughal Empire through her *Taj Trilogy* novels. Hence, it gives fresh imprints to the readers about the significance of the harem in determining the course of the Mughal Empire.

The postmodern concept of multiple histories, various phases of feminism,

New Historical reading practices that prioritise the parallel reading of the literary and the historical and the philosophy of history, which forms the foundation of historiographical metafiction are used to explicate the thesis statement. New Historicism provides a political reading of the text by discussing gender issues, the culturally and psychologically oppressed and marginalised women in society. Sundaresan's Taj Trilogy novels argue for the possibility of gender history in large and about the reconstruction of the Mughal past by including the role of royal women in the making of the Mughal Empire in particular. Sundaresan reminds the injustices of the patriarchal history that has instilled, nourished, and popularised a wrong ideology among the public.

Alex Rutherford and Indu Sundaresan have used the possibilities of narrative history, the contemporary philosophy of history, and the freedom of historical fiction in their novels. They are conscious of the constructive role of literary narratives in salvaging the past. Both have tried to remain faithful to historical facts as far as possible and at the same time, showed justice to the women who had been neglected in history by portraying their extraordinary abilities and their immense contribution to the history and culture of India. Such historical fiction destabilises and potentially undermines the traditional modes of history writing that were to a great extent, revolved around the lives of powerful men.

Indu Sundaresan and Alex Rutherford have introduced India's glorious past of Mughal reign to the global audience. Both of them sincerely tried to maintain the accuracy of historical facts but at the same time rendered the pictures of a possible past. In the late twentieth century, in light of the new philosophy of history, the

interpretation of Indian history has gone through a radical change. Romila Thapar in the introduction of her book *The Past as Present* observes, “The earlier focus on political and dynastic history has been vastly broadened to include many facets of social, economic and cultural history” (xii). The thesis tries to incorporate this shift in the domain of historical discourse and discloses the pertinent issue of formulation of historical identity. The transformations in history are effective because it illuminated many new areas of analytical investigation of the past and its rational understanding. Alex Rutherford has applied social history parameters to present a more comprehensive view of the Mughal Empire. Social history argues for giving a more complete and holistic interpretation of the past. Rutherford presents a kaleidoscopic image of the Mughal past – religious, economic, socio-political, environmental, and cultural dynamics of the Mughal time are depicted in the novels in *Empire of the Mughal* series.

In contemporary times, it is a fact that the past is often used to legitimate the present and the present draws heavily on the past. E. H. Carr claims that there is a continuous interaction between the past and the present - that reflects the importance of salvaging the past. Reconstruction of the past is an unavoidable process in the making of history as historians generally historicize past events. However, in the contemporary developments in the philosophy of history, every mode of historical investigation needs to be scrutinised and reconstructed. Every reconstructive process has artistic involvement. The fiction writers and historians often retrieve the past in multiple ways. The postmodern historical philosophers like Hayden White consider both history and fictional works are literary artefacts. However, this mode of enquiry

and understanding about the discipline of history helps to reconstitute the past from manifold dimensions.

Sundaresan's reconstruction of the Mughal past through her *Taj Trilogy* helps to articulate voice to the devoiced to raise their resentments and thereby, she challenges the mainstream/ dominant Mughal history. Sundaresan, through the novels, shows that the hegemonic construction of history is also a mode of oppression of women. Though Jahanara controlled the Empire from behind the veil, her visibility in the public domain was denied. Nur Jahan had controlled the Mughal Empire during the reign of Jahangir as an Empress, but Mughal historiographers excluded her from the domain of history. Right from the time of Babur onwards, Mughal imperial women wielded immense power to take political decisions, but they were sidelined to the margins.

Alex Rutherford, though concentrates on the Mughal monarchs, proved the fact that history is not just the total of countless biographies and assumptions. As Marnie Hughes Warrington says, "The way in which we communicate about life can never be exact because we constantly encounter situations in which existing concepts and definitions are thus constantly changing" (17). Alex Rutherford developed their Mughal historical series in line with what E. H. Carr remarks in his *What is History*, "Modern history begins when more and more people emerge into social and political consciousness, become aware of their respective groups as historical entities having a past and a future, and enter fully into history" (149).

Rutherford's canvas is quite comprehensive to include the minute details related to the Mughal Empire such as the precise description of the architectural

miracles of the Mughal artist and the delicious cuisine of the time. Apart from the historical texts on Mughal history, the authors have gone through memoirs such as *Baburnama* and *Tuzuk –i- Jahangiri*, biographies such as *Humayunama* and *Akbarnama* and Jahanara's treatise on Sufism, travel writers' accounts on Mughal India, literary works, annals and chronicles, popular ballads and oral tales to salvage the Mughal past. Rutherford, though a foreigner has heavily depended on Indian historical texts on the Mughal history and other popular tales circulated about the Mughals in India in their attempt to reconstruct the Mughal past. Both the writers have concentrated to propagate an argumentative tradition in the textualisation of the past and their novels stand in line with the concept of social history. Reconstruction of the past for them is a responsible task to reread the available historical sources and documents in the archives to salvage the past convincingly and also to do justice to all sections of people. A proper investigation of the past is crucial, otherwise, politicians and religious fundamentalists would try to misrepresent or manipulate the past to serve their purpose. Both the writers have not employed misrepresentations or distortions in their portrayal of the Mughal world. Rutherford has not imitated some foreign writers who intend to blemish the image of the country.

Historical fiction became a very popular genre in the nineteenth century due to the social and cultural transformations such as the rise of nationalism, modernisation, and changes in human consciousness. Even though history was established as an academic discourse, historical fiction became ubiquitous and successfully used in the creation of nationalism, national heroes, and a retrospective vision of a nation. Historical fiction continued its relevance in the twentieth century

because of its ability to emplot the past in a new mode. Historical Fiction, therefore, becomes a medium to present different versions of reality, a means of telling a subjective exploration of the past from an alternative point of view. The genre of historical fiction calls for an acceptable equilibrium between facts and fiction and gives substantial autonomy to the author to fill in the stillness of the past with ingenious retelling.

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