

Chapter I

Manil Suri as a Contextual Writer

Manil Suri, born in Mumbai (Bombay) in 1959, studied mathematics at the University of Bombay, and later received his M.S. and Ph. D. at Carnegie-Mellon University. A professor of mathematics at the University of Maryland, his work as a writer of fiction helps him cope with the "horror" of being a mathematician. Suri produced a literary stir with his much anticipated first novel *The Death of Vishnu* (2001), which won the numerous awards. Two further books of a trilogy; *The Life of Shiva*, *The Birth of Brahma* also show that his works are still in progress. Begun as a story in 1955 and as an "escape" from tenure pressures, Suri's novel inspired a publishing bidding war. His father, a film music director, and his mother, a teacher inspired his love of film and literature.

Vishnu, the odd-job man in a Bombay apartment block, lies dying on the staircase landing. Around him the lives of apartment dwellers unfold-the warring housewives on the first floor, the lovesick-teenagers on the second, and the widower, alone and quickly grieving at the top of the building. In a fevered state Vishnu looks back on his love affair with the seductive Padmini and comedy becomes tragedy as his life draws to a close. Vishnu, lies dying on the staircase, and his neighbor families Pathaks and Asranis, argue for paying ambulance. This is the beginning of the chain, which transports the reader to the higher and higher floors of the building in Bombay, and reveals the drama behind the closed doors of its dwellers. We follow Mr. Jalal through his obsessive search for the sense of life. We see the widower Vinod Taneja, who is missing his wife so much,

renounces life together, and young Kavita Asrani, who imagines herself as a heroine of Bollywood romance movie and runs away from home.

Like Suri's first novel, *The Death of Vishnu*, *The Age of Shiva* published in 2008 presents a scene of a woman offering nourishment to a needy male. There, the calculating housewife Mrs. Asrani is unwilling to waste her good tea on the dying manservant Vishnu. Meera is also seen breastfeeding her son Ashvin, a scene that Suri dresses up in language that initially suggests lovemaking.

Indeed, *The Age of Shiva* develops into a story about the hope of redemption invested in passionate mother-love, a Lawrentian theme, but also one with roots in Indian mythology, in the story of the goddess love, Parvati's creation of a son to keep her company in the absence of her philandering husband Shiva.

Hindu mythology, like that of most Christian faiths, is built around a trinity of god-figures. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer. Together, they form a perfect cycle of birth, life and death, but only to set the stage for rebirth and another cycle. Shiva is thus not only a destroyer but also a deity who makes rebirth.

Steve Koss while reviewing *The Age of Shiva* introduces:

Manil Suri's second novel, *The Age of Shiva*, borrows heavily and often by specific reference to the representational meanings of both Shiva and Vishnu. In doing so, he tells two parallel stories running from January 1955 into the early 1980s -- that of his main character, Meera Sawhney in the foreground, and that of the emergence of modern India as an independent nation-state in the background. (1)

In both novels, Suri tries to show the Indian society after the independence. In *The Age of Shiva*, Suri also tells the story of a woman's life in modern India after independence from Great Britain. While Suri's second book does not quite reach the stratospheric level of his extraordinary first book *The Death of Vishnu*, *The Age of Shiva* is nevertheless a compelling tale of Indian culture and family life as well as a neatly structured allegory of modern India's own rebirth and emergence on the world stage. These two books are from Suri's trilogy that he wants to write. The Hindu trinity, known as Trimurti (or "three forms") consists of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. With it are the three ingredients of the cycle of existence: life, death and birth. Matching them he gives three titles, so that the *The Death of Vishnu* (2001) is the first among them, *The Age of Shiva* (2008) is the second and next one could be *The Birth of Brahma*.

Sherry L. Morton-Mollo, in his essay while introducing the text claims:

The Death of Vishnu (which both Time and News week hailed as an "eagerly awaited" novel of 2001) fascinates readers because the work metaphorically incarnates Hindu philosophy in its portrayal of every day citizens who people a mundane apartment building in Bombay. The apartment dwellers are a motley lot, who as often as not, portray common human weaknesses that are transcended by the central character's metaphysical visions as he (Vishnu) slowly dies in the first floor hallway.

(1)

In above extract, Sherry L. Morton-Mollo tries to show that *The Death of Vishnu* metaphorically incarnates Hindu philosophy in its portrayal of every day citizen of

Bombay. Similarly, the critic tries to show that the novel with its setting in apartment is the microcosm of Indian society. He expresses:

A pauper and a drunk, Vishnu lives off others' charity - yet most of the apartment residents are shown to be self-centered and self-serving in their response to the dying man. The focus of his dying hallucinations are the Asranis and Pathaks on the first floor, the Jalals (Muslims) on the second, and the doleful Mr. Taneja on the third floor. Covering only a twenty four hour period, this "soap opera" scenario is transformed, however, in to a microcosm of society that provides Hindu insights into the nature of reality. (1)

The story, infused with Indian mythology, is a metaphor of a social and political division in the contemporary Indian society which is shown here as a building, inhabited by people of different social status, religious beliefs. The Pathaks and the Asranis are very similar Hindu families, who live in constant competition and jealousy, uniting only against those who are much different, like the Jalals, who is allowed to live on the stairs of the building in exchange for favors. The stairs provide shelter for many people, nearly as many as those who live in the flats, and equally diverse. There is Ganga, who is assigned the task of bringing the milk to the flats, and the radiowalla, whose only pride is his small transistor radio. The building sparks with life, everyone is going about their business, and in the mid of the staircase there lies Vishnu in a coma.

The story of the few days before Vishnu dies is interrupted by Vishnu's visions of his past and afterlife his prostitute lover, Padmini, his dreams of a better life and his misery and happiness in life. These fragments bring spiritual depth into the witty novel, giving it perspective and rounding it up as a thoroughly Indian story. The author, Manil

Suri, is a mathematician, and maybe because of this he manages to give his debut novel exceptionally good structure. The ending is open and leaves room for imagination. The language is light and clear. The book reads fast and absorbs the reader.

The characters in the novel are all ordinary, from dying alcoholic Vishnu, to the warring neighbors, the Aranis and the Pathaks, the teenage "star-crossed" lovers, the reclusive widower upstairs, tall and short Ganga , or the cigarette and radiowallas.

Suffused with Hindu mythology, this story of one apartment building becomes a metaphor for the social and religious divisions of contemporary India. And Vishnu's ascent of the staircase parallels the soul's progress through the various stages of existence. As Vishnu closes in on the riddle of his own morality, we wonder whether he might not be the god Vishnu, guardian not only of the fate of the building and its occupants, but of the entire universe.

In one note, Suri claims:

Sometime after finishing the third chapter, it suddenly struck me. The Hindu trinity, known as "Trimurti" or ("three forms") consisted of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer. With it were the three ingredients of the cycle of existence: life; death and birth. Matching them gave three titles, so that the next two books could be *The Life of Shiva* and *The Birth of Brahma*. (2)

Similarly, in "Publishers Weekly's" interview Manil Suri introduces his novel: "There was a real person named Vishnu. He lived in the building in Bombay where I grew up I didn't know him very well; but he always said hello to me. He was kind of a squatter, but people used to give him some work to do and some food and some money. In 1994, when I went back to Bombay to visit my parents, he was very sick, and he died.

While he was outside on the steps dying, I was very sick, too. I had chicken pox and no one knew what it was. They were treating me for all kinds of things, and they finally decided it was toxic food poisoning. It was a frightening experience. But at the same time I was in bed being pampered, there was Vishnu actually dying. So I thought I should write something about it'. This answer of the interview is also a point to introduce the text with contemporary Indian society.

However, the apartment house upon whose floor Vishnu spends his final hours functions as a microcosm of Indian society. It helps to know even a smattering about Hindu mythology or Indian's religious conflicts. The Hindu–Muslim conflict is also illustrated in the novel:

Mr. Jalal gaped at the electrician. He had no idea what the man was talking about. 'How dare you make fun of poor Vishnu. How dare you throw our own Gita in our faces like that. What have you come here to do, you Muslim bastard, reveal Krishna to us? A seed of recollection blew into Mr. Jalal's brain. Yes there was something in the Bhagavat Gita – something about Krishna revealing himself – to Arjun, was it? It had been so long since he had read it - but yes, there was a familiar aspect to the dream, now that he thought about it. 'But I did dream it', he said, 'even if it is in the Gita' (*The Death of Vishnu* 268).

This extract clarifies the Hindu-Muslim conflict in the society which is one of the prominent aspects of contemporary Indian society.

Similarly, the character, Mr. Jalal is actually based on Emperor Akbar from the Mughal period. He has a similar vision and tried to combine Hinduism and Islam. He is the starting point for Mr. Jalal. Suri thinks the events in the last several years in India

make Mr. Jalal more significant and more topical. But here problem is that Akbar was quite ego-driven as was Mr. Jalal: Ahmed, though, was all for it, and regarded Akbar as a personal hero. 'He really put the mullahs in their place'. He would say, as he looked for opportunities to taunt people. 'Perhaps it's time to give the experiment another shot force everyone to convert to it, Hindus and Muslims alike (*The Death of Vishnu* 60).

In the middle of chapter eight, there is also question on reality and, faith with the name of different theorists.

What was real, he wondered, and what was a dream? Didn't the Hindus hold that reality was just an illusion? That everything was maya as they called it – all existence a temporary delusion – hadn't even the Buddha accepted that? And westerners too . . . Was it Kant who had said that? Or Nietzsche? No someone else someone less well-known-who was it. Berkeley, perhaps" (*The Death of Vishnu* 174).

The extract clarifies that there is no fixed truth, but truths according to context. Socio-political and cultural context is the prominent thing while reading the text. As claimed by Foucault, a text is a discourse, language in relation to society. So the power and the context of society influence the text. By the use of such power a history is created, which is either false or true. The important point here is that the text is the product of context. *The Death of Vishnu* as a product of context is studied from New Historical perspective.

The man who lies dying in the beginning parts, goes to watch cinema with his beloved at the last part of the novel, the different forms of Vishnu leave the readers in the mystery to find 'who is Vishnu and what is reality': "Amitabh Bachchan as Vishnu,

Reshma as Padmini, see it now, *The Death of Vishnu*.' Vishnu takes the tickets out of his pocket. Where is Padmini? He told her to be here at 6:30 p.m. . . . 'Hear the music by Laxmikant Pyarelal. See the killer dance by Helen" (*The Death of Vishnu* 307). In the beginning parts, the Muslim child, Salim is in love with Hindu girl Kavita but at the last part she makes her decision not to marry Salim or Pran but the police inspector tries to search the cause behind it. Kavita wants to be an actress – 'The inspector turned to Kavita. 'And you, miss, have you been watching cricket as well? This was it. It was her chance to act. She would prove to her mother that she was a natural, a born actress, who should not be kept from her calling (*The Death of Vishnu* 321).

At the end of the novel, Vishnu has been sleeping in the forest, tired from all the play with the boy. A melody awakens him:

It is the flute again, as agonizing as before. He rises and follows the sound – it leads him deeper and deeper into the forest . . . The boy raises the flute. 'You must be tired. Tonight I will play for you. Tonight, you can rest.' He puts the flute to his mouth. 'And tomorrow?' Vishnu asks. 'Tomorrow, you go back', the boy says and Vishnu hears the notes start up again (*The Death of Vishnu* 329).

This all shows that this novel is an irresistible blend of realism, mysticism, and religious metaphor, a parable of the universal conditions of human life.

Gerber Leslie E. in his essay expresses:

With this first novel, Manil Suri places himself in the country of Salman Rusdie, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Bapsi, Sidhwa, Gita Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, and others in the great post-independence India and Pakistani literary flowering . . . he permits his readers to

experience the explosive fullness of contemporary Indian life – its sensuality and asceticism; passion for food, scents, music, and film; love for the gods, holidays, and ceremony; the viciousness of Hindu-Muslim enmity; and intellectuality and devotion. (1)

The author shares qualities with his contemporary Rohinton Mistry, or with the work of veteran writer R. K. Narayan, in his focus on microcosmic situations, but with a black humour not present in Mistry's work and a contemporary urban angst not explored by Narayan. He reveals aspect of Hindu mythology in an accessible manner borrowing from the stories of the Bhagavad Gita – and clearly demonstrates how these stories enable the poor to cope with the burdens of life on the lowest rung of Indian society. Punctuated by references to Bollywood (the Indian film industry), the author also reveals how filmic illusion infiltrates every strata of society, and the way fantasy is used as a sedative for the entire population.

The condition of working class people is also shown in the novel – the first time Vishnu met Radiowala . . . Nathuram, the cart pusher, whose single burning ambition in life, declared to Vishnu the day they met, was to own a transistor radio (*The Death of Vishnu* 121). Nathuram, Radiowala, Paanwala, etc. in the novel represent the working class. The novel is a savage yet hilarious anatomy of a society in which charitable gestures are complacently self-serving, destitution is accepted as part of the unchanging “scheme of things”, and the misery of others represents an opportunity for exploitation.

Thus, *The Death of Vishnu* tries to display a manageable cross-section of contemporary urban India life. The novel is based on the events only in a Bombay apartment building, which itself can be taken as a microcosm of Indian society; the novel records the realities of Indian society and mingles them with imaginary events. The novel

has also elicited much response and criticisms from the critics positioning their interpretations of the novel in relation to the context of contemporary India.

While introducing my research methodology, New-Historical Reading, I can express that, New-Historicism was developed in late 1970's in response to perceived excesses of New Criticism, and other language-based theories which tended to ignore importance of historical context of work of art. New Historicists argue that we can not know texts separate from their historical context. For them all interpretation is subjectively filtered through one's own set of historically conditioned view points. History is an intersection of discourses that establish an episteme, a dominant ideology. The real center of inquire is not the text, but history. As a post-modern perspective New-Historicism denies the hierarchy and the vertical history. So I have selected the New-Historical reading as the best perspective to historicize and contextualize the text with contemporary Indian society and to have my research and write a thesis paper.

Chapter II

Socio-cultural Representation

New historicism, which emerged in the late 1970s, rejects both, traditional historicism's marginalization of literature and New Criticism's enshirement of the literary text in a timeless dimension beyond history. For new historical critics, a literary text doesn't embody the author's intention or illustrate the spirit of the age that produced it, as traditional literary historians asserted. It is an approach to literary criticism and literary based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and circumstances of its composition rather than an isolated creation. It had its roots in a reaction to the "New Criticism" of formal analysis of works of literature, which was seen by a new generation of professional readers as taking place in a vacuum. New Historicism developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic Stephen Greenblatt, and gain widespread influence in the 1990s.

New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature, which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas. Michel Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limits of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents in order to understand the episteme of a particular time. New Historicism is claimed to be a more neutral approach to historical events, and is sensitive towards different cultures. New Historicist scholars begin their analysis of literary texts by attempting to look at other texts – both literary and non-literary – to which a literate public had access at the time of writing, and what the author the original text himself might have read in.

Since the early 1980s, has been the accepted name for a mode of literary study that its proponents oppose to the formalism they attribute both to the New Criticism and to the critical deconstruction that followed it. In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. New historicists conceive of a literary text as “situated” within the totality of the institutions, social practices and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes.

Being above the practice of interdisciplinary approach and ultimately emphasizing the “transdisciplinary” approach, New Historicism seeks to blur the generic boundaries between different disciplines. So, for new historicists literary texts and non-literary texts bear equal importance. They also read the text on equal footing, not making any hierarchy of ‘high’ and ‘low’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and so on. Not only that new historicism also challenges the canonicity of texts and writers. New Historicism rejects the autonomy and individual genius of the author and the autonomy of the literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context. The author’s role is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances.

As the same, the way history is dealt with by the new historicists in their analysis of text differs from the previous approach at least two ways. First, they try to see the significance of a literary work in certain historical circumstances. Second, they seek to analyze a literary work with respect to historical forces that encompass power relations and discursive practices which were in operation during the composition of that work. The new historical thinkers try to suggest that literary text can have an easily identifiable

historical context. With this parallel, then we can say that fictionalization of history and historicization of text, both result in indeterminacy and various ‘truths’. For Foucault in his redrawing of boundaries of history has had a central influence on the domain of the ideas like power, discourse and subject. A text, in Foucault’s view, speaks of his ‘history’ but not as it is described by traditional Marxists and historicists. It, within itself, buries the ‘situatedness’ of institutions, social practices including their workings amidst the power relations and the hierarchies. Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today* also emphasizes the new historical notion that “history is a matter of interpretation, not facts, and that interpretations always occur within a framework of social conventions” (286). Again in the same book, Lois Tyson claims, “New historicists also acknowledge that “our subjectivity, or selfhood, is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born” (Tyson 280). From this all, it is clear that, for the new historicists, our individual identity is not merely a product of society. Like any kind of text, a work of literature is profoundly shaped by different socio-political, economical circumstances. Hence new historicists “view literature as one discourse among many cultural discourses” (Habib, 762).

In the essay, *Truth and Power* Foucault says, “The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits. . . Truth is a thing of this world’. . . It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint (qtd. in Adams 1144).

Therefore, Foucault sees truth as a product of relations of power and it changes as system changes. Both literature and history are narratives and they are in the form of discourses.

M. H. Abram, in his text, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, defines New Historicism

as:

In an off-quoted phrase, Louise Montrose described the new historicism as “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history”. That is, history is conceived to be not a set of fixed, objective facts but, like the literature with which it interacts, a text that itself needs to be interpreted. Any text, on the other hand, is conceived as a discourse with, although, it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called representations – that is, verbal formations which are the “ideological products” or cultural constructs of the historical conditions specific to an era. (191)

M. A. R. Habib while defining the ‘New Historicism’ expresses:

The “New” Historicism which arose in the 1980s reacted against both the formalist view of the literary text as somehow autonomous and Marxist views which ultimately related texts to the economic infrastructure. It saw the literary text not as somehow unique but as a kind of discourse situated within a complex of cultural discourses - religious, political, economic, aesthetic - which both shaped it and, in their turn, were shaped by it. If there was anything new about this procedure, it was its insistence, drawn from Foucault and post structuralism, that “history” itself, an interpretation, and that there is no single history. It also rejected any notion of historical progress or theology, and broke away from any literary historiography based on the study of genres and figures. In the same way

the “culture” in which New Historicism situated texts was itself regarded as a textual construct. (761)

Greenblatt elaborated his statements about New Historicism in a subsequent influential essay, “Towards a Poetics of Culture” (1987). He begins by noting he will not attempt to “define” the New Historicism but rather to “situate it as a practice”:

. . . He purposes to situate this practice in relation to Marxism on the one hand, and post structuralism on the other. Citing passages from the Marxist Fredric Jameson and the poststructuralist Jean - Francois Lyotard, Greenblatt questions the generalizations made about “capitalism” in each passage. Both writers are addressing the question of the connection between art and society. Greenblatt further charges that both Jameson and Lyotard are trying to provide a “single, theoretically satisfactory” answer to the question of the relation between art and society. (Habib 764)

Again, to show the relation between the text and context, Foucault’s essay “What is an Author?” (1969) questions and examines the concept of author ship and, in insights that were taken up by the New Historicism, argued that analysis of literary text could not be restricted to these texts themselves or to their author’s psychology and background; rather, the larger context and cultural conventions in which texts were produced needed to be considered (Habib 766).

There are number of similarities between New Historicism and Marxism, especially, a British group of critics making up a school usually referred to as cultural Materialism. Both New Historicists and cultural Materialists are interested in recovering lost histories and in exploring mechanisms of repression and subjugation. The major difference is that New Historicists tend to concentrate on those at the top of the social

hierarchy while cultural Materialists tend to concentrate on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

However, New Historicists take this position further by then claiming that all cultural activities may be considered as equally important texts for historical analysis; contemporary trials of hermaphrodites or the intricacies of map-making may inform Shakespeare play as much as say, Shakespeare's literary precursors:

Literary criticism found itself in the contradictory situation of justifying the study of literature as an alternative mode of knowledge one more fundamental than that of science, but requiring the development of an analytic and "scientific" methodology to confer on it the authority to make such a pronouncement. This history of criticism is riddled with such contradictions, and they go a long way to explain the tensions in the twentieth century over the recognition of the role of 'theory' in literacy studies. (Waugh 29)

New Historicism is also more specifically concerned with questions of power and culture (Especially the messy commingling of the social and the cultural or of the supposedly autonomous self and the cultural/political institutions that in fact produce that self).

Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant studies of the Renaissance gave established him as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism. Indeed, his influence meant that New Historicism first gained popularity among Renaissance scholars, many of whom were directly inspired by Greenblatt's ideas and anecdotal approach.

The critical forces I have conveniently if simplistically labeled as new historicism or cultural poetics, cultural materialism, feminism, and Marxism, have in common a

concern at once to affirm and to problematize the connections between literary and other discourses, the dialectic between the text and the world. In recent years, these forces have challenged, with considerable success, the dominant paradigms of New Critical rhetorical analysis and positivist historical scholarship in Anglo-American literary criticism. The enabling conditions of this challenge have been various in their origins and complex in their interactions (Boose; W. Cohen; Gallapher, "Marxism"; Wayne, "power, politics" (Montrose 392-93).

These above lines show how new historicism in some point closer to cultural materialism, feminism and Marxism and how new historicism is different from the textual criticisms. While knowing new-historicism, we have to also understand Foucauldian idea of power and truth. The putatively Foucauldian new historicist argument for the dominant's production and containment of subversion is pungently characterized by Frank Lentricchia as "a prearranged theatre of struggle set upon the substratum of a monolithic agency which produces 'opposition' as one of its delusive political effect" (Foucault's Legacy 234). However, such a strict containment argument over simplifies Foucault's subtle, flexible, and dynamic conception of power by suggesting that the volatile and contingent relations of power that saturate social space are actually determined by the crystallization of power in the state apparatus. For Foucault, power is never monolithic and power relations always imply multiple sites not only of power but also of resistance. He writes that such sites of resistance are of variable configuration intensity, and effectiveness (Montrose 403).

Power, for Foucault is "the multiplicity force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization". Foucault's genealogical concept of power is explanatory. It aims to uncover how power diffuses itself in the

system of authority and how the effects of truth are created within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false. Truth itself is a product of the relation of power and changes as the system changes. Not only that, Foucault also questions the concept of sex. Conventionally sex was seen as Enlightenment, later society forced it to be repressed. Anyway from this all, we can also claim New-Historicism, which analyzes literary texts as socio-political discourses rather than as timeless aesthetic objects. It is abundantly clear that New Historicism means studying literature in relation to its historical contexts, but a wealth of possibilities and problems lie, buried in the innocuous phrase, 'in relation to'. Now there is no doubt that my text, *The Death of Vishnu*, which I am researching can be well analyzed by New-Historical reading. The different events happening in a single Bombay apartment can be contextualized with contemporary Indian society. The book is the representation of 'how the Indian society is'.

From a new historical perspective, no discourse, by itself, can adequately explain the complex cultural dynamics of social power. For there is no monolithic (single, unified, universal) spirit of an age, and there is no adequate totalizing explanation of history (an explanation that provides a single key to all aspects of a given culture). There is instead, a dynamic unstable interplay among discourses:

They are always in a state of flux, overlapping and competing with one another (or, to use new historical terminology, negotiating exchanges of power) in any number of ways at any given point in time. Furthermore, no discourse is permanent. Discourses wield power for those in charge, but they also stimulate opposition to that power. (Loistyson 281)

These above lines try to suggest how new historical perspective sees the text. Again Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today* also tries how new historical perspective speaks from marginalized perspective and blur every boundary. He claims:

In order words, new historicists consider both primary and secondary sources of historical information forms of narrative. Both tell some kind of story, and therefore those stories can be analyzed using the tools of literary criticism. Indeed, we might say that in bringing to the foreground the suppressed historical narratives of marginalized groups – such as women, people of color, the poor, the working class, gay men and lesbians, prisoners, the inhabitants of mental institutions, and so on – new historicism has deconstructed the white, male, Anglo, European historical narrative to reveal its disturbing . . . what most Americans know about history. (284)

D.G. Myers in his essay “The New Historicism in Literary Study” also tries to express, what New Historicist interpretation is. He claims:

In New Historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history . . . For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior. The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture’s ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore to prior to) the work. If it didn’t, the critic could not

discern a relationship between work and ideology; and if ideology were not prior to the work, it wouldn't be a historical relationship.

(4)

What the New Historicism offers to students of literature is the joy of new explanations, new paradigms. It does not designate an unexplored area of scholarly investigation. It does not raise new problems, new questions. If its attempts to "historicize" literary study were merely an inducement to look into new kinds of documents, to ask about the relation of literature to social history in a new way, the movement would perform a service for scholarship. But it does not. D. G Myers in his essay 'The New Historicism in Literary Study' tries to clarify above like:

The New Historicism can not be considered a new subspecialty within the discipline in English in the same sense as the older subspecialties of textual criticism or Renaissance studies. It is instead an academic specialty in the same sense as that feminism is- . . . New Historicists like to picture themselves as challenging "the institution of criticism" - breaking loose from what Jane Tompkins describes as "the extremely narrow confines of literary study as it is now practiced within the academy". (6)

Foucault also had the ability to pick up common terms and give them new meaning, thus changing the way critics addressed such pervasive issue as "power", "discourse", "discipline", "subjectivity", "sexuality", and "government". New Historicist criticism first try to understand what historicism is, what problems it tries to solve, and what other problems it creates in doing so, and, of course, whence it arose historically in both the long run and short term. It is abundantly clear that new historicism means

studying literature in relation to its historical contexts, but a wealth of possibilities and problems lie buried in the innocuous phrase, 'in relation to'.

The words 'historicism' and 'romanticism' were both first widely used in the early years of the nineteenth century in Germany and in England. After the decimation of Germanic territories in the post-revolutionary Napoleonic wars (see chapter on "The historical integrity, 'Germany'") being then only a loose confederation of thirty-nine states, not unified in its modern form until 1871. Hence these historians began their researches with a purpose, although their idealized goal was a history without prior interpretations, only what really happened, as critics repeatedly state rigorous scientific rules of evidence and interpretation were marshaled to produce 'results' of a definite ideological tendency.

Complaints (criticism) sometimes are also made about New Historicism. As the complaints, one is that, it tends to reduce literature to a footnote of history, and neglects the uniquely literary qualities of the work question. Frederick Jameson argues that much New Historicist criticism lacks a theory of history. That history, to paraphrase the bumper sticker, "just happens", without explaining why it happens in the way it does and who is affected. At its worst, New Historicism's emphasis on connecting literature to politics can resemble what Eve Sedgwick calls "good dog/bad dog" criticism, where critics praise artists for their progressive views and chastise them for reactionary ones, instead of accepting that cultures have problems, those problems are complicated, and we can learn from how artists tried to grapple with those problems without giving them a grade card. Sometime it is also criticized that since the true centre of analysis is history, New Historical critics sometimes do not pay close attention to the actual text.

It is the pervasive influence of Foucault that has elicited a good deal of criticism. Foucault's views of power and its effectiveness have been widely and inconclusively, debated, but no matter 'how we finally judge those views there are passages in his work that suggest a deep pessimism regarding the possibility of resistance. In a seminal new historicist essay, 'Invisible Bullets' of 1981, Stephen Greenblatt echoes Foucault's pessimistic strain and argues that Renaissance subversion inevitably played into the hands of power. (Hans Bertens – 177)

These lines also try to clarify how New Historicism sometimes has also been debated. Again, Bertens in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics* tries to link New Historicism with cultural Materialism and also bring the concept of Montrose. He claims:

As Louis Montrose has put it: 'I have a complex and substantial stake in sustaining and reproducing the very institutions whose operations I wish to call into question' (Montrose 1989:30). More generally new historicists – like the cultural materialist – are very much aware that their understanding of historical texts is to an important extent shaped by the socio-cultural reality that they themselves are part of. If the texts that they study are to a substantial degree co-produced by the social reality of their authors then clearly that must also be the case with their own texts. (182)

“New historicism frequently borrows terminology from the marketplace: *exchange, negotiation, and circulation* of ideas are described. H. Aram Vesser calls “the moment of exchange” the most interesting to new historicists, since social symbolic capital may be found in literary texts:

“the critic’s role is to dismantle the dichotomy of the economic and the non-economic to show that the most purportedly disinterested and self-sacrificing practices, including art aim to maximize, personal or symbolic profit” (xiv). Greenblatt adds that “contemporary theory must situate itself . . . in the hidden places of negotiation and exchange” (“Towards a Poetics of Culture” 13).

(A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature 284)

This extract discusses the new historical critic’s role and terminological borrowing that new historicism brings. Again the multiple writers in the book ‘A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature’ express:

In “The Flying Island and Female Anatomy: Gynaecology and Power in Gulliver’s Travels”, Susan Bruce offers a reading of Book III that makes some new historicist sense out of Swift’s use of Laputa. Bruce tie together some seemingly disparate events of the year 1727, soon after the book was published, including relations between eighteenth-century midwives and physicians and a famous scandal involving a “monstrous birth” that the Royal Court”. (284-85)

Anyway this also shows that ‘the text is historical, and history is textual and new historicism concerns itself with extra literary matters – letter, diaries, films, paintings, medical treatises – looking to reveal opposing historical tensions in a text.

So, for new historical literary critics, the literary text, through its representation of human experience at a given time and place, is an interpretation of history. As such, the literary text maps the discourses circulating at the time it was written and is, itself, one of those discourses. That is, the literary shaped and was shaped by the discourses circulating

in the culture in which it was produced. Likewise, our interpretations of literature shape and are shaped by culture in which we live. As the same, the novel *The Death of Vishnu* is the mixture of superstitions, religious fanaticism, suppression, (the serving of others for so-called god), sexual exploitation (the so-called god, Vishnu always wants to have sex with a prostitute, Padmini and other some character also try to love for sex), Hindu-Muslim conflict, the two classes-owners and workers, etc. Those everything is represented with the events happened in a single apartment building of Bombay which really match with the society of contemporary India. The single apartment contextualizes the whole society.

Thus, to represent those different aspects of contemporary society, I have selected New Historical Reading. Foucault's ideas of power, discourse, sex, history play the vital role to analyze the events of the novel with such perspective

Chapter III

An Analysis of Indian Contemporary Society

India got its freedom in 1947 from British colonization. Though politically independent, culturally the colonization was still continuing. So, fragmentation, alienation, ambivalence, etc. also existed for some years. The society couldn't develop well due to Britisher's still remaining cultural exploitation. However, the country slowly started making progress. But around 2001 A.D. exploitation, religious conflicts superstitions, human foibles, and miseries were plaguing the nation. These social evils then started to be expressed by the medium of different texts. *The Death of Vishnu* (2001) written by Manil Suri contextualizes every aspect of contemporary Indian society.

Manil Suri's first novel, *The Death of Vishnu* is a melange of social commentary. Blending fantasy and reality the author focuses on a Bombay apartment building inhabited by several paralyzed characters. Each character is unable to escape both his/her true state of mind and the role he/she plays within the confines of the apartment. *The Death of Vishnu* skillfully captures the struggles of urban life. In order to understand the author's frequent mythological references, it's best to brush up on the basics of Hinduism. The events of the novel aren't chronological and vertical but unchronological and horizontal. The events of the novel reflects the past and present Indian society. The cultural and religious traditions have been contextualized through different memories and those traditions have been mingled with contemporary Indian life. Every activities of the characters in the novel are the activities of contemporary Indian people. Vishnu's so-called powerful ness, two Hindu-Muslim families' quarrel, Taneja's mournful activities,

Salim and Kavita's activities and other working class activities are the examples of it.

Suri's work was inspired by the actual death of Vishnu, a man who had lived and died on the steps of the author's childhood in Bombay. The novel depicts the slow poignant demise of the title character, an odd-job man whose – limp body lies motionless on the landing and the intertwined lives of the building's inhabitants unfold around him. According to Hindu mythology, whenever there is an imbalance between good and evil, Vishnu, "the preserver" is born to re-establish order. The deity of Vishnu has emerged from the old man's body to sort out the emotions flying through the apartment block, which are completely out of equilibrium. Suri explores the deeper workings of human nature as he approaches an electrifying catharsis of illumination, love and loss. Suri has called the Bombay apartment building in *The Death of Vishnu* a microcosm for the ethnopolitical map of India. The novel chronicles several relationships within the building: a pair of feuding housewives, a bereaved widower who lives in his own past, lovesick teenagers and a Muslim couple and their failing fast. By focusing the chapters of his novel on how these different characters interact with one another and with Vishnu, Suri is able to show how religion, death, faith, and unexpected changes all work together to define each person's individuality.

Religious issues distress several of Suri's characters, including the Hindu Asrani family in the first floor and the Muslim Jalals on the second. Kavita the beautiful, teenage Asrani daughter must choose between the high-class Hindu engineer her parents have selected for her, and her true love, Salim Jalal. Kavita and Salim's secret relationship places a huge strain on the entire apartment community. In the novel, religion is taken as a discourse. Different people have different religious beliefs. They are representing Religion and God in their own way. Every utterance is created with in so-called power. Vishnu agrees to become their "alerter", and shares vicariously in the dangerous lust and

innocent beauty of first-time love. Meanwhile, Salim's father, Ahmed Jalal, in his deep effort to understand the obstinacy and hysteria of religion, is determined to experience "this thing they call faith". However food can also be destructive force. The deep-set animosity between Mrs. Asrani and Mrs. Pathak results from petty arguments over miniscule amounts of ghee and gur. The seemingly mundane Bombay metropolis is fused with the beauty and depth of Hindu mythology in this impressive literary accomplishment. This all shows that the text *The Death of Vishnu* deals with socio-political context of India of contemporary time in which New Historicist expresses his /her concern.

He reveals Hindu mythology in an accessible manner borrowing from the stories of the Bhagavad-Gita – and clearly demonstrates how these stories enable the poor to cope with the burdens of life on the lowest rung of Indian society. The novel juxtaposes small but searing human foibles with the attempt to find higher religious meaning. The religious superstition like two families' quarrel to serve Vishnu and pay the ambulance; exploitation of working class like radiowalla , cigratteewalla ; characters' love esp. for sex etc. are the important foibles of the society. The building is a specimen of domestic misery – damp walls, rotten fruit, insects lining the floor boards. A member of the Hindu trinity the god Vishnu is the sustainer of the universe, the center between Brahma, the creator and Shiva, the destroyer. However in *The Death of Vishnu*, the title character is only an impoverished alcoholic who is dying on the stairwell while the residents of the building squabble over who will pay for ambulance. And yet perhaps there is much more to this Vishnu – just may be, he is indeed the god Vishnu – the one who sustains the entire world.

The novel takes place over a short period of time in the life of a Bombay apartment building. Through this window, we learn the stories of its residents and the

forces that have shaped their lives as Manil Suri creates an intimate and intricate portrait of life in a great Indian metropolis. The novelist tries to place the common person as God to portray common people's superstitious belief about God. The characters are all ordinary from dying alcoholic Vishnu, to the warring neighbors the Asranis and the Pathaks, the teenage “star-crossed” lovers, the reclusive widower upstairs, tall and short ganga, or the cigarette and radiowallas. This is a domestic story, and the people or familiar ones, with common sins of vanity, religious zeal, coartiousness and narrow-mindedness.

While analyzing the novel, *The Death of Vishnu* I like to bring an extract from Magdalena Ball’s review. There, he says:

The story moves deftly and between the comic and material world of the neighbours and the sensual and dream like world of the dying Vishnu, and the recalled memories and desires under the surface of these ordinary people. The narrator is entirely invisible and the characterization so realistic, that the reader becomes intimately connected with the story. (1)

From this extract, it is clear that the novel always mingles both comic and material world and sensual and dreamlike world of the dying Vishnu. The actions move to past and present. The ordinary people believe that the person who is dying is God and they are trying to make him happy. The characterization is realistic. People are superstitious. This also shows contemporary superstitious Indian society where the people practice to make Vishnu, happy by thinking that he is lying as God into different forms.

Not wanting to arouse Vishnu in case he hadn’t died yet, Mrs. Asrani tiptoed down to the third step above the landing on which he lived, tea kettle in hand. Vishnu lay sprawled on the stone, his figure aligned with

the curve of the stairs . . . Vishnu had not only thrown up, but soiled himself. She had warned her neighbour Mrs. Pathak not to feed Vishnu when he was so sick, but did that woman ever listen? (*The Death of Vishnu* 1)

From this extract it is also clear that Asranis and Pathaks both families are quarreling for serving single person. If so, doesn't the novel express how the Indian society is full of superstitions? The lines try to portray the Indian society. Here the new historicist's socio-political context works. The Magdalena Ball's idea of mingling comic and material and sensual and dreamlike world in single place to describe the Indian context is a bit ambivalent and unclear. Every event in the novel is related to culture and religion rather than politics. So, I think politics is less touched in the text.

In one interview taken by Dave Weich, which is in powells.com, Manil Suri clarifies that "there was a real person named Vishnu, as I say in front of the book, and it was his death that sparked the novel at least the initial idea. But I didn't really know the actual person; I would just see him occasionally when I was growing up. He lived on the steps, and he would say hello to me that was it." (Interview, powells.com 2). Here Manil Suri uses the common person and gives the place of God for it. Indian common person is used to redicularize the superstition of the society. So the God-like character is used to identify the common person who lives in Bombay apartment.

In the same interview Manil Suri claims:

Originally, I was going to write about a revelation: Vishnu may or may not be a god. I was going to have a snake appear, perhaps it might have been Mrs. Pathak or Mrs. Asrani who noticed. Snakes are holy in India so that would have been the device to pass the question into the book. But then Mr. Jalal took over, and once I'd read the Gita, that central scene from the

eleventh chapter it seemed the logical thing for Mr. Jalal to see. (Interview Page 2).

From the extract, we can also guess that the novelist is trying to depict the minute details of Indian society. He is appearing as a snake and observing everything. He also brings the reference from Gita to join the religious aspect of Indian society. In Hindu religion and Gita, snake is also worshiped as 'Debata/Nag'. The practices of the characters to find higher religious meaning also contextualize the text with Indian socio-cultural context. So, this extract is also a reference of it.

The title of Manil Suri's first novel gets right to the point. His protagonist, having purchased the right to sleep on the ground-floor landing of a Bombay apartment house, slips slowly from a coma into death. As this aging alcoholic takes leave of the earth, his neighbors surround him, arguing over who gave Vishnu a few dried chapattis, who called the doctor for him, and who will pay for the ambulance to cart him away. Meanwhile, the hero of *The Death of Vishnu* is lost in memories.

Drifting through increasingly vivid scenes from his past, he recalls his relatively rare snatches of love and job and especially his romance with Padmini, a self-involved prostitute. Vishnu also recalls his secret passion for Kavita Asrani, the beautiful teenage daughter of one of the families for whom he works. However, the apartment house upon whose floor Vishnu spends his final hours functions as a microcosm of Indian society. It helps to know even a smattering about Hindu mythology or India's religious conflicts.

To prove this I want to cite an extract:

Memories of Padmini, the vapor still devoid of cardamom or clove, but smelling of Chameli flowers fastened like strings of pearls around her wrists . . . Mrs. Asrani was sick, it was her daughter Kavita who performed the daily ritual. Vishnu would scrape a broken comb through

his knotted hair every morning and wait to deliver a toothy “salaam, memsahib!” when she came, winking at her with his good eye. (*The Death of Vishnu* 3)

Asranis and Pathaks both try to obey Vishnu and to show their good belief in God and religion. But I think they are trusting as God to the person who has no well qualities of God. Vishnu though thinks himself keeper of the universe, but he tries to exploit Padmini sexually. He has only memories of Padmini, he wants to fulfill the sexual desire by Padmini. So, here question can be arisen – Does God sometime lie dying and sometime get the life? Does a God exploit sexually to any girl? etc. So, in contemporary time there was deep-rooted superstition in Indian society. The memories, Vishnu's discourses thinking as powerful and the depiction of the superstition and sexual exploitation of the society also relate the text with New Historical reading.

There is a singular thread running through the book – that of isolation on various levels. The Pathaks and Asranis share a kitchen, almost to the point of invading each other's privacy and yet are so distant and cold. Vishnu is dead and yet no one wants to claim him and take him to the nearest morgue. Her husband and son, seeking refuge in intellectualism and staunch belief, leave Mrs. Jalal alone.

In the essay “Simply Amazing Mind Boggling: *The Death of Vishnu*” Vivek Tejuja “vivekian” expresses:

Vishnu in another realm altogether believes that he is God (or rather is made to believe that by Mr. Jalal) – Vishnu, who had ten reincarnations. His love for . . . Padmini, his longing for Kavita, and his thoughts on living make the book ‘one delicious course’. (2)

Here Vishnu thinks himself powerful. He thinks himself superior. As claimed by Foucault, power works in society while writing history, Vishnu also tries to be in power

and tries to bring everyone under him. He thinks that all events should happen around him. Vishnu tries to create his own discourses with his own so-called powerfulness.

Similarly in the same essay Vivek Tejuja claims:

The book is not easy to read. There are layers and sub-layers to this course through. On the surface, things are quite simple and easy to understand, but what Mr. Suri has created is something else. He has created what one might call “a quilt of emotions” right from love to the isolation one feels in the metropolis to the bare human nature. In short, Manil Suri has created Universe in an apartment of Bombay – a city so huge and yet so cold and distant. So uninviting. (2)

Here, in the above extract, how an apartment of Bombay is represented is shown. The single setting of an apartment has included different aspects of the society. The main character Vishnu lies dying on the landing and other different types of character live in different floors and they run their activities around Vishnu. So, in short this shows that the single apartment is representing the amalgam of every aspects of Indian society. The human nature of the society is depicted by the apartment setting. Difficult to believe – that is a first novel! Manil Suri has chosen a theme both timeless and extraordinary unique as he sculpts the life of a dying man through the overheard conversations of the folk living in the boarding house on whose steps he lies.

Similarly Douglas S. Wood in his essay “A God Lies Dying on the Steps?” elaborates:

The Death of Vishnu is peopled with an array of interesting characters who live in or work near the building like the Asranis, Pathaks and the Muslim Jalals, as well the cigrettewalla and the paanwalla, Short Ganga, and Tall Ganga . . . the search for religious enlightenment, religious conflict,

middle-class social pretensions (all the fiercer for being so pedestrian) and more. There is a lot going on in *The Death of Vishnu* and Suri intended this busy-ness to reflect the reality of life in Bombay (as he calls it). (1)

This extract also tries to elaborate how the novel is depicting middle-class social pretensions. The depiction of this reflects the reality of life in Bombay.

For, the Western reader, *The Death of Vishnu* at times presents challenges of interpretation – Is Mr. Jalal semi-accidental search for enlightenment supposed to be comic or not? India is a very strange place to Westerners, but Suri deftly brings it closer without greatly Westernizing the story. Actually Manil Suri doesn't westernize the text. Every context in the novel depicts the Indian society. The context of Hindu religion together with the Hindu religious book Gita and also Hindu-Muslim conflict in India is depicted in the novel. Here the non-western especially India is represented purely in non-western especially Indian own context.

Mostly images are depicted with the same context. Like in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the novel tries to show that the non-westerns are also able to create their own images with their own literature. Though the novelist is the professor of American University but he is able to show the pure image of contemporary India. Western writers have made different criticisms and responses about the novel but all they accept that the text is depicting India life without greatly westernizing the story.

In one interview, while giving the answer of the question (How does Hindu-Muslim tension factor into this book?) Manil Suri claims that Mr. Jalal is actually based on Emperor Akbar from the Mughal period. He has a similar vision and tries to combine Hinduism and Islam. He is the starting point for Mr. Jalal. He thinks the events in the last several years in India make Mr. Jalal more significant and more topical.

. . . a sixteenth-century Akbar had concerted to unify his subjects. Religion revealed by man, not prophet, their school mullah had contemptuously asserted 'is religion fit for no one'. Ahmed, though, was all for it, and regarded Akbar as a personal hero. (*The Death of Vishnu* 60)

This extract also proves how Mr. Jalal is actually based on Emperor Akbar from the Mughal period. Akbar is quite ego-driven (acc. to mythological story) as is Mr. Jalal. This shows how Indian Society is the amalgam of Hinduism and Muslimism.

Brian Budzynski while reviewing *The Death of Vishnu* also relates the same issue and elaborates:

From this simple premise, Manil Suri launches a journey deep into intimate relationships of contemporary Indian society. The building is a specimen of domestic misery-damp walls, rotten fruit, insects lining the floorboards. This misery exists likewise in its residents. Vishnu alone crippled and malodorous, recognizes the evil that permeates the house "it springs up from inside the hearts of people, it needs no external source to appear". The novel juxtaposes small but searing human foibles with the attempt to find higher religious meaning". (2)

Here the reviewer is expressing that the novel depicts every foibles, miseries and people's practice of getting religious meaning in Indian society. For him the building is a specimen for all these. Here Budzynski only tries to show every negative side/ weakness of society. But I think though the novel depicts the condition of Indian society, it teaches something about Hindu – Muslim philosophy. Though Vishnu is devalorized but some positive aspects of Hinduism and Muslim in Indian society like, a kind of tolerance, their marriages, their devotion for God, etc. are shown. So we shouldn't judge the novel only

depicting negative aspects of Indian society. In real representation like new-historical both bad and good aspect should be shown without any hierarchy/boundary.

In the novel a young girl struggles against an arranged marriage by imagining herself a film star; an old man mediates on the early death of his wife; a husband abandons his wife's bed to sleep on the staircase next to Vishnu, convinced he is a newly found prophet. But is Vishnu, Vishnu the sun god? (He believes himself to be "keeper of the universe, keeper of the sun"). The play on this question breathes tremendous life into what could have been a predictable, dismissible yarn about a building full of people who don't like each other much. Every character has their different aims. A young girl imagines herself a film star and tries to arrange her marriage. An old man abandons his wife's bed and goes near to Vishnu to sleep. He thinks that Vishnu is the god. He sleeps near the dying man Vishnu. This is the superstition of Indian society for God.

Vishnu thinks himself God (keeper of the universe, keeper of the sun). How over ambitious is he? Can a man claim himself God? As claimed by F. Nietzsche God is always dead. He questions God that it is the human image only. There is no God, instead of it there is superman. Man himself is the God. I also believe in this point. A person who is claiming the God is not God. There is no hierarchy of God and man. If man shows good behaviour and behaves humanly, he himself is the God. So here I don't accept Vishnu's self discursive line. All other activities done to satisfy Vishnu is only superstition of Indian society. Here to blur the boundary of so-called God and man, the New Historical reading also concerns. To prove this I want to take reference from the text: "I am Vishnu, he says 'keeper of the universe, keeper of the sun'. There is only darkness without me" (*The Death of Vishnu* 21).

This is only his self-ambition of power. Not only that this can be supposed as patriarchal power. Vishnu and mother show themselves that Vishnu is powerful but the novelist devalorize Vishnu.

Helen Haywood while reviewing the novel expresses: “on one level, the novel is a savage yet hilarious anatomy of a society in which charitable gestures are complacently self-serving, destitution is accepted as part of unchanging “scheme of things”, and miseries of others represents an opportunity for exploitation (2).

As Greenblatt claimed, about new historicism in his essay, ‘Towards a Poetics of Culture’ (1987). He claims: Citing passages from the Marxist Fredric Jameson and the poststructuralist Jean-Francois Lyotard, Greenblatt questions the generalizations made about “capitalism” in each passage. Both writers are addressing the question of the connection between art and society (Habib 764).

Like Greenblatt’s ideas, Helen Haywood also tries to read the text from Marxist point of view. The misery of Indian working class and exploitation are the heart core for Marxist reader. In such raising the voice against exploitation, and social hierarchy, New Historicism is too closer to Marxism. Vishnu also tries to exploit others who are around him. They are compelled to serve the self-claimed god, Vishnu who also tries to exploit a girl, Padmini sexually. So I accept in the point that the novel also depicts misery and exploitation.

In a comically anachronistic pursuit of enlightenment, he submits himself to deprivation and, for his pains, is granted a vision of the divine nature of Vishnu. (The god Vishnu is a member of the Hindu trinity, and is said to have descended to earth in a number of avatars.) Vishnu’s putative divinity perhaps serves as a metaphor for the Hindu sense that our essence partakes of the infinite, as part of a supreme universal spirit. The novel remains tantalizingly inclusive on the subject of whether his divinity is

metaphoric or actual. Vishnu feels his consciousness detach itself from his body but is powerless to change events.

Mr. Jalal seeks to spread the message that Vishnu is a god, but instead provokes a communal riot; while he hangs from the building in flight from his attackers, the narrative unaccountably turns to the story of Vinod Taneja, who lives above. Suri recounts the blossoming of Taneja's love for his wife and his grief at her early death. The widower's pursuit of meaning in good works and religion echoes in a less frivolous vein. Not only that Suri recounts Jalal's quest and his ultimate attainment of tranquility.

Mr. Jalal craned his head around the stair way to make sure there was no one on the landing. Vishnu lay just as he had been left this morning . . .

He shook his head to expel this thought – what if Vishnu was able to read it in his mind? (*The Death of Vishnu* 185)

Here in the extract, though Mr. Jalal is the son of Muslim family but he seeks to spread the message that Vishnu is a god. He is a sceptic tormented by a desire for faith and a coward who courts martyrdom. Taneja is feeling meaninglessness in life due to his wife's death. So he is trying to pursue the meaning by being closer to Vishnu. At the time of being painful, he believes that the lying man is Vishnu

V.S. Naipaul has argued that the novel is “part of that western concern with the condition of men, a response to the here and now”, while Indians prefer to satisfy “the basic human hunger for the unseen” *The Death of Vishnu* may well bear out his contention (Haywood 2).

During a span of 24 hours, Vishnu's body becomes the fulcrum for a series of crises, some tragic, some farcical, that reflect both the folly and nobility of human conduct. Here is also clear about how Vishnu is represented. While Mr. Jalal seeks to test his intellectual agnosticism by seeking spiritual enlightenment, Vishnu's lyrically

rendered thoughts are interspersed as his soul leaves his body and begins a slow ascent of the apartment stairs. Then his thoughts are rising through the stages of existence as he relives memories of his gentle mother and his passion for the prostitute Padmini.

“Publishers Weekly” while reviewing *The Death of Vishnu* expresses:

Suri has a discerning eye for human foibles, an empathetic knowledge of domestic interaction and an instinctive understanding of the cast-nuanced tradition of Indian society. The excesses of life in that country – the oppressive heat, the mixture of superstitions and religious fanaticism, the social cruelty - - permeate the atmospheric narrative. (2)

I also support the extract where the different aspects that are represented in the novel are expressed. Really, the novel is the amalgam of religious fanaticism, social cruelty, superstitions, caste-system, etc. These all aspects are deep rooted in contemporary Indian society.

The well-developed and often humorous characters who make up the world of the building are the Pathaks and Asranis, whose difficult wives beg rudely share a kitchen. Not only that, the other humorous characters are the Asranis’ lovesick teenaged daughter, Kavita, who plans to run away with her Muslim boyfriend and Mr. Taneja, who still mourns the loss of his spouse years earlier. I think the two families quarrel in such useless matter. They are less educated and are superstitious, so they are accepting the man as god. To prove this I want to cite one small extract from the text:

Listen to your wife only, and pay me’, the ambulancwalla claimed in. Mr. Pathak looked sternly through his glasses at Mr. Asrani, who started shifting uncomfortably. ‘Actually’, Mr. Asrani mumbled his face reddening as he stared at his wife’s feet. ‘Actually, Mr. Pathak asked me to help him call the ambulance’. (*The Death of Vishnu* 52)

For new historical literary critics, then, the literary text, through its representation of human experience at a given time and place, is an interpretation of history. As such the literary text maps the discourses circulating at the time it was written and is, itself, one of those discourses . . . Likewise, our interpretation of literature shape and are shaped by the culture in which we live (Monstrose 292).

Like claimed by Monstrose *The Death of Vishnu* is also shaped by India culture. Different interpretations are shaping it with Indian culture with Hindu-Muslim religious situation in India. So we can't go out from Indian socio-political, and religious context while interpreting the text. Sherry L. Morton-Mollo in his essay about *The Death of Vishnu* claims, "The characters' lives and reactions to Vishnu comment not only on offering levels of enlightenment, but also on the terrible conflict of human's attachment to material things while hungering for a higher spiritual knowledge (para 2)." From this we come to know that throughout, *The Death of Vishnu* is constant co-mingling of the physical, material, and mundane with the spiritual and divine. But again, in this point, we also can find that creating a story filled with ambiguity that raises meaningful questions about the nature of reality and human life.

What was real, he wondered, and what was a dream? Didn't the Hindus hold that reality was just an illusion? That everything was maya as they called – all existence a temporary delusion – hadn't even the Buddha accepted that? And the westerners, too . . . Was it Kant who had said that? Or Nietzsche? (*The Death of Vishnu* 174)

As Nietzsche questioned the reality, here the extract also tries to question the reality. Though the text depicts the society, but here is the question on reality. I think this is not so surprising thing. Dream and reality, existence and delusion are integral parts. A same society can believe in dream, illusion and reality. Some may be superstitious but some may intellectually analyze God. So every thing of this depends upon interpretation.

Either seeing the same text real depicting or ambivalence of real and illusion depends upon interpreters and power. As claimed by Foucault the interpreters who is powerful create his/her own discourse which is either false or true. Here in the novel also, Vishnu is creating own discourse, thinking himself God and Mr. Jalal and his family members are creating their own discourses. This above also clarifies that truth is always contextual there is no final truth and final interpretation.

The Muslim Jalals on the second floor are in turmoil because husband Ahmed, after years of proclaiming himself a religious freethinker, has been behaving like a mystic, leading his wife Arifa to worry that he is the victim of an evil eye. And unknown to all the adults in the building is the Asrani daughter Kavita's movie-besotted plan to elope with the Jalal's son Salim. During the course of the novel, Vishnu's soul disentangles itself from his earthly remains and begins ascending the apartment house stairs. As this spirit looks back on the life just ending, on the mother who named him after a Hindu god, on the prostitute whom he truly loved. From this it is also clear that Suri's novel also achieves an eerie and memorable transcendence or in short this is an enchantingly transcendent novel about contemporary life in his native Bombay. Even listeners unfamiliar with India's religions and Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively the creator, the preserver and the destroyer will marvel at Suri's ability to reveal the tapestry and nuances of Indian culture through the activity contained in own small apartment building.

P.W. in *New Internationalist* while reviewing the novel gives its main point for the novel, that is "Suri's depiction of the apartment block as a building cauldron of resentment, pettiness, and both acute and touching. We see the vituperative bickering of the Asrani and Pathak families, mania of the Muslim Mr. Jalal, and the plans of his son Salim to elope with Kavita, the daughter Asranis" (2). Here P. W. also focuses on the

same issue of microcosm but the points are not strong. They are limited with only real aspect of society. P.W. has been failed to mingle all aspects of the society.

Suri permits his readers to experience the explosive fullness of contemporary Indian life – its sensuality and asceticism; passion for food, scents, music, and film; love for the gods, holidays, and ceremony; the viciousness of Hindu-Muslim enmity; and intellectuality and devotion. Vishnu's landing is part of a staircase, which Vishnu gradually ascends to meet that great god's daughter, Lakshmi and be taken up in the great cycle of birth and rebirth. Both Mr. Jalal and Vinod Taneja recapitulate the classic Hindu stages of life (student, house-holder, ascetic). The staircase, grimy and bug-ridden, places all life on the same ladder of being. India is radically modern and ancient at the same time. On the first floor, the Pathaks and Asranis move from crisis to crisis in their long rivalry. The wives spar over the use of the four kerosene stoves in the hot common kitchen. A huge dispute erupts over who is to clean up Vishnu's area, pay for an ambulance and handle medical costs. Neither family really cares for him – emotionally or responsibly – for he is completely beneath them in station.

To prove this I want to bring the reference from the text: Wordlessly, Mrs. Asrani went back to her flat. She reemerged moments later, and put some kills and a fifty-paisa coin in the ambulance walla's hand. 'Here's our share of the money', she said, not looking at Pathaks or her husband Mr. Pathak paid the ambulance walla the other half . . . Vishnu hears Mrs. Asrani and Mrs. Pathak – they are both very angry (*The Death of Vishnu* 52-53).

Here, both Hindu-families are quarreling in useless matter. They even quarrel each other thinking to get higher religious meaning. On the simple matter paying ambulance walla, serving Vishnu, they quarrel. But for this I think it is due to lack of

education. Due to lack of well-education, they are compelled to have superstitious beliefs. This all is the representation of Indian society.

The Hindu eighteen-year-old daughter has fallen in love with Salim Jalal. Before he fell ill, Vishnu helped them (for a price) pull off their crisis in dark recesses of the building. Disregarding the disaster they will surely cause, the Hindu-Muslim love birds elope. In their absence, the underlying religious hostility breaks out with unimaginable viciousness. The rumor spreads that Kavita has been kidnapped and despoiled. A vicious crowd gathers at the Jalal's door. Though there is a rivalry between Hindu and Muslim in India, but here a Hindu girl is in love with a Muslim boy. I think that this is also a kind of religious tolerance in Indian society. This context especially represents the Hindu Muslim rivalry in India and also between Pakistan and India in contemporary time.

Paradoxically, Salim's father, after years as a critical skeptic, has already started an inward journey that would have made conversion to Hinduism inevitable. In the book's choicest scene, he speaks fearlessly to the mob, describing a great vision of the deity he has had while sleeping next to Vishnu on the landing. He believes this to be the first sermon ministry. After 17 years of grieving the death of his wife, Sheetal, he has begun to find some peace. Whereas he once found sterile the basic teachings about the stages of life necessary to prepare one for liberation from desire and attachment, their truth now provides him with a way to continue.

For a long time after she died, it seemed as if she was still around. As if she had been in the room with him a minute ago, and just gone downstairs to the store . . . Sheetal loved paan. Not the plain kind, but the sweet ones, with lots of coconut and condied betel nut and all the minty pastes and mixtures that the paanwala kept in silver boxes around the circumference of his tray" (*The Death of Vishnu* 223) .

Taneja is shocked to learn that the man knows that he is not Vinod (the word means “happiness”); moreover, the Swamiji understands that he has suffered a great loss and harbors anger because of this. After much reflection, Taneja is able to find that anger and experience its force. From this extract it is clear that Vinod is in deep grief. He would feel the energy from the trinity that flowed through to fill all of him. He would see the universe being created in a single exhalation of Brahma’s death. He thinks that Vishu balanced everything between creation and death. So Vinod also tries to be closer to Vishnu, believing that he is God.

What is the relation of the god Vishnu and the man dying on the landing? The novel’s answer to this question is evasive, playful, cosmic, funny and ineffable. As the (illusory?) action spirals around the unconscious squatter, tantalizing flashbacks reveal a few things about the poor man’s life. Vishnu was raised in a hut made of cardboard and tin. He recalls his beloved mother making fragrant tea for him – from leaves she would use again. His father, drunk on bhang, put out one of his eyes by dropping an earthen pot on him. In the novel, there are different references of Hindu religion and customs: The fasting for devotion of God, Hindu’s funeral ceremony, drinking Vhang etc. are some rituals of Hindu and Indian society. Not only that there are different words and phrases directly taken from Indian culture and society like Swamiji, Vhang, Om Jai Jagdish Hare, maya, Satya Sai Baba, Sudras, yogi, Divali, phulijadis, dupatta, etc. These different words also help the text to contextualize as the representation of Indian society and culture.

The greatest thing in Vishnu’s life is his love for the prostitute Padmini. She is coquettish, beautiful, rampantly sexual – and out of reach for him as a wife. The economic and social realities of survival in Bombay rule this out from the start. He is now dying, and memories of their time together come and go. The allure of his mother

and of Kavita, the symbols of red and the sea, the joy of such spectacular holidays as Holi and Diwali – all of these surface as he returns to small incidents in his life with Padmini.

(Gerber Leslie 3)

To prove Gerber Leslie's criticism I want to cite one extract:

A breeze blows down the staircase. Vishnu can suddenly smell the sea. 'I feel so light like I am floating', Padmini says, opening the car window and holding her head out. Vishnu looks at her, her face framed against the yellow of the dupatta billowing up around her. He puts his hand on her thigh, and she does not push it off. (*The Death of Vishnu* 93)

Here, we can see how the so-called god, Vishnu is in love with a prostitute Padmini. He is loving her to be satisfied sexually. The girl is also a prostitute, coquettish. Sexual intercourse is everything for her. She is so proud of thinking that she is fulfilling the desire with god. I think that this scene of the extract describes the contemporary Bombay society. In Contemporary time, many women are professionalized to have sex in Bombay. Many women are sexually exploited. So the extract can also represent such society. But one important thing is that Gerber Leslie E. has only seen their love and having sex negatively. In this age, especially postmodern time, love and sex are becoming necessary parts of Life but no doubt, that should be within a limit or digestive for society. So blaming Vishnu and Padmini only sexually is not well analysis.

As the narrative cycles back over and again to scenes of Vishnu's mother caring for him, more stories of the gods and complex mythopoetry of the gods are told. He loves the tale of the yogi-spirit Jeev, "born nine hundred and ninety thousand times", writes Suri: "The lives of wealth and indulgence that await Jeep. The feast where each grain of rice is dipped in silver, where the apricots have emeralds as pits. The marriage to the princess of Sonapur, with the procession of the thousands of trumpeting elephants"

(Gerber 3). This is only the reference how same Vishnu forms as Jeev and again as human being. It forms human being from the form of Jeev. For this, we can also guess that the novel is so inclusive which is including every aspects of the society.

Vishnu slowly rises up the stairs, freed from his body, as one who perceives the unity of being and the even scene of both death and life with each necessary step. He continues his transformation and his detachment from himself as Vishnu sprawled-on-the-filthy-landing. Each step upward brings to his mind more stories: of Thanu lal and, again, Jeev. He will have to avoid falling asleep now, lest Yama, the god of death defeat his progress.

The Death of Vishnu celebrates movies and is itself paced and structured cinematically. It should come as no surprise (but it does) that the book ends with Padmini and Vishnu going to the Metro cinema to see a much heralded new film, “decades in the making”. Vishnu buys her a cold drink and a samasa. They love being together. The movie? Of course: *The Death of Vishnu*. It has a spectacular ending.

Finally here, see it now’, the man is saying, ‘So many decades in the making, *The Death of Vishnu*. The man is standing on a chair in front of the ticket booth, at Metro Cinema, next to the large ‘House Full sign . . .’ Amitabh Bachhan as Vishnu, Reshma as Padmini, see it now, *The Death of Vishnu*. (*The Death of Vishnu*, 307)

Here the novel juxtaposes with Bollywood film. Vishnu juxtaposes with Amitabh Bachhan, and Reshma with Padmini. From this we can say that the novel celebrates movies and structured cinematically. Vishnu, climbs down himself from god to Bollywood hero. He tries to become Bollywood hero to love Padmini and enjoy with her. Not only them, the next major character Kavita also has a desire to be an actress. She thinks herself a natural, a born actress. I think this is also her desire to persuade Salim

and make the love successful. It is his self devalorization on the one hand. But on the other hand, this scene also tries to express the condition of Contemporary Indian cinemas and also Indian people's attraction to such movies. How Bollywood film focuses on love story and sexual scenes rather than teaching moral lessons, can be also seen in the novel.

One can only hope that many more novels of this reach and quality will come from Mani Suri's hand. To have held in balance so many characters, themes, lines of action and symbols is an achievement worth the many honors that the book is bound to receive. Some readers will doubtlessly find the juxtaposition (especially in the character of Mr. Jalal) of slapstick and tragedy a bit forced. Others might complain that Vinod Taneja's story is insufficiently connected to the others. Readers unwilling to enter the realities of contemporary Bombay will find the novel too exotic. Mr. Jalal's "balcony scene" is much too long, for the seriousness of the situation saps the humor from this stream-of-consciousness piece.

Finally Suri creates a perfectly wonderful character in Nathuram, the cart-pusher; known as 'Radiowalla', his single ambition in life is to own a transistor radio, "the one sitting in its own glossary brown leather case in the Philips showroom window at Kemp's Corner". Most readers will want to know more about Nathuram's antics, as well as about the characters dwelling on the other landings. To link this context I like to bring the reference: 'Since Nathuram did not have his own cart, work was somewhat erratic, and he would sit for days on end at Gowallia Tank with the other cart pushers, waiting for his turn . . . 'Eleven, rupees today', Nathuram would say to, Vishnu. Fourteen rupees'. 'Eithteen' 'Twenty-four'. (*The Death of Vishnu* 121). This scene of working class also depicts how the so-called higher class owner were exploiting and are exploiting the lower class/working class in contemporary India.

Not only that the racial and tribal description is also a deep rooted part of Indian society esp. Hindu religion. “The lowest casts were not to let their shadows fall over the path of a Brahmin, they were to carry a broom everywhere to sweep the ground clean after their feet contaminated it, they were punished for the slightest mistake.” (The Death of Vishnu 276) This extract is true representation of tribal discrimination of India. Hindu mythology has divided people in different castes and divided works according to that. Brahmins think themselves the highest class. But other some lower classes are not allowed to touch everything of that so-called Brahmins and Chhettries. Now there is a kind of conflict between so called higher castes and lower, castes. This is also represented in the novel *The Death of Vishnu*.

Similarly, to join the analysis of text I want to link with one New Historical view. Hans Bertens, in his book *Literary Theory, The Basics*, elaborates: “We might well ask what the point of new historicist research is if we know beforehand that whatever it comes up with will be flawed and therefore incomplete. One important answer to this question is that new historicist arguments about the past, no matter how flawed are relevant for our contemporary situation. Inevitably, we too live within discourses that we have at least partly been shaped by (182)

This extract tries to show that New Historicism always describes every discourse of the past and present. It elaborates every event unchronologically linking with socio-political or contemporary context. By including every event, we create a discourse which is analyzed according to the society, the base of which is power. Like this Manil Suri explores the role of religion and faith in the lives of the occupants; the different levels of the apartment block are a symbol of the progress of a soul’s journey from the lowest realm to spiritual realization in Hindu cosmology. Not only that he also explores the thinly veiled hostility between Hindu and Muslim communities in India through Mr.

Jalals spirit journey from an intellectual sceptic to martyred prophet. He shows an ability to weave comedy and tragedy together into a warm, authentic and engaging narrative. Punctuated by reference to Bollywood (the Indian film industry) the author also reveals how filmic illusion unfiltrates every strata of society, and the way fantasy is used as a sedative for the entire population. To summarize all these we can claim that, through the window of a Bombay apartment building, we learn the stories of its residents and the forces that have shaped their lives as Maril Suri creates an intimate and intricate portrait of life in a great Indian metropolis;

I think the conclusion or the last part of the novel esp. chapter 16 gives us the impression that it took place in a Hindu universe; The scene in the forest is also another aspect of Vishnu's dream. "After the light comes darkness". Someone is playing a flute. It is so sweet, it makes Vishnu want to cry. He follows the strands of sound, they guide him like a rope through the darkness. He feels the trees before he sees them twigs brush against his face ... through the trees, he sees the boy. Beyond lies the meadow, a hut in the forefront, caws gazing on the grass behind. The boy is hiding behind a tree. (*The Death of Vishnu* (327).

This final scene of the novel tries to show the Hindu universe. The scene of the jungle of this part is Vishnu's dreamy world. I think the main character Vishnu, perhaps, like the god Vishnu, is supporting the universe by imagining it. For after death "the darkness fade, and he sees the mist of a forest", hears a flute, its music impossibly sweet, and catches a blueskinned boy in the act of stealing butter. It is Krishna another of Vishnu's avatars. The boy who is described at the final scene may be Krishna, the next avatar of Vishnu. In Hindu religion, the birth, life, death and rebirth are in cycle. The Hindus believe that when a god dies, he again reborns in different avatars. Anyway I think this scene is nothing more than bringing Hindu context and belief.

Suri himself also calls the Bombay apartment building in the *Death of a* microcosm for the ethno political map of India. I also think that Suri is able to show how religion, death, and unexpected changes all work together to define each person's individuality. The seemingly mundane Bombay metropolis is fused with the beauty and depth of Hindu mythology in this impressive literary accomplishment. The novel serves as a rich allegory and exploration on through the Hindu and Muslim faiths, through spiritual quests, and the nature of life and longing. A text always should depict the time and place in which the text is written. This makes the text to interpret with related time and place. Like this, the text is also able to represent the time esp. contemporary and place esp. Indian Society.

Thus, we can also analyze that even though it opens with an image of Vishnu's dead body, the novel is not so much about Vishnu dying as it is about the other characters. It is as if Vishnu is the hub of a wheel, where all the action is happening around him, but would not be occurring if he were not there. Somehow Vishnu's passing sparks fervor of spiritual questioning and rebellion among the residents of this apartment building in crowded Bombay. The four families living in the apartment building: two Hindu families on the first floor, a Muslim family on the second and a largely secular widower on the top floor also represent different types of people of Indian society. By every events happening in a single apartment building, Suri tries to depict tradition in India especially Indian culture. So, by all these reasons, we can join the text with contemporary India. The above all analysis helps us to understand the text with New Historical perspective. So I have thought New Historicism as the best approach to contextualize the text with Indian socio-cultural context together with the Indian religious context.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

At the conclusive part of my research without any doubt I can claim that the novel, set in a single Bombay apartment building around the main character Vishnu, who lies dying on a Landing is a Journey deep into the intimate relationships of contemporary Indian society. The single setting place, an apartment building is a specimen of domestic misery-damp walls, rotten fruit, and insects lining the floorboards. Though the setting building seems small and narrow but in reality it is not so because every aspects of Indian society like superstition, class-conflict, Hindu-Muslim conflict, Hindu belief of God, etc. are directly represented together with miseries and foibles. So to represent those every aspect I have used New Historical Reading with its well-references.

Suffused with Hindu mythology, the story of one apartment building becomes a metaphor for the social and religious divisions of contemporary India, and Vishnu's ascent for the staircase parallels the soul's progress through the various stages of existence. The first book of a planned trilogy *The Death of Vishnu* sets around a short period of time, but from the window of the apartment, we learn the stories of its residents and the forces that have shaped their lives as Manil Suri creates an intimate and intricate portrait of life in a great Indian metropolis. In the novel Suri explores the deeper workings of human nature as he approaches an electrifying catharsis of illumination, love and loss.

Not only that, Manil Suri's first novel, *The Death of Vishnu*, is an interesting and captivating novel that combines the rich elements of Bollywood and Hindu mythology. Sometimes the novel is very funny in its exploration of social airs and keeping up appearances, and at other times deadly serious when contemplating the implications, such

attitudes may have on others. The novel also serves as a rich allegory and exploration through the Hindu and Muslim faiths, through spiritual quests, and the nature of love and longing. The novel contains richly drawn characters and highly developed stories that are at times comic and at other times tragic. As the novel progresses, Vishnu continues his recollections and memories of his life as his soul leaves his body and moves up the stairwell up the building. Each landing brings new occupants and new stories to tell. This also shows that the events of the novel are not chronological, different flashbacks are also there especially memories and recollections. By observing every incidents of the novel, it can be claimed that Suri has a discerning eye for human foibles, an empathetic knowledge of domestic interaction and an instinctive understanding of the cast-nuanced traditions of Indian society. He has also discerning eye on the oppressive heat, the mixture of superstitions and religious fanaticism, the social cruelty etc.

The story, infused with Indian mythology, is a metaphor of a social and political division in the contemporary Indian society, shown here as a building inhabited by people of different social status, religious beliefs. The Pathaks and the Asranis are very similar Hindu families, who live in constant competition and jealousy, uniting only against those who are much different, like the Jalals, who are respectful Muslims (and whose son elopes with Kavita Asrani), or like Vishnu, a poor drunk who is allowed to live on the stairs of the building in exchange for favors. The story of the few days before Vishnu dies is interrupted by Vishnu's visions of his past and afterlife his prostitute love, Padmini, his dreams of a better life and his misery and happiness in life.

In short, Manil Suri has created a Universe in an apartment of Bombay. An ordinary man elevated to something extraordinary to satisfy the superstitions and religious notions of the upper notches of society. Vishnu's body becomes the fulcrum for

a series of crises, some tragic, some farcical, that reflect both the folly and nobility of human conduct. The apartment dwellers portray common human weaknesses that are transcended by the central character's metaphysical visions. Vishnu in Indian religion is powerful "preserver" deity in a triad with Shiva, and Brahma. In the throes of death he has a vision of each of the character's lives along with his own earth-bound, sensuous hallucinations. The setting place, an apartment block is a microcosm of Indian society where interactions between people of different Hindu castes and religious minorities unfold. It is shown through their relationship with drunkard and odd job man.

There is no doubt that New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature, which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas. New historicism frequently addresses the idea that the lowest common denominator for all human actions power, so the New Historicism seeks to find examples of power and how it is dispersed within the text. To judge this main point of the novel the New Historicism can be thought as suitable approach.

Thus, Suri's novel *The Death of Vishnu* is based on the events only in a Bombay apartment building, which itself can be taken as a microcosm of Indian society. The novel records the realities of Indian society and mingles them with imaginary events.

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