# INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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# English in India

I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for oriental pearl!

These are the words of Dr. Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's play *Dr Faustus*. The play was written almost in the same year as the East India Company launched upon its trading adventures in India. Marlowe's words here symbolize the Elizabethan spirit of adventure. Dr. Faustus sells his soul to the devil, converts his knowledge into power, and power into an earthly paradise. British East India Company had a similar ambition, the ambition of power.

The English came to India primarily as traders. The East India Company, chartered on 31 December, 1600, was a body of the most enterprising merchants of the City of London. Slowly, the trading organization grew into a ruling power. As a ruler, the Company thought of its obligation to civilize the natives; they offered their language by way of education in exchange for the loyalty and commitment of their subjects.

## Orientalists and Anglicists

English language reached Indian in the early 1600's when the East India Company started trading and English missionaries first began their efforts. Some of the early officials of the company like Sir William Jones were interested in the rediscovery of India's past. Sir William Jones established the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and Sir Thomas Munro too was much impressed by the Indian culture. These men came to be called 'Brahmanised Britons' or 'Orientalists' because they admired oriental culture and deprecated the idea of introducing Western Civilization into India. The Orientalists were in the favour of use of classical languages of Indian tradition, such as Sanskrit and Persian. The Anglicists, on the other hand, supported English. In their debate with the Orientalists, the missionaries and the Anglicists have perceived Indian languages and people as degenerate. Orientalists supported the use of Indian languages, while the Anglicists favoured English.

## The Beginnings

By the beginning of the 19th century, Britain – or East India Company – was more or less the master of the situation in India. In 1813, the commercial monopoly of the company ended, and the British in India assumed, beside police functions, missions of educating as well as civilizing the population. A token grant of Rupees one lakh per year was made for education and the idea was to promote only Oriental education. Printing presses in different parts of the country and books in the vernacular as well as in English were coming out since the beginning of the 18th century. Along with grammars, dictionaries and translations, the printing presses also gave rise to the first ever newspaper—Hicky's *Bengal Gazette*; others followed in due course. Last came the private schools that imparted English education—such schools have been started as early as 1717 at Cuddalore near Chennai, 1718 at Mumbai, and 1720 at Kolkata, culminating in the establishment of Hindu College in 1817. The Hindu College started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his friends, later became the Presidency College in 1855.

Western education was spreading fast in different parts of Indian and was doing much better than the institutions imparting oriental education. The Orientalists and the Anglicists continued to wrangle but it was quite evident that the former were steadily losing ground, till finally, Macaulay's celebrated Minute settled the issue. He declared that it was both necessary and possible "to make the natives of his country good English scholars". On 7th March, 1885, Lord William Bentinck resolved, "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and science among the natives of India".

**Macaulay's Minutes**

By the turn of the century, the imperialists believed in giving English education to the Indians. There was a pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and lower officials in administration and knowledge of English was essential for these jobs. Before the close of the eighteenth century, missionaries came to Indian for spreading the "word of Christ" among the native Indians. A large number of missionary schools imparting English education were set up by the early 1800's. The Orientalists opposed the project of importing English education in India.

Lord Macaulay who is called the Father of English education, asserted in the House of Commons a year before he sailed to India; "To trade with civilized men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages". The civilized subject of Macaulay's imagination was not the slave who performed his salaams to the British officer, but "the English educated gentleman using English tapestry and English cutlery, the man who valued English manufactures and spoke the English language". In 1835, as a law officer to the Supreme Council, he drafted a document which came to be known as "Macaulay's Minute on Education". The process of producing English-knowing bilinguals in India began with the Minute of 1835, which officially endorsed T.B. Macaulay's goal of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect".

According to Kachru, the far reaching Minute was highly controversial because of disagreement about whether it was correct to impose an alien language on Indians or not. The Orientalists expressed their disagreement in a note dated 15 February 1835, but they could not stop it from passing and had to give way. On 7 March 1835, the Minute received a Seal of Approval from Lord William Bentinck, and an official resolution on Macaulay's Minute was passed. This resolution "formed the cornerstone of the implementation of a language policy" in India.

**The Renaissance in Modern India**

During the 20 years, between 1835 and 1855, the number of those educated in English had been rapidly increasing. It is said that even in 1834-35, 32,000 English books were sold in India, as against 18,000 in native Indian languages. Indians started with reading and speaking English, and they soon started writing also. Indian writing in English was one of the manifestations of the new creative urge in India—what is often referred to as the literary Renaissance in India. The study of English literature stimulated literary creation in Bengali, Marathi, Telegu, Gujurati and other Indian languages. And Indian English literature had the same origin as the other modern literature in India, though here the foreign element seemed more pronounced.

The Renaissance in modern Indian literature begins with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Roy's understanding of the different religions of the world helped him compare them with Vedantic philosophy and garner the best from each religion. Sufi mysticism had a great influence on Roy. Dissatisfied with the system of education and the rote learning method of teaching English, he formed an association of English and Hindu scholars. He also invested his own money in the starting of a school where he introduced subjects like science, mathematics, political science and English. Roy felt that an understanding of these "modern" subjects would give Indians a better standing in the world of the day. Though initially antagonistic towards British rule in India, Roy later began to feel that the country would benefit in terms of education and by exposure to the good points of Western culture. For this, he was called a stooge of the British.

Roy made his first and only trip to England in November 1830 where he lived until his life was tragically cut short on September 27, 1833 after a brief illness. In England, he wrote a brief autobiography on request and it was published in Athenaeum and the Literary Gazette. He thus started the tradition of Indian leaders writing autobiographies. Modern auto-biographers like Gandhi, Nehru, Surendranath Banerjee, and Rajendra Prasad may proudly trace their lineage to him.

Reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy were in favour of English education. Roy was followed in the early 19th century in Bengal by the poets Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt. It was with Toru Dutt that Indian English writing really graduated from imitation to authenticity. She was the first Indian poet to make an extensive use of Indian myth and legend in poetry. However, the most famous literary figure of this era was Rabindranath Tagore who won the Noble Prize for literature in 1913.

As a writer, Tagore primarily worked in Bengali, but after his success with Gitanjali, he translated many of his other works into English. He wrote over one thousand poems; eight volumes of short stories, almost two dozen plays, eight novels, and many books and essays on philosophy, religion, education and social topics.

**The Era of Gandhian Whirlwind**

English became the official and academic language of India by the early twentieth century. The rising of the nationalist movement in the 1920's brought some anti-English sentiment with it—even though the nationalist movement itself used English as its medium. Gandhi and Nehru showed how English language could be a tool of insubordination and ultimately, freedom. The Gandhian whirlwind blew across the country during 1920-1947.

The inevitable impact of the Gandhian movement on Indian English literature was the sudden flowering of realistic novels during the nineteen thirties. The emergence of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao was the most remarkable event in the realm of Indian English fiction. In their novels, prevailing social and political problems that Indians found themselves in were given prominence. The nation-wide movement of Gandhi not only inspired Indian English novelists but also provided them with some of their prominent themes, such as the struggle for freedom, the East-West encounter, the communal problem and the miserable condition of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed.

**English in the Indian Subcontinent**

The British Empire is now gone. What remains is the English language. Despite continued resentment from some sections, English remains at the heart of Indian society. It is widely used in the media, in Higher Education and government and therefore remains a common means of communication. According to a recent survey, approximately 4% of the Indian population use English. That figure might seem insignificant, but out of the total population this represents 35 million speakers—the largest English speaking community outside the USA and the UK.

The English language remains in India even after all other traces of British Raj have receded from view. In the past, it was often taken for granted that native speakers were the only approximate models for language learners. Today, non native speakers outnumber native speakers of English. It has been claimed that English is no longer the property of native speakers but belongs to everyone who speaks it. After independence, particularly from the 1950s onwards, English began to acquire a distinct Indian voice through greater innovations and creativity. English is getting absorbed into Indian languages even as it enriches itself by assimilation them in turn. It has acquired a specific cultural identity in India and has entered India's linguistic and literary creativity.

Starting from Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, to Kamala Das, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and the like, the parade of excellent Indian writers is long. Why these writers do choose to write in English? R.K. Narayan chose to write in English because, "It is the only language I am really familiar with. It is the only language which is transparent and takes on the hues of the country or region where the story set". Creative writing in Indian English has gained its stature in recent years. International awards such as Booker Prize and national awards like Sahitya Akademi awards are indicators of the increasing appreciation and acceptability of creative writing in Indian English.

# Indian Fiction in English: An Introduction

**Introduction**

Novel as a form of creative expression, both in English and in regional languages, began to emerge in India as a result of the European invasion. It is true that the English novels that began to be read by the English educated Indians functioned, in a huge way, as models for the early novelists. But the fiction produced in India cannot be treated as a mere imitation of the western novel. The socio-political conditions that resulted in the development of the form called novel in Europe, had its parallel in India under the British rule. Bourgeois values that got filtered into the Indian society created awareness about concepts like equality, fraternity, democracy and individualism. The novel carries in its body the post-Renaissance values that placed the individual over the community. The single voice narratives that emerged in the later part of the 19th century in various Indian languages, as well as in English became expressions of a new era that questioned the traditional values and narrative forms.

The first novel in India, *Rajmohan's Wife* was serialized in the year 1864 and was later published in the year 1935. Bankim Chandra Chaterjee attempted to indigenize the form of novel by a liberal use of Indian words and by attempting to tell a story that is truly Indian. Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Saguna* (1893), Madhaviah's *Thillai Govindan* (1908) and K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) are some of the early attempts in this field. The early novels were attempts to depict Indian social life, family life, interpersonal relations, values and attitudes among high caste Hindus and could be seen as good social documents than truly creative fiction. Indian fiction in English could be said to have come of age with the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938).

The efforts of these three writers placed Indian Fiction in English at a dignified position from where it developed further and won international acclaim in recent years. For Mulk Raj Anand writing was a social act. A committed writer, Anand wrote novels that exposed the problems of the poor and the working class. *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) discuss the plight of the tea estate workers and *The Big Heart* (1945) deals with the life of industrial workers. R. K. Narayan's novels are based in Malgudi, a fictional locale in South India. For him life is 'leela', an ever-evolving play. Narayan adopted a lucid narrative style, characterized by the use of myth, irony and humour. *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962) are some of the important novels written by Narayan. Raja Rao attempted to address the question of East-West balance and pursued a discourse on the spiritual quest incorporating the traditional values of pluralism, hierarchy and holism along with modern values of secularism, socialism and individualism. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) are two of the important novels of Raja Rao.

The three writers who had contributed much for the development of Indian fiction in English are popularly known as the 'Big Three of Indian Fiction in English.' The period in which Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao wrote was predominantly a humanist phase. Majority of the writers belonging to this period shared this vision. Bhabani Bhattacharya wrote novels about casteism, patriarchal oppression, etcetera while K. A. Abbas wrote about the political turmoil of independent India. Kamala Markandeya concentrated on the urban poor in her famous novel *A Handful of Rice*(1966). Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) dealt with the partition of India while Manohar Malgonkar wrote about the decline of princely states. Malgonkar's novel *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) made him famous. Nayantara Sahgal is known as a political writer who tried to trace the political history of independent India through her novels. Another important preoccupation of Sahgal is the liberation of women. *Rich Like Us* (1983) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) are some of the well-known novels written by her. Ruth Prawar Jhabvala who wrote about the confrontation between tradition and modernity and

Romen Basu who concentrated on the leftwing politics are among the important names to be included in this phase.

In the second phase the main preoccupations of the writers were East-West Encounter, Existentialist angst, Alienation, Postcolonial predicament and feminist concerns. One of the most popular writers during this period is Anita Desai. Her novels, in general, can be considered as a celebration of womanhood. *Cry the Peacock* (1963) *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Where Shall we go this Summer* (1975) express the quest of the female self for identity. Shashi Deshpande's novels also possess a similar preference for the female predicament. Her novels are full of references to Indian life, rituals, festivals and the plight of the female in the Indian context. Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) expressed existentialist concerns while Gita Mehta in her novel *Karma Cola* (1979) reveals the ways in which Indian spirituality is marketed in postcolonial India. Writers belonging to this phase generally followed the style of the earlier phase.

A marked difference in style and technique is visible in the third phase with the emergence of writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, etcetera. A general tendency to re-imagine the Indian past is seen in many of the writers belonging to this phase. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) was an allegorical presentation of post-independence national history. Shashi Tharoor in his novel *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) retells the modern Indian history using parody. Lingustic experimentation is another important aspect of writing during this phase. Rushdie's language, popularly known as chutnified English, is a mix of Bombay Hindi and English. Many other writers including Arundhati Roy adopted similar techniques successfully to indigenise English language and give it a local flavour. Another important aspect of this phase is the preoccupation with the experience of the diaspora. Large-scale migration and settlement outside the native country resulted in the hybridization of culture and thus the peculiar experiences of the diaspora community began to appear in fiction. Writers like Bharathi Mukherjee, Vikram Seth and Rohinton Mistry write from locations outside India. Rohinton Mistry's narrative is a blend of Persian, South Asian and European story telling methods. His novel *Family Matters* (2002) deal with the brokenness of the modern family. Settled in Canada, Mistry writes about displacement and deprivation of the urban poor. Upamanyu Chatterjee also experiments with the language in his book *English August: An Indian Story*. The language used in this book is a mix of English and Hindi. Vikram Chandra, Amit Chaudhuri and Pankaj Mishra are some of the writers who have contributed significantly during this period. By and large, the writers of this period show the influence of postmodernism.

Another important development during this period is the large scale translations from regional languages into English. It has enriched the Indian English fiction by adding variety and multiplicity. Experiences hitherto unknown to Indian English Fiction appeared through these translations. The emergent and influential Dalit are all translations from regional languages.

**Indian English Novel Today**

The last two decades witnessed an unprecedented output in fiction in India. This "new fiction" category stands unmatched by any other period in the growth and development of the Indian English Novel. The various awards and recognitions at international levels, won by this huge yield adds credibility to it. Never before was a situation when India was placed so prestigiously on the International literary map

The most important role is played by the international publishing firms, in making these writers reach a global audience. Faber and Faber; Andre Deutsch; Heinemann; Alfred Knopf, Random House; Picador and the list of international publishers publishing Indian English novels is exhaustive. In fact a full list of these will read like a directory of British and American publishers.

Equally remarkable is the fact that today even a young Indian writer publishing his first book is readily accepted by a leading publisher abroad. Thus, Amit Chaudhuri's first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address,* was published by Heinemann in 1991.The earlier

condition was such that Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, *Untouchable* (now included in the Penguin Classics) was left untouched by nineteen British publishers in 1935, and needed a word from E.M. Forster to persuade Lawrence and Wishart in accepting it; also, how R.K.Narayan had to wait for the "Green(e)" light before his long and illustrious career could begin. This does not of course mean that Amit Chaudhuri is a better writer than Anand or Narayan, but it certainly does indicate the ready acceptance of Indian English literature abroad now.

If recognition and respect come, can monetary benefits be far behind? Vikram Seth's novel, *A Suitable Boy* was sold to Faber and Faber for a sum of one million pounds, for the U.K. rights alone. (It is obvious that this had caused considerable heart burning in "Nativist" circles in Bombay and Calcutta, but let that pass.) But sales alone do not spell literary excellence; *a la* Keats, "Where are the bestsellers of yesterday, aye, where are they?"

The new novelists have proved their mettle by winning, competitions with writers whose mother tongue was English, several major literary awards, prizes and distinctions, a complete list of which will occupy pages. To note only the most outstanding of these, three new novelists have won the Booker Prize, supposedly the British equivalent of the Nobel Prize: Salman Rushdie for *Midnight's Children* in 1981 (in 1993 this was adjudged the "Booker of Bookers," the best novel to have won the Booker Prize in its first twenty-five years), Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* in 1997 and Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006. (R. P. Jhabvala, from the earlier generation, too had won the Booker prize). Since then almost every novel by Rushdie has won an award in one country or another: *Spume* bagged the *Prix the Meilleur Livre Etranger* in Paris; *The Satanic Verses* was given the "Author of the Year" Award in Germany, and the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel; *Ilaroun and the Sea of Stories* qualified for the Writers Guild Award in England; *The Moor's Last Sigh* was adjudged "The Novel of the Year" in *1996,* while *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* was considered the best book in the Eurasia region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Similarly, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey,* which was short listed for the Booker Prize, received the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best book, the Governor General's Award, and the W. H. Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1991. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best Book, and the W. H. Smith Award, in 1994. And more recently, Jhumpa Lahiri created history in becoming the first Indian author to win the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in the USA for her collection of short stories, *The Interpreter of Maladies (1999).* The novels of Rushdie, Roy, Anita Desai and others have been translated, as well, into numerous European languages, thus setting the seal on their standing in the world of letters today. And this adulation is no traditional "White-pat-on-the-Brown-Back" syndrome, which has plagued Indian writing in English for a long time. Surely, there could not have been a collective will to condescension in so many, on such a large scale, in so many countries, at the same time.

The ways of handling the English language by these writers is another significant feature of the stream of Indian English novelists. The days of F. A. Anstey's comic "Baboo Jabberjee, B.A." dropping heavy linguistic bricks on white feet all over Calcutta are now part of the long-forgotten colonial story; now the Babu in question seems to be in a position to teach a thing or two to his ex-Prospero. Born in the days when the sun was never supposed to set on the British empire (as Chesterton said, "this was because God wouldn't trust the Englishman in the dark"), when Queen Victoria was in her Buckingham palace and all was right with the world (in British perception), the older Indian novelists could not perhaps but be somewhat self-conscious in using the tongue of the August master. Each of the "Big Three" solved the problem in his own way. Anand boldly carried the battle into the enemy camp, by cocking a snook at Fowler and Company; he translated literally from his native Punjabi into English, and gave the language of Shakespeare and Dickens the pungent flavour of *sarson ka sag.* Raja Rao

bravely declared, “We cannot write like the English. We should not” and tried to capture the rustic Kannada grandmother’s breathless garrulity in *Kanthapura* and the stately rhythms of Sanskrit in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Narayan’s method was subtler: he deliberately adopted a seemingly drab, colourless and almost journalistic style, so that the thrusts of his ubiquitous irony could prove all the more deadly.

The new novelists of the post-colonial world, many being part of the great Indian diaspora, had no reason to feel self-conscious in handling the English language. For them, the language didn’t carry a colonial baggage but was simply a tool—and a most resourceful and pliant one—which their education and upbringing have placed into their hands, and which they have thoroughly mastered, with the typical Indian flair for languages. One mark of this is the fact that most new novelists do not feel the necessity of appending to their novels an annotated list of Indian words in the text, explaining their meaning. One remembers how the American edition of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* carried a 60 page long glossary of Indian words (at the instance of the publisher, one is told). Now neither publisher nor author regards this as necessary. This infers the fact that the author of the earlier generation had to walk towards the reader, while today his successor expects the reader to move all way towards him. The inference is clear: earlier, the Indian writer was supposed to go at least half way to meet his reader (in some cases, he even went three quarters). His successor today expects his reader to go all the way to meet him.

Where do the new novelists stand in relation to their chief predecessors?
Curiously enough, the most outstanding of them do not seem to follow any of the “Big Three.” Neither Anand’s burning reformist zeal, nor Narayan’s ironic apprehension of life, nor yet Raja Rao’s metaphysical musing seems to provide a viable model to them. Their affinities are rather with that maverick of Indian English fiction: G. V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr,* an exciting amalgam of fantasy, the absurd, comedy, satire and linguistic pyrotechnics. These were the fictional values which dominated post-colonial and post-modern fiction also, especially after the rise of Magic Realism; hence most of the leading new novelists are Hatterr’s children. If, as Hemingway said, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberrv Finn”,* it could be said that most of recent Indian English fiction has come out of the “too-large-for-him hat” of the headmaster of H. Hatterr’s school.

The more cosmopolitan style and content of today’s novels makes it significant in the global scenario. Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao have all lived in the West for a time, but barring a few exceptions, their primary engagement has been with India. Of course, Anand goes to France and Flanders in *Across the Black Waters* and to England and Ireland in *The Bubble,* and Raja Rao lives in France for long periods in *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Chessmaster and His Moves.* Bhabani Bhattacharya sets the scene of his *A Dream in Hawaii* in the island by the same name. But the new novelists go much further. In Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate,* not only is the setting entirely American, but the characters as well. In *An Equal Music,* the scene shifts from England to Austria to Italy, his chief characters are English, and India is nowhere in the picture. In Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya’s *The Gabriel Club,* the setting is Hungary and all the characters are mid-European. And the grand finale of Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* takes place in a lonely tower room of a fortress in an Andalusian village in Spain. The novelists of the present generation are placed globally in their thought, still strongly bound to their motherland.

The first of the new novelists to arrive was Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) whose *Midnight’s Children (1981)* heralded a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. Rushdie’s main assets are a vaulting imagination, which often makes the bizarre its business, a carnivalesque sense of the comic, and an irrepressible love of word-play. When these powers are under perfect artistic control, and are geared to meaningful central concerns, he produces his better work. On the other hand, when his imagination runs amuck, when his sense of the comic overcomes his sense of propriety (an occupational hazard for every comic writer—“The clown in me trips me awfully,” Bernard Shaw once said), and when his word-play descends to the level of

compulsive jesting, he seems to fall back on puerile puns, juvenile jokes and worn out witticisms.

Rushdie's fictional art has been shaped by some highly significant factors. Born and brought up in Bombay, he spent the first fourteen years of his life there, after which he was sent to England for higher education. Since then he had been living there. Childhood and adolescence play a major role in shaping a writer's mind. This explains why Rushdie has come to have a firm foothold in both India and the West. This must have evidently been reinforced by his study of history at Cambridge. Further, though a Muslim by faith, he has himself said, "'My writings and thought have ... been as deeply influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones" *(Imaginary Homelands: 404)*.

It is his hyper-active imagination that must have drawn Rushdie to surrealism, and its modern cousin, Magic Realism, a strategy which has patent affinities with the strong oral traditions and narrative patterns of Third World societies; and *All About H. Hatterr* must have shown him the immense possibilities of word-play in English. Rushdie's forbears are thus, Lawrence Sterne, Gunter Grass, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and G.V. Desani.

His first novel, *Grimus (1975)* shows Rushdie trying his hand at these various strategies, without mastering any. The protagonist is Flapping Eagle, an American Indian in search of his lost sister. He finally locates her on a Mediterranean island controlled by Grimus, a magician. The narrative is a hodgepodge of several myths and motifs, which do not seem to mix well. Thus, the name "Grimus" is an anagram of "Simurg", a great wise eagle in the Persian *Shahnama;* while the Rose which is the secret of Grimus's power, and the protagonist's guide Virgil (Jones) are obviously from Dante. And Sufi mysticism and Menippean satire make strange bed-fellows. In *Grimus,* Rushdie was evidently serving his apprenticeship.

His mastery at this is suddenly apparent in *Midnight's Children (1981),* Rushdie's first major work and, in a sense, his best novel. It is a multi-faceted narrative, which is at once an autobiographical *bildungsroman,* a picaresque fiction, a political allegory, a topical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy, and a daring experiment in form and style.

*Midnight's Children* is the story of Saleem Sinai, born on the midnight of *15* August, *1947:* the time and year of the birth of the modern Indian nation. He therefore feels that he is "mysteriously handcuffed to history". The narratives opens with an account of the life of Saleem's grandfather, and the hero is actually born as late as on page 116 (which reminds us of the birth of Sterne's hero in *Tristram Shandy* in Volume IV of the novel). Saleem's peregrinations over the next twenty-five years include his experiences during the Bangla Desh War in *1971* and the clamping of Emergency in *1975.*

The narrative abounds in several instances of meaningful use of fantasy and symbolism. Thus, Saleem, who represents the new-born Indian nation is actually a changeling, the son of an Englishman and an Indian woman; Saleem is born with unblinking eyes and has to be taught to shut them, "for nobody can face the world with his eye open all the time". And out of the 1001 (a figure which clearly alludes to *The Arabian Nights)* children born on the midnight of *1947,* exactly *420* die (this is the notorious number of the section of the Indian Penal Code dealing with cheating).

The story is narrated in the first person by Saleem himself, and his garrulity makes for several digressions like the Paean to Dung and the "Fairy Tale of the Prince of Kif." Stylistic experiments, which remind us of *All About H. Hatterr,* mainly take the form of the "chutnification" of the English language, using several devices such as the use of Hindi and Urdu words, expressions, expletives etcetera ("0 baba", "funtoosh"), bilingual echoic formations ("writing-shiting"), use of Hindi idiom *a la* Mulk Raj Anand ("who cares two pice"), bilingual puns ("ladies and ladas"), and dovetailing of words ("onónon").

But what makes *Midnight's Children* an outstanding work is the fact that it has a distinctly existential dimension. One central theme seems to unify all the elements of

political fantasy, comedy and surrealism in the novel; this is the over-arching theme of Identity and its plight in a hostile world. The numerous ways in which Identity is made to suffer is vividly illustrated in the experiences of the protagonist. Identity is in turn, shown as a sham, as mistaken and confused, subjected to oblivion, fractured, dwarfed and reduced to animal level; as barren, sterile and totally lost. And since heredity is an essential element in Identity, some of these ordeals are repeated from generation to generation in the narrative which opens with the protagonist's grandfather and ends with his son.

If the political allegory in *Midnight's Children* concerns India, its sister nation, Pakistan, born at the same time, is the subject of *Shame* (1983). Here again, the political equations are quite clear. The protagonist is Omar Khayyam Shakil, a name which points to the Pakistani belief that it has greater affinities with Persia and the Middle East rather than with neighbouring India, in spite of the fact that a majority of the people of Pakistan are Hindus converted to Islam. He is the illegitimate son of three mothers and a British Officer. This obviously refers to the British Government's creation of Pakistan out of three Muslim-majority provinces of pre-Independence India. Many major players in the history of Pakistan during the first three decades of its turbulent life, including Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (Iskandar Harappa), and Zia ul Haq (Raza Hyder) appear here. The macabre end, in which Omar is killed by his own wife, who has turned into a man-eating beast, and his home destroyed in an explosion, is perhaps a dire warning that a nation born in hatred, and which has for the most part lived in an ambience of tyranny, violence and unrest, is bound to end the same way.

Apart from the political allegory, the narrative has other dimensions as well. The miraculous birth of Omar and the sudden transformation of his wife into a white panther clearly belong to the fiction of Magic Realism. The idea of a human being transformed into an animal is not new. In David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* (1922), a country gentleman's wife is suddenly transformed into a fox; her husband accepts her as she is now and continues to live with her until she is killed by hounds. This is fantasy as a sheer flight of the imagination, but with no symbolic dimension. It is this symbolic dimension that gives Rushdie's novel its powerful appeal.

Furthermore, as Rushdie himself says, "I am only telling a sort of a modern fairy tale". But here is a fairy tale with a big difference, an inverted fairy tale. In a traditional fairy tale, a frog is transformed into a prince, in the midst of the ringing of wedding bells; in *Shame*, the process is reversed, with tragic consequences.

The title, "Shame" suggests another possible dimension of the narrative. The Hindi word *"Aurat"* meaning woman, comes from an Arabic word, which means: (a) something under a veil, any place of concealment and (b) private parts, genitals; the reference by implication to Woman and Woman's honour is plain. In all oriental cultures, Woman and Shame are associated in two diametrically opposite ways. First, it indicates a woman's honour, her decency and modesty. Ancient Hindus, who had a passion for classification, have listed eleven basic traits of woman, including modesty, along with beauty, tolerance, self-effacement, etcetera. In fact, in a positive sense, Shame is associated with the Divine. Idols of *Lajja Gauri* (Lajja = Shame, and Gauri = Parvati, the consort of Shiva) are still found in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. They symbolized female fertility and were (and still are) worshipped by barren women.

On the other hand, "Shame", in a pejorative sense, is equated with dishonour, loss of self-respect, humiliation etcetera. It is this pejorative sense that seems to be emphasised in this narrative of three decades of a country united in a "macabre fellowship of Shame". Finally, *Shame* in a sense is also an impressive Feminist document, in that Sufiya Zinobiya's transformation into a ferocious beast perhaps suggests that in a country which reduces its women to less than second class citizens, Woman power will one day arise and slay the oppressor.

Rushdie's fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses (1988),* brought him considerable notoriety, and devout Muslims found it blasphemous. A *fatwa* was issued against him

by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, passing a death sentence on him. In Chapter 53 of the Holy Koran, verses number 19 and 20 refer to Lat, Uzza and Manat, three deities worshipped by pagan Arabs in Mecca. According to a discredited *hadith,* these verses were followed by a verse glorifying these pagan idols; this verse, written under the influence of Satan, was never part of the Holy Koran. Rushdie is fascinated by this imaginary incident, and goes on magnifying it - the chapter "Mahound" opens with these pagan deities as daughters of the Devil, "Lat, Manat, Uzza - motherless girls laughing with their Abba." The section ends with the Prophet abandoning Gibreel, after bringing him the devil, and Gibreel is left trying to fight against "the three winged creatures." Rushdie, no doubt, meant this reversal (the Prophet brings the Devil to Gibreel instead of the angel Gabriel bringing the word of God to the Prophet) as a profound meditation on good and evil, but all he achieves is puerile word play which is highly offensive to Muslims.

The novel opens with an incident typical of Magic Realism: two Indians fall from an aeroplane on to the English coast and land unhurt. They are Gibreel Farishta, a superstar of Indian cinema, and Saladin Chamcha, an Indian emigre. The names are highly symbolic. "Gibreel", which is "Gabriel", represents the angelic (in Islam, Gabriel is the angel who brought God's Word to humankind), and "Farishta" means angel; and "Saladin" recalls Sultan Saladin, whom the Christians regarded as the evil enemy against whom they fought the Crusades. But as usual with Rushdie, the symbolism is actually multi-layered. For instance, "Chamcha" means a "hanger-on", a flatterer in Hindi, and his wife's name is "Pamela Lovelace" *a la* Samuel Richardson. Rushdie is quite self-conscious about his choice of names. In the portions of the novel which did the most to attract charges of blasphemy, he chooses the name "Mahound" for the prophet. "Mahound" was the name which medieval Christian writers used for Muhammad, identifying him with the Devil - Dante, for example, puts him in Inferno. Rushdie writes a whole paragraph justifying his choice: ". . . has adopted, instead, the devil-tag the farangies hung round his neck. To turn insults into strengths, whigs, tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn ..." (In fact, a detailed consideration of the symbolism of proper names in the novel will take an entire essay).

The ensuing adventures of the two Indians in England provide the occasion for the treatment of many subjects, including the problems of Indian immigrants in England, British politics (Mrs Thatcher becomes "Mrs Torture"), Islamic history and theology, and feminism. Both finally return to India to meet different fates. Gibreel, who had earlier won his laurels by playing Hindu gods on the screen (a dig at N. T. Rama Rao, the noted Andhra actor) makes a movie on Prophet Mohamed, and when it is a big flop, he shoots himself. Saladin, suddenly realising that his roots are in India, decides not to return to England.

In spite of its seemingly inexhaustible inventiveness (or perhaps because of it), *The Satanic Verses* is ultimately a confused book. In his irrepressible way, Rushdie tries to do too many things at the same time, allowing the narrative to run in too many directions, ultimately arriving nowhere. The nature of Good and Evil is an exceedingly complex subject. To unravel its intricate inter-connections is an arduous task; and it is certainly not made easy by periodic engagement with peripheral issues, however interesting they may be by themselves.

With the Damocles sword of the religious *fatwa* hanging over his heretical head, Rushdie was forced to go into seclusion and live under constant police protection in London. It speaks volumes for his courage, strength of mind and *sangfroid* that under these forbidding circumstances, his creative powers remained entirely unaffected. In fact, in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990)* he has written perhaps his most delightful novel. Rushdie is supposed to have, written the book at the request of his small son for a story, but here, as in the case of *Gulliver's Travels,* is a children's tale with an urgent message to the adults, a message on the issues of the liberty of creative imagination and the sanctity of the artist's freedom of expression. These questions were of pressing personal relevance to

him then, and it is a mark of his powerful creative imagination that he transformed a seemingly insuperable difficulty into an invaluable artistic opportunity.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* opens in a manner typical of a children's tale: "There was once in the country of Alifbay a sad city." In this city lives Haroun, a small boy, whose Dither, Rashid Khalifa is a master story-teller. But his wife runs away with another man and he suddenly finds that his story-telling powers are also gone. He regains them in the end after several adventures and a great war between the champions of the freedom of expression and their tyrannical oppressors. The story abounds in allegorical characters like Prince Bolo (speak), Princess Batcheet (dialogue) and Khatam-shud (completely finished).

As an allegory *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* invites comparison with the earlier *Grimus;* and the comparison immediately shows how much ground Rushdie has covered during the fifteen years that separate the two novels. In *Grimus,* the allegory was vague, confused and unanchored in a specific cultural reality. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* these pitfalls have been successfully avoided. Devoid of digression, compact and unified in effect, this is perhaps the most focused of Rushdie's novels, and as an allegory it is, perhaps, fit to rank with the best in the English language.

It is precisely this power of focusing that is missing in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). All the usual ingredients of Rushdie's fiction are here: a large canvas; a narrative covering several generations; characters sporting different kinds of eccentricities; employment of thinly disguised real-life personages; Magic Realism; a conscious attempt to allegorise; and constant word-play. But these several elements do not seem to coalesce well enough to constitute a unified whole. This is probably because some of these ingredients appear to be merely routine gestures, rather than organic parts of the narrative.

Consider, for example, the curious fact that the protagonist, the "Moor" grows twice as fast as his biological age, owing to a casual wish made by his mother, so that he is actually born only four and a half months after conception, and he is sixty at the age of thirty. This idea is evidently borrowed from Gunter Grass, whose protagonist, Oskar in *The Tin Drum* refuses to grow after the age of three. Both are typical examples of Magic Realism, but in *The Tin Drum,* the protagonist's refusal to grow has a profound thematic significance; it symbolises, in a powerful way, the stunting of the intellectual growth of the nation during the totalitarian Nazi rule in Germany. Rushdie has not been able to invest the Moor's double-fast biological growth with a similar symbolic meaning. It remains little more than a clever gimmick.

The same objection must be taken to the putative parallel suggested at various places in the novel between the protagonist, the Moor and Boabdil, the last Moorish sultan of Granada. The protagonist's real name is "Moraes" which is shortened as "Moor", and his surname, "Zogoiby" means "unlucky" - an adjective which fits Boabdil also, because with his defeat in 1492 ended the eight-hundred year-old Moorish kingdom in Spain. The picture, "The Moor's Last Sigh" depicting Boabdil riding out of the palace of Alhambra also figures at more than one place. But the comparison is limited to superficial details like these, and is not rigorously worked out in symbolic terms, in respect of character and action. It would be uncharitable, but perhaps correct to suggest that Boabdil was an afterthought, which provided an attractive title, since the "Moor", like Boabdil, was destined to be the last of his line.

*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), Rushdie's latest novel, stands apart from all his other narratives in that it is his first attempt to deal with the theme of love. Vina. a singer, is the woman, the ground beneath whose feet is worshipped by her lover, Ormus Cama. Rushdie implies a symbolic parallel between a modern love story and an ancient legend: the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The names of Rushdie's lovers are symbolic. "Ormus" is a variation on "Orpheus" and "Cama" is a common Parsi name also recalls "Kama", the Hindu god of love. "Vina" is a musical

instrument, and music plays a crucial role in the narrative. There is an interesting twist given to the old story. Ormus, injured seriously in a car-crash, lies in a coma. Vina who has been separated' from him for long, gets to hear his latest song, "Beneath Her Feet," and hastens to be at his bedside and he revives. So, in Rushdie's narrative, it is Eurydice who brings Orpheus back from the dead, and not the other way round. Finally, the lovers are separated for good, when Vina disappears, literally swallowed up by the "ground beneath her feet", in an earthquake in Mexico.

The chief weakness of the novel is that the lovers fail to come to life. It is extremely difficult to portray romantic love credibly in this hard-headed age of ours, where even the word has become devalued (the London barmaid calls you "luv"); and perhaps only lyricism of the highest kind can make the feat possible. Rushdie's attempts in this direction lack conviction:

> How shall we sing of the coming together of long-parted lovers separated by foolish mistrust for a sad decade, reunited at last by music? Shall we say they ran singing through fields of asphodel and drank the nectar of the gods ?

This tissue of conventionalities becomes all the more unconvincing when one remembers that Vina continues to flirt with her friend Rai all the time, and on the night previous to her death, she has had a man warming her bed.

Emotion is hardly Rushdie's strong suit; fantasy, irony, and satire are. It is hardly surprising therefore that the minor characters, who afford him ample scope to exercise his powers, are much better realized: Cyrus, the pathological killer, called "the Pillowman" because he smothers his numerous victims with a pillow; Piloo Doodhwala, involved in a goat-scam, and Ormus's father, a sham-barrister, who is finally exposed. The weakness at the heart of the narrative is compounded by the excessive and at times puerile word-play (e.g. "Cut the throats of your goats and turn them into coats").

Just past the age of fifty, Salman Rushdie should have many more years of creative writing before him; and the recent easing of the deadly *fatwa* should make for more congenial conditions of work. Meanwhile, Indian English literature owes him much. Known earlier only for a few prominent writers and studied in a few universities abroad, Indian writing in English has now won far wider acceptance, not only in English-speaking countries, but in the wide world also, through translations. And it was Rushdie who showed the way by his bold "chutnification" of English.

**Other Practitioners of Magic Realism**

Apart from Rushdie, there are quite a few contemporary novelists who have employed the technique of Magic Realism, with varying degrees of success. The experiment succeeds best when the novelist uses the technique to present a meaningful vision of life. But in the absence of this, it merely becomes a currently fashionable literary device which amuses, but does not enlighten. This dichotomy is illustrated in two well-known novels of this period: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), the first novel by Amitav Ghosh (b.1956), and Shashi Tharoor's (b.1956) *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), also a first novel. Ghosh's protagonist is a Bengali orphan called "Alu" (potato) because his head is shaped like one. His real name is "Nachiketa", which reminds us of the enterprising young boy in *Katha Upanishad,* who pursues the god of Death, importuning him to reveal to him the secret of existence. Alu is forced to run away from his village, because he is falsely accused of being a terrorist. His peregrinations take him to the Middle East, moving as he does from alGhazira, a small Persian Gulf town to Cairo, the Sahara and finally Algeria.

The narrative teems with many interesting and in some cases eccentric, characters. Several incidents are in the vein of Magic Realism. Alu, fascinated by the loom, wants to be a weaver. But his thumbs shrivel and atrophy, making it impossible for him to weave. Perhaps there is an implied reference here to the story of Eklavya, the tribal in the *Mahabharata* who learnt the art of archery by worshipping a statue of Dronacharya, the great martial arts teacher of the Pandava and Kaurava princes. Alu too is of the wrong caste - society disapproves of a higher caste boy learning to weave.

In spite of its wealth of character and incident, *The Circle of Reason* fails to generate adequate thematic substance. The tripartite division of the narrative into *Satwa, Rajas* and *Tarnas,* which refer to the three universal qualities in Hindu thought, and the allusion to Nachiketas raise visions of a strong under-pinning of serious ideational significance, which the actual narrative finally belies. Ghosh's subsequent novels: *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) and *The Glass Palace* (2000) show him attempting different strategies; in fact, no two novels by him are alike in tone and spirit. These novels will be considered in their proper places later.

One of the finest examples of post-modern fiction in recent Indian English literature is Shashi Tharoor's first novel, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). The title itself is a take-off on the ancient Indian epic, *The Mahabharatu* ("The great narrative of India"). By a daring stroke of imagination, Tharoor finds uncanny correspondences between the chief characters and events in the three thousand year old epic and the leading political figures and developments in modern Indian history. These correspondences are not mechanically worked out but suitably modified, sometimes hinted at rather than fully spelt out; and on occasion they are given an ironic twist in a spirit of self-mockery, which is so characteristic of post-modernism. Thus, the venerable Bhishma, the son of Ganga in the epic becomes Ganga Datta, a Mahatma Gandhi-like figure; but Gandhi's great Salt-march, which shook the foundations of the British Empire in India, becomes the rather comic "Mango-march." Duryodhana, the wicked son of King Dhritarashtra in the epic is "unsexed" to become a woman: Priya Duryodhani, who stands for Indira Gandhi; the evil she did, causing the breaking up of the Congress party and the gagging of democracy during the infamous Emergency.

The narrative is rich in comic invention of various kinds. Comic verses are interpolated from time to time, to remind us of the original epic, and word-play is continuous and usually of a high order. The witty titles of the books themselves set the proper tone for the diverting narrative: "The Rigged Veda"; "The Bungle Book", "Midnight's Parents" etc. *The Great Indian Novel* which effectively demonstrates how the technique of running a continuous parallel between antiquity and modernity, is easily one of the most outstanding novels of the period.

Another novel which demonstrates the use of going back to the past is *The Memory of Elephants (1988)* by Boman Desai (b. 1950). This is the story of Homi Seervai, a young Parsi scientist in the USA, who invents a machine which can activate the part of the brain in which memories are stored. After frustration in a love affair, he tries to use the machine to re-live his memories of love, but something goes wrong with the machine, and he begins to re-live the past, not only of his family but also that of his entire race, from the time of the collapse of the great Persian empire to the flight of the Parsis from their land to seek shelter in India. The fantasy, here is perfectly credible, given the first premise, and is put to significant use - viz. an encapsulation of Parsi history, life, culture and character.

In his second novel, *Asylum, USA (2000),* Desai tries his hand at comic extravaganza. The protagonist, Noshir Daruvala, is a young Parsi student in Chicago who must get a green card or be deported to Bombay. He gives Barbara a thousand dollars to marry him, so that he becomes an American citizen, but discovers that she is a lesbian with a live-in woman-lover. Later, he meets Blythe, but she too has a boyfriend and so he lurches on from one woman to another. As he himself tells us in one of his (rare) serious moments, "The women ... in this story ... were less a tribute to my powers of attraction as I liked to think than to my troubledness ... they too were troubled we were linked by our troubles". But this serious aspect of the story is not realized adequately, because it is engulfed by flippant gestures like frequently gratuitous dove-tailing of words, *a la* Rushdie ("hewasthefirsttoaskher"), and the non-use of quotation marks in dialogue throughout with an entire page full of these marks at the end, to supply the deficiency. Devices like these yield more facetiousness than genuine comedy.

A fellow Parsi, Farrukh Dhondy (b. *1944),* tries to make fantasy subserve the needs of comic extravaganza in his *Bombay Duck (1990)*. The most credible part of this rather

footloose fantasy is the "Book of Xerxes Xavaxa Hoax Xtraordinaire" dealing with the exploits of the resourceful Parsi, Xavaxa, one of whose more or less crazy schemes is a baby-smuggling racket in London.

The extravaganza is even more boisterous in *The Revised Kamasutra (1993)* by Richard Crasta. The sub-title reads: "A Novel of Colonialism and Desire with Arbitrary Footnotes and a Whimsical Glossary." This is the sexual odyssey of Vijay, a small-town, middle class boy from South India, whose sexual propensity begins at the age of seven and finds its full flowering when he goes to the USA as a young man. Crasta's word-play is often resourceful and reminds us of Desani and Rushdie. (e.g., "I am in the well, thank you"; "offences against pubic peace"; two girls named "Erecta and Ejecta" etc). *The Revised Kamasutra is* a rollicking recital of a comedy of rampant sexuality.

Fantasy may use reality as a spring-board, but an uneasy mixture of the two is sure to create problems for both the writer and the reader. This is what seems to have happened in *A Clean Breast (1993)* by G.J.V. Prasad *(b. 1955)*. The narrator one day suddenly finds in a glossy magazine the photograph of a huge female breast, with one hair growing near the nipple, and recognizes it, with horror, as that of his wife. But having had its fling with fantasy, the novel reverts to social realism, and seems to fall between two stools. The successful sustaining of fantasy is far more difficult than its creation.

Paradoxically enough, fantasy cannot thrive, if it severs its connection with reality altogether; for if realism reflects reality, Magic Realism only refracts reality; it is simply Realism reflected in the turbulent waves of a river in spate. Indrajit Hazra's *The Burnt Forehead of Max Saul* (2000) illustrates this. Max, a middle-aged man, is found lying semi-naked on a garbage dump; removed to a hospital, he lies in a coma for several months. His "burnt forehead" (which is reminiscent of the head-injury of Desani's hero in *All About H. Hatterr)* probably accounts for the hallucinations he is subject to ("what happened around Max didn't happen").

His escapades include shop-lifting; trying to organise the escape of a friend from jail by the bizarre device of hiding him in a large piano and even committing a murder. He tells us at the beginning of his narrative that his father has asked him to locate the mysterious Serai but at the end it is revealed that his father has been dead for years and that Serai never existed. The only specific touch of reality comes at the end: "I raise my arms to smell the horse odour of my armpits." Hatterr's story raises larger questions such as colonial consciousness, appearance and reality, and at the end he arrives at a philosophy of life. Max's hallucinations remain mere fantasies, without any ulterior significance, though some of his adventures do generate black humour.

The Magic Realism technique may give the novelist the widest possible scope for the exercise of imagination, but in that process, he always stands in danger of losing his hold on the structural values of fiction. This is what happens in *Beethoven Among the Cows (1994)* by Rukun Advani (b. *1955)*. The eight chapters of the book are actually so many separate short stories linked together loosely by the two protagonists who are twins, and all the events are seen through their consciousness. The action covers a period of three decades, from 1962, the inglorious year of the war with China, when the twins are born, to 1992, which witnessed the infamous demolition of the Babri Masjid. The fantasy produces strange results: Elizabeth Taylor comes down from the cinema screen to meet the twins, and later, she suddenly merges into the historical Eliza Taylor, who was in the besieged residency in Delhi during the Mutiny of 1857. The comedy operates at various levels, the most notable of which is the stylistic one. Advani makes deft use of parody, caricature, witty allusion and word-play. The character of Professor Lavatri All-theori, "the Moby Dick of the American Academy" is of topical interest, as a caricature of a well--known modern Indian critic long settled in the U.S.A. We are. told that in her Women's Movement, "Lit.crit" becomes "Lit.Clit". In the absence of a hard, central core, however, *Beethoven Among the Cows* remains a charismatic chaos of a book.

*Looking Through Glass* (1995) by Mukul Kesavan (b. 1957) is slightly better organized. The narrator, a young photographer, accidentally falls off a railway bridge

and loses consciousness; when he comes to, he discovers to his surprise that he is now back in the nineteen-forties. He acquires a Muslim foster family in Lucknow and goes again through the political vicissitudes of the entire decade, including the last phase of the Freedom Struggle and the Partition holocaust. Fantasy now seems to run riot: Muslim Congressmen, who oppose the Quit India "resolution" of August 1942 suddenly disappear, and the degree of their disappearance is in inverse proportion to their commitment to the Congress. Some just become lighter-skinned, others translucent like Inayat Khan, who finds himself totally naked. The famous film-star, Yusuf-bin-Ansoo ("child of tears" - an obvious caricature of Dilip Kumar, Yusuf Khan in real life, a well-known Indian Muslim film-actor, called the "Tragedy King") looks into the mirror (probably to assume the right expression), and then somehow, the actor vanishes but his mirror-image remains. All this is, no doubt, highly imaginative and extremely entertaining, but its final impact remains limited. localized and sporadic. Such incidents form a loose chain of events: they do not ultimately come to constitute a thematic whole, as in *Midnight Children*.

The larger the canvas, the more difficult it is to control it and harness it to a solid central concern. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) by Vikram Chandra (b. 1961) illustrates this. In this long and ambitions novel, the action moves from India to the U.S.A. and back, and covers two centuries (the nineteenth and twentieth), and the characters include historical personages like de Boigne, head of Scindia's artillery; George Thomas and Begum Samru - both wellknown adventurers; Hindu gods - Yama, Ganesha and Hanuman; and even a monkey, who, we are told, was actually a bright Brahmin boy in a previous birth. The narrative moves jerkily, with flash-backs and "dash-forwards" and there are numerous surrealistic effects, as when the gods Ganesha and Hanuman, and the protagonist, Abhay together watch the popular Hindi film, *Amar Akbar, Anthony*. We are carried along swiftly in the headlong current of this fantastic narrative, but by the time we reach the end, we find ourselves saying, "but there seems to be no 'figure in the carpet' after all."

Embarking on a fantasy is like riding a tiger, you can't dismount without being doomed; *The Narrator (1995)* by Makarand Paranjape (b. *1960)* demonstrates this truth. The narrative opens promisingly, with the protagonist, a University lecturer in English undergoing a most curious experience: there is a sudden emanation from his mouth, which soon assumes a transparent human shape. It is probably, his own uninhibited self. He calls it "Baddy" (suggesting both "buddy" and "Biddy" - a short form of "Libido"). It is soon transmogrified into Badri(nath), a self-made businessman, who proposes that the narrator and he should author a film-script together. After this, the story of the film, the doings of the narrator and the goings on of Baddy get mixed up until one is left wondering which the text is and which the subtexts are. The numerous authorial asides, such as those on the art of fiction, and the one on "those stupid and carping reviewers ... who suck up to any author who has been published in England or America, but piss on those published in India. Poor, misguided sods" only compound the general amorphousness. It is all very clever and witty; it is a pity it could not be more.

Magic Realism is a jealous mistress. Once you set up house with her, social realism becomes an unwelcome guest there. *An Angel in Pyjamas* (1996) by Tabish Khair (b.1966) provides an example. The author describes the book as "anything-but-a-novel" written by a plurality of authors: "there might even be more of me - one who tries to write a novel, one who writes this book, one who is in this book, one who is in and out, and so on and so forth." This arouses great expectations of experimental fiction, which however are sadly belied soon. The first part of the narrative, which is in the realistic vein, tells the story of the marriage of Yunus Shaikh, a young journalist, to Farida. In the second half fantasy enters, and renders the first part virtually redundant. Yunus now meets the nineteenth century poet, Ghalib, in twentieth century Delhi. The narrative gets side-tracked into the story of Sukha, an innocent Sikh peasant, unjustly accused of being a

terrorist. Here again, what begins with a realist whimper, ends with a fantasist bang. In jail, Sukha suddenly develops a halo around his head, levitates and just flies away.

Another novel that fails for a similar reason is *Ravan and Eddie* (1995) by Kiran Nagarkar (b. 1942). Thirteen-month-old Rama falls from the fifth floor of a Bombay chawl straight on the head of Victor, a young mechanic; the poor man falls down and dies, though the child survives miraculously. Its mother starts calling it "Ravan" now, to ward off the evil eye in future. Ravan and Eddie, Victor's son who is almost of the same age, grow up together, but each in his own world. A narrative which made such a spectacular beginning now settles into the grooves of social realism. There is a half-hearted attempt to enliven it by digressions, like the one on the Hindi film-world and the Portuguese colonisation of parts of India, but these appear to be merely excrescences. The author informs us that the novel was originally written as a screen-play. That, indeed, explains a lot.

One of the earliest forms of fantasy which is as old as *Aesop's Tales* is the Animal Fable. *The Crow Chronicles* (1996) by Ranjit Lar (b. 1955) belongs to this genre. The protagonist is a white crow from Bombay, who migrates to a bird sanctuary, seizes power from the ruling eagle there, and becomes a dreaded dictator called, "Khatarnak Kala Kaloota Kawa Kaw Kaw." His henchmen have equally meaningful names: "Depraven Craven Raven," the Prime Minister; "Dr Thappad Maro Sala," - the Chief Interrogator; and "Buddhhoo Bandicoot," Chief of Intelligence. A Resistance movement launched by the smaller birds ultimately destroys the tyrant's power, and he flies off to the Himalayas. While the correspondences with the human types are maintained consistently enough, the fable lacks the grounding in a specific political milieu which makes the satire in Orwell's *Animal Farm* so devastating. Nor does it possess the existential dimension that gives Swift's picture of the Yahoos in the last part of *Gulliver's Travels,* its formidable power.

Another animal fable, which seems to be more ambitious, though far less achieved, is *The Last Jungle on Earth (2000)* by Randhir Khare (b.1951). This is both a dystopia and an animal fable. It is a vision of the world, after the last Great War has been fought, leaving the earth in ruins. The few human beings that survive are now called "Animen", and are despised by the animals, which are dying for lack of water on the devastated planet. Kenyoba, an African elephant, Hindona, an Indian pachyderm, and Columbus, a tortoise from the Galapagos Island, form a team which goes out in search of water. After several adventures in which they encounter different animals, they at last find "The Last Jungle," which is also the "first", as it promises renewal of life.

As a dystopia, the narrative would appear to be deficient in the kind of rich specificity which accounts for the power of major modern anti-utopias like Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World.* An animal fable, as well, *The Last Jungle* lacks the symbolic dimension of *Animal Farm,* though there are occasional touches suggesting that the novelist is aware of the possibilities in this direction, as for instance, his depiction of the great Rat King, Thrile, who is greeted as 'Hile, Thrile' by his minions which recalls Hitler and his Nazi hordes ("Hile, Thrile" is an anagram for "Heil, Hitler").

**The Novel of Social Realism**

In spite of the fascination for Magic Realism in recent times, fiction of social realism still flourishes, and will perhaps always flourish, because the novel, born of social reality, may deviate from it, but will always continue to find external reality an eternal source of substantial artistic material. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the heyday of Salman Rushdie and Magic Realism, we have an equally strong school of social realism led by Vikram Seth (b. *1952)* whose *A Suitable Boy (1993)* won almost as much attention on its publication as *Midnight's Children* had done a dozen years earlier.

*A Suitable Boy* is a novel of large dimensions in the tradition of *War and Peace* and *Middlemarch.* As the title indicates, the central action of the novel is concerned with the search by a middle-aged society lady, Mrs Rupa Mehra, for a suitable bridegroom for her daughter Lata. Her search ends successfully when Lata finds Haresh Khanna, a young

tanning expert quite suitable. But the main strength of the novel lies not in the business of match-making, but in the depiction of the social panorama of the decade after Independence. The stories of half a dozen families are brought together to create the panorama. These families are connected either by marriage ties as in the case of the Mehras and the Chatterjees, and the Mehras and the Kapoors or by friendship like the Kapoors and the Khans; and there are sub-plots, with their own characters as well.

The wide social sweep of the novel gives Seth a chance to portray life in the fictitious northern State of "Purva Pradesh", in its various aspects. The rivalry between Mahesh Misra, a minister, and his bitter foe, L.N. Agarwal, brings the political scene to life, especially because it recalls the rivalry between the followers of Nehru, and those of the traditionalist, Purushottam Das Tandon, during the fifties. Among the aspects of the social scene revealed are the life and culture of the old north Indian aristocracy, of which the old Nawab sahib of Baitar is a typical representative; the world of the courtesans, like Saeeda Bai; Hindu-Muslim relations and their eternal fragility, with the threat of violence always hovering over them; and the unsavoury politics in academic circles, of which young Pran Kapoor, a university lecturer, has a bitter taste.

For a novel of more than thirteen hundred pages, *A Suitable Boy* has a surprisingly well-ordered structure. There are indeed very few passages and pages which the reader is tempted to skip, like the discussions on the Zamindari Abolition Bill, and the description of religious festivals and rituals etc. Impressive as Seth's achievement is in *A Suitable Boy,* one wonders whether the very nature of his central theme has not hamstrung him in his engagement with a social milieu. Society is a fluid entity, and social forces can best be presented against changing times. On the other hand, match-making is a very limited activity, severely restricted in both space and time. That is probably why Jane Austen, who also took up the theme of match-making in *Emma,* did not attempt to make it an extended family chronicle. Austen's novel has a strong moral underpinning. This dimension is altogether missing in *A Suitable Boy,* in spite of its realism and readability, which alone are not enough to make a novel a major work of fiction.

Seth's second novel, *An Equal Music (1999)* is a bold experiment. The narrative is set entirely in the West, and all the characters are European. Earlier, he had attempted the same experiment in his novel in verse, *The Golden Gate (1986),* where the setting was California. The title, "An Equal Music" is drawn from Donne's description of a state of being where there shall be "no cloud, nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but an equal music ... one equal communion and identity ... One equal eternity." An "equal music" therefore is music which has attained perfection; and since "music is the food of love," it plays a major role in a narrative of love lost and found and finally lost again.

The lovers, who are obviously intended to be "more equal" than others, are Michael Holme, a young music student in London, and Julia, a fellow student whom he meets in Vienna, where they both study music. A misunderstanding separates them, and when he is able to locate her ten years later in London, she is married and the mother of a boy. Love revives for a time, but finally Julia opts for marriage, husband and family.

So commonplace a narrative couldn't have been redeemed even by heavenly music. In fact, music, which was obviously supposed to play a major role in the narrative, actually becomes a fatal liability, because the frequent discussions of technical aspects of Western music, with their own jargon, become virtually inaccessible to the common reader (especially the non-western one). Again, Seth, like Rushdie in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet,* fails to muster adequate emotional intensity to make a more or less conventional love story credible. Perhaps, a discerning reader could have even predicted this: one remembers that in *A Suitable Boy, a* love-scene between Lata and her lover comprises an exchange in which there are such stylistic gems as: "I love you" ... "I love you too". Never was love expressed, perhaps, in more banal terms; and love and banality go ill together. Fiction of social realism has several ramifications. When the narrative is restricted mainly to a particular ethnic group it has a distinctive flavour of its own. Realism sharply

focused on a distinctive social section, bound by ties other than those of ethnicity, creates its own world. Political and historical fiction generate their own ambience; and so does regional fiction, which has the additional advantage of the setting being so evocatively realized that it becomes a fictional value in itself. And when the main emphasis is less on action than on the depiction of states of mind, on the apprehension of their own experience by the major characters, realism travels inward. Recent fiction illustrates all these major trends.

The Parsis form a minuscule ethnic group in Indian society, but they have written evocatively about their people and culture. (Curiously enough, Muslims, several times larger in number, have seldom done so, with very few exceptions: but this is obviously an issue for sociologists to investigate.) Perin C.Bharucha's *The Fire Worshippers (1968)* was perhaps the earliest example of Parsi fiction. Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants* has already been considered as a novel of Magic Realism. Social realism has attracted more Parsi novelists. *Trying to Grow (1990)* by Firdaus Kanga (b. 1959) is a semi-autobiographical novel by a very unusual protagonist: a boy born with bones as brittle as glass (hence his nickname: "Brit", a short form of "brittle"). He breaks his legs eleven times before he is five, is undersized and confined to a wheel-chair. Several cures are tried without much success, including the blessings of a miracle man called "Wagh Baba" who is finally exposed as a sex-crazy fraud. Kanga writes with remarkable objectivity and a total absence of self-pity, and observes the social scene acutely, as when he records the typical Parsi way of snapping the middle finger and the thumb to ward off the evil spirit, the importance of the number 101, and the habit of translating literally Gujarati idiom into English ("Spoil him, until one day he sits on your head"). Occasionally there is a subtle touch, as when the crippled protagonist tells us, "I always saw people from down up; that was the view from my chair."

Rohinton Mistry (b. *1952),* who lives in Canada, has written two novels in which Parsi characters play a major role: *Such a Long Journey (1991)* and *A Fine Balance (1995)*. The "long" (and hard) "journey" is the life of a middle-aged, middle class Parsi bank clerk living in a Parsi tenement in Bombay. His humdrum life is suddenly disturbed when his best friend is involved in a bank fraud, in which he too unwittingly becomes a partner. He is lucky enough to go scot free, but his friend dies in mysterious circumstances in prison. These events are obviously based on the notorious "Nagarwala Case" during the regime of Indira Gandhi. More appealing is the detailed picture of middle class Parsi life in Bombay. We hear the "metallic clatter of pots and pans ... nibbling at the edges of stillness" in the tenement-houses, as the day dawns and we see the clerk at prayer: "he recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti from around his waist. When he had wound all nine feet of its slim, sacred hand-woven length, he cracked it whip-like: once. twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the Evil One, driven away."

*A Fine Balance* is a much longer work, but is perhaps far less achieved. The "Fine Balance" is that between hope and despair, and the major characters experience both, until ultimately, life is seen to go on, in spite of everything, including the suicide of one of them. The setting is the mid-seventies, when a state of Emergency was proclaimed, suspending the fundamental rights. Mistry's picture of the excesses of the Emergency is graphic, but in his understanding of the lives and mores of the rustics he betrays an urban expatriate's ignorance at its worst. He shows two village untouchables learning (of all things) tailoring, and actually becoming practising tailors. That their teacher is a loveable Muslim old man is another suspect touch, reminiscent of Hindi films, with their machine-made plots selling national integration. Mistry is predictably on surer ground in handling his chief Parsi characters, Dina Shroff, a lonely middle-aged Parsi woman and Maneck Kohlah, a sensitive young man.

Parsi life in Bombay is also the theme of Ardesir Vakil (b. 1962) in his *Beach Boy* (1997), the story of a middle class Parsi boy in Bombay. Cyrus Readymoney is, in many ways, a typical urban teenager, interested primarily in food, films and flirtation, but he is also blessed (or cursed) with a high-flying imagination, which compels him to fantasize all

the time. Vakil's style has a strong visual quality, but there are so many factual inaccuracies in his depiction of the Indian scene that one suspects it is a case of an expatriate writer trying to jog half-forgotten memories of things with which he has lost touch long ago.

Like the Parsis, the Anglo-Indians are another minuscule minority in India. Their best representative in Indian English literature so far was Ruskin Bond, who belongs to a previous generation. In I. Allan Sealy (b. *1951),* they now have an even more effective spokesman. Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle (1988)* is a rollicking family chronicle blending history, legend, digressions and humour of various kinds. The title alludes to medieval eastern chronicles of kings, like the *Shahnama* and the *Babarnama*. The book tells the story of seven generations of the Trotters, the descendants of a French mercenary who settled near Lucknow in the eighteenth century. It ends with most of the Trotters migrating to England and Australia, after Indian Independence.

While Sealy is, on the whole, faithful to historical fact, it is clear that he is not writing a conventional historical novel. His is a postmodernist narrative, with an open form. Devices like the mock-heroic and parody are employed frequently, and the style shifts register accordingly, recalling *All About H. Hatterr*. The digressions comprise passages from archival material, dictionary entries and even recipes, including one on "Trotter-curry". Its tremendous verve, vitality and inventiveness make *The Trotter-Nanza* one of the most enjoyable novels-of the period.

Sealy's second novel, *Hero (1990),* is a departure from the Anglo-Indian theme, but he returns to it, though partially, in *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar (1998)*. This had been once an exclusive hotel in the small town of Drummondganj near the Himalayan foothills, but now it has fallen on bad days and been converted into a home for the unwanted. The owner, Jed, is a ninety-year-old eccentric Anglo-Indian, once an avid mountaineer, and supposed to be working on his *Druinrnondganj Book of the Dead*. Ritu, a young nun, arrives to look after Jed, and spends a year here, during which she makes the disturbing discovery that life in this seemingly isolated and quiet place is far more complicated than what she expected. The author claims that the division of the narrative into six parts is modeled on Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara,* but the thematic equation between the stages of development in the narrative and the changing seasons has not been adequately established, though Sealy's descriptions often have a lyrical quality.

The worlds of bureaucrats and business executives often touch each other at more than one point, and both by their very nature invite satirical treatment. *English, August: An Indian Story (1988)* by Upamanyu Chatterjee (b. *1959),* is one of the most appealing of these, as indicated by the fact that it has been made into a film. Young Agastya Sen is known as "English August" to his friends, "August" being the Anglicisation of "Agastya", and "English", a snide reference to his admiration for everything English. As a probationary officer in the Indian Administrative Service, Agastya is posted to a small town, where he finds life utterly boring, his colleagues dull, and his work mechanical. He seeks release in drugs, drinking and masturbation. Another way of seeking amusement is to invent preposterous lies about him and circulate them among his associates. (He tells one that his wife has cancer and another that he can't marry the girl of his choice because she is a Muslim). Finally, he finds that he himself does not know what exactly he wants: "He wanted nothing, it seemed only peace, but that was too pompous a word." The satire on bureaucracy has its mordant moments, but the book finally leaves us wondering whether the protagonist's existential angst is not after all a routine gesture of conformity to modern cynicism, rather than an adequately motivated state of mind.

Sequels are dangerous animals; they often end up by devouring their begetters. Chatterjee's sequel to *English, August, The Mammaries of the Welfare State (2000)* appears to prove this unwritten law of letters. We meet here "August", eight and a half years later, and discover that like the Bourbon kings, he has "learnt nothing and forgotten nothing." He still finds his work as dull, unrewarding and even useless as ever, but

his only solution to his problem is to run away from it, by taking as much leave as the state of his bank balance will allow. The callow youth as an unheroic hero can be a figure of charm; he is less so, when one finds him unchanged after a decade of experience of life.

The chief saving grace of *The Mammaries of the Welfare Slate* is that it offers a much more varied picture of bureaucracy than *English, August*. Chatterjee takes us on a whirlwind tour through the "Blunderland of Babudom," and employs several comic devices to pinpoint its absurdities. Bureaucratic red-tape, corruption, nepotism and sheer pig-headedness are expertly pilloried. There is sheer farce, as when we are told that the Secretariat is infested by three thousand monkeys which outnumber the clerks, and that a convenient method of reducing paper-work is a periodic outbreak of fire in the office. There is exuberant word-play throughout, especially the humour in absurd acronyms, as in "BOOBZ" (Budget Organization on Base Zero). Delightful as all this is, one cannot help feeling that *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* would have become a far more meaningful novel, had the author focused his efforts more on the depiction of the mind of his protagonist than on the milieu.

Ashok Banker's *Vertigo (1993)* deals with the world of Jayesh, a young marketing executive, whose colleague, Meera, represents the "new", emancipated working woman. The characters, including Jayesh's alcoholic mother, tend to be as one-dimensional as the King of Spades, and the style, staccato and frequently colloquial, deepens the general impression of mere reportage. Banker's second novel, *Byculla Boy (1997)* reveals a far more delicate touch; it shows the plight of a sensitive boy, the product of an unhappy marriage between a Hindu father and a Christian mother.

Nalinaksha Bhattacharya's *A Fistful of Desire (1997)* is a diverting account of how red tape is used by bureaucrats as a potent weapon. Chaturvedi, a senior bureaucrat uses all the tricks in the bureaucratic book (including those in the Appendix as well) to harass Hilda, the wife of a British anthropologist, who is reported as lost in the Andaman Islands. The expedition to search for him has to be cleared by the Home Ministry, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Department of Culture, the Anthropological Society of India, and the Directorate of Tribal Welfare. On top of it all, the concerned clerk is discovered to be on leave.

In N.K. Singh's *Stripped Steel (1997),* the tone is far more serious, but the fictional values far less, in evidence. Young Ripu, an executive trainee at Rajnagar Steel Plant soon becomes aware of the gulf between management theory and practice, and is shocked at the spectacle of personal aggrandisement and corruption, one-upmanship and caste-politics that unfolds before his eyes. As a senior executive himself, Singh knows the whole field thoroughly, but his language is often poor, and he compounds this by interspersing the narrative with gratuitous verses which are worse than his frequently ungrammatical prose.

Bureaucratic corruption is also highlighted in *Making the Minister Smile (1996)* by Anurag Mathur (b. *1954),* but the East-West theme which is central to it perhaps necessitates the inclusion of the novel in another group to be considered later. Bureaucracy is at the centre of Mathur's *"Are All Women Leg Spinners?" asked the Stephanian (1998)*. Mr. Thakur here is that rare thing - an efficient, honest and hard-working bureaucrat, but since he has no political godfather, nor bureaucratic mentor and no influential businessman-friend, he is an easy target of a minister's anger. He is shunted off to an obscure post, and is given an office actually situated in a toilet. Another interesting character is Baby Loon, a three-year-old precocious girl, whose father, mother, grandfather and grandmother are or were all government servants. Naturally, she lisps in bureaucratese and speaks like a "government press release." Her normal response to any question is: "I will apply my mind to it."

But it is in *Scenes from an Executive Life (2000)* that Mathur's satire is at its sharpest. In tracing here the graph of the rise and fall of Gambhir Kumar, a brilliant marketing executive in a private corporation, Mathur unfolds the drama of jealousy and

ambition, private feuds and cut-throat competition among colleagues and rivals. The satire here is more concentrated also because there are no distracting sub-plots as in his two earlier novels.

The academic world does not seem to have interested the Indian English writer much and we have had nothing so far comparable in this genre with C.P. Snow's *The Masters*. P.M.Nityanandan's nostalgic account of college days in South India, *The Long, Long Days* (1960), and M.V. Rarna Sarma's rather colourless *The Farewell Party (1976),* the reverie of a senior professor on the day of his retirement, were perhaps the only campus novels before *1980*. There are now three more additions: *The Atom and the Serpent (1982)* by Prema Nandakumar; D.R. Sharma's *Miracles Happen (1985);* and *The Drunk Tantra (1994)* by Ranga Rao (b. *1936)*. Prema Nandakumar's novel will be considered in the chapter on the Women Novelists; and *Miracles Happen* is so pedestrian in every way that one is tempted to classify it as one of the increasing number of publications whose chief value is to swell the catalogue of Indian English literature.

*The Drunk Tantra* fails for less ignominious reasons. It hardly fulfils the great expectations raised by the author's first novel, *Fowl Filcher (1987),* a boisterous, picaresque chronicle, in which the footloose hero plays many parts, and is, in turn, a dog-catcher, a drugsmuggler and a politician's factotum, enjoying each role with uniform zeal. The boisterousness is still there in *The Drunk Tantra,* but it is far less controlled. The protagonist, Hari Kishen (justifiably nick-named "Hairy") is a jovial college lecturer who finally becomes a principal, and is tipped to be a vice-chancellor. A victim of priapism, he embarks upon a sexual odyssey filled with fantastic adventures. But the narrative, moving sometimes on the realistic plane and at other moments on that of Magic Realism, falls between two stools. The thin but vital dividing line between genuine comedy and mere facetiousness is also frequently crossed.

The world of the cinema had not figured noticeably in Indian fiction in English earlier, except for R.K. Narayan's *Mr. Sampath (1949)*. Now there are at least two notable presentations: Allan Sealy's *Hero (1990)* and Shashi Tharoor's *Show Business (1991)*. Sealy records the progress of a South Indian film-star from the cinema to active politics, ending with a prime-ministership. The absurdities of both worlds are pilloried expertly. For instance, the titles of the hero's films always begin with a "K", which is supposed to bring him luck; so we have concoctions like *Khichadi Khoon Ki* and *Kabooterbaaz ka Khwab*. Similarly, he wins his seat in parliament by doing a novel national integration stunt. He takes an ordinary bucket, fastens it to a strong rope and lowers it into the great "North-South Rift". The narrative is appropriately structured like a film and divided into three parts entitled "Entrance", "Intermission" and "Exit"; while the chapters are named "Flashback", "Cliff-hanger", "Song" and "Dance".

*Show Business* also sports a film-script structure, each part being called a "Take". The hero, Ashok Banjara, resembles the Indian film star, Amitabh Bachchan, and many events in his career parallel Bachchan's own experiences. There are amusing parodies of Hindi film songs and scenarios. It is all immensely witty and funny, but rather superficial. At places Tharoor throws out thoughtful observations, like those on the curious affinities between Hindu religion and Indian cinema (both are agglomerative and eclectic; and the Hindu concept of cyclic time repeating itself is reflected in the repeated variations on a few basic themes in Indian films) and the Indian world-view and Indian Cinema (the Indian film is only an idealised representation of the Indian attitude to the world). These are acute insights, and had Tharoor developed them and given them an important place in his narrative, *Show Business* could have become a far more meaningful novel. As it is, it is only an amusing one.

The political theme had been very prominent in Indian English fiction, before and immediatly after Independence, and though an older novelist like Chaman Nahal returned to it in his Gandhi Quartet ending with *The Triumph of the Tricolour (1993),* it appears to have ceased to be of urgent concern to most novelists now. The satirical portraits of Ministers, Sevak Chand and Balak Kumar in Anurag Mathur's *Making the Minister Smile* and

*"Are All Women Leg Spinners?" Asked the Stephanian* respectively, are convincing enough, but these two novels are not political fiction. The most advertised political novel of the last two decades is P.V.Narasimha Rao's *The Insider (1998;* revised and enlarged edition *2000),* which had held out high hopes of an Indian English Disraeli appearing on the scene, when it was in the press. These hopes were soon belied. As a true insider in the Indian political process, and a close witness to many momentous political developments during the last four decades, Rao could have certainly been expected to give us many new insights; but obviously declining the challenge, Rao offers us nothing which any well-informed observer of the Indian political scene does not know. Caution was Rao's watch word as Prime Minister; but while caution may enable one to keep one's chair for five years, caution is not such stuff as quality fiction is made of. Rao's protagonist, Anand, is an idealised portrait of himself, and many other characters recall real life politicians. There are pages where the sprawling narrative becomes merely a recital of historical events. On the whole, what seems to be missing is the creative element which makes for the difference between genuine political fiction and mere reportage.

The world of diplomatic missions abroad had been scarcely touched upon earlier, except in Aamir Ali's *Via Geneva (1967)* and Ahmed Ali's *Of Rats and Diplomats (1985).* Kiran Doshi's *Birds of Passage (1998)* is a worthy successor to these novels. Like Narasimha Rao, Doshi, too is an "insider" in his own world of diplomats; he is an officer in the Indian Foreign Service, having worked for a number of years in missions in several foreign countries. He demonstrates how an insider with an eye for telling detail and a sharp comic sense can bring his own particular world to life. The novel has several hilarious scenes, including the one about the unexpected visit of a Swami, reportedly close to the Prime Minister, to Washington. A lunch hosted in his honour must have some prominent American guests; but there is no time to invite them. American employees of the Indian embassy are then made to dress up and impersonate dignitaries, including the Vice President of the U.S.A.

Two very unusual political novels are *Gestures (1986)* by H.S. Bhabra and *The Gabriel Club (1998)* by Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya (b. *1962).* Not only are they set entirely abroad, the characters in them also are entirely non-Indian. The central character in *Gestures is* Jeremy Burnham, a British career diplomat, now in his eighties, whose autobiography the novel purports to be. The setting changes from one European city to another, and the picture of diplomatic circles in Europe is detailed and authentic. The eventful decades of the nineteentwenties and thirties in Europe, the rise of Mussolini and Hitler and the growth of anti-Semitism during the period are evoked effectively.

*The Gabriel Club* is a small non-Communist secret society founded in the 'seventies in Hungary and soon broken up. Seventeen years later, the surviving members of the club are reunited, leading to a struggle between those who had collaborated with the Communist regime, and those who had resisted it. Roy-Bhattacharya, who has lived in central Europe for a number of years, is completely at home with Budapest and his Hungarian characters.

The historical novel has always had its practitioners, beginning with Mirza Moorad Alee Beg, whose *Lalan the Beragan or the Battle of Panipat* appeared in *1884.* During the last twenty years, at least half a dozen prominent historical novels have been published. Sudhir Kakar, distinguished psychologist, has now tried his hand at fiction. *The Ascetic of Desire (1998) is* set in the fourth century and deals with a very unusual subject: the life of Vatsyayana, the celebrated author of that classic of eroticism, *The Kamasutra.* "The Ascetic of Desire" is actually the title of a journal kept by a pupil of Vatsyayana, in which the Master's life-story is reconstructed from periodic dialogues between the two. Some interesting facts emerge: Vatsyayana's mother was a well-known courtesan, and probably knew more about the act of love than her own son who was a sexual novice. But, by and large, the narrative reads more like a treatise than a work of achieved fiction.

On the other hand, *In an Antique Land (1992)* by Amitav Ghosh shows how history can be enriched by imaginative reconstruction without damage being done to historical fact.

The narrative deals mainly with Bomma, a low-class Indian, bought as a slave by a Jewish merchant who comes to India in 1130 A.D., and lives in Mangalore for seventeen years, before returning to Egypt. The book turns into a travelogue when Ghosh recounts how he came across a reference to Bomma, when he had gone to England to do research in social anthropology. He actually went to Egypt to investigate the matter, and he records his encounters with the Egyptians, which generate much humour, arising mainly out of cultural misunderstanding. The narrative moves back and forth from India to Egypt, and from the twelfth to the twentieth century. *In an Antique Land* is much more than a historical novel.

Kiran Nagarkar is best known as the author of an experimental novel in Marathi, *Saha Satte Trechalis* ("Seven Sixes are Forty-three": the English translation by Shubha Slee has this title). His first attempt at historical fiction, *Cuckold (1997)* comes as a huge disappointment, because there is nothing experimental about it. Set in the sixteenth century, this is the story of Bhoj Raj, son of the great Rajput king, Rana Sanga. Bhoj marries Meera, the saint-poetess, who has dedicated her life to the worship of Krishna. She tells her husband that she is already betrothed to Krishna, hence the title "Cuckold". In his Afterword, the author tells us, "The last thing I wanted to do was to write a book of historical veracity. I was writing a novel, not a history." But the story of Meera has been told so often that it now leaves hardly any room for artistic invention. Nagarkar is perhaps more at home with the existential angst of a modern hero than with the marital woes of a sixteenth century prince.

From sixteenth century Rajasthan we move to seventeenth century Maharashtra in *Govind (1996)* and *Govind, Shivaji S Warrior* (1997), both by H. Ratnakar Rau (1914-1995). These historical exercises are of the usual "Drum and Trumpet" and "Velvet and Brocade" variety, clearly modelled on Scott, without, however, the felicities of the creator of *Ivanhoe*.

Early and mid-nineteenth century colonial India is the setting for Eric Prabhakar's *Maderia at Sundown: A Raj Trilogy* (1990). The book actually comprises three separate novellas of which the first, "The Outcaste Lovers," is the story of the marriage between an Englishman and a Bengali girl. In the second, "The Pioneers Disobliged," the central theme is the establishment of tea-plantations in India by the British; and the iniquities of the indigo plantations form the chief subject of "Law, Order and Penury", the third part. That they deal with a period largely neglected in the fictions of the Raj is perhaps the sole distinction of these narratives, which are mostly pedestrian in conception and indifferent in execution.

Mandeep Rai's *In the Shadow of the Pines* (1996) also breaks new ground in that it tries to explore the private life of Lord Dalhousie, normally known only as a diehard imperialist, armed with his Rhadamanthine "Doctrine of Lapse."

*Once Upon a Raj* (1992) by Gustasp Irani (b. 1947) shows how a refreshingly new approach can make a much-explored field yield an abundant harvest. The Indian princely state under British rule has been the subject for countless novels so far. Irani approaches the theme is a cavalierly irreverent manner, combining comedy and satire, farce and horse-play. Prince Vir, busy philandering and drinking in London, is suddenly summoned back to his State in India' by his father to contract a marriage of political convenience. He tries to escape his fate by resorting to several stratagems, which land him in one mess after another, but finally he does succeed in returning unscathed to his "women, wine and the weed" in London. Royal traditions and conventions, the mandatory tiger-hunt, stolen treasures, palace intrigues and the inevitable tensions between the Prince and the British Resident are all given a farcical colouring.

Like the Raj world, the much-discussed theme of the nexus between the East and the West appeared to have exhausted most of its possibilities, until the appearance of Anurag Mathur's *The Inscrutable Americans* (1991), which is one of the most delightful novels of the period. This is an account of a one-year sojourn in America of Gopal, a gauche Indian youth from a small town in North India. Armed with customary semi-urban prejudices and misconceptions about America and the Americans, Gopal blunders

through the country, unselfconsciously parading his very Indian English and dropping linguistic and social bricks on unwary American feet, from the time he lands on American soil up to the moment he boards the flight home. (For instance, when the Customs officer tells him "Watch your ass", Gopal's reaction is: "This is wonderful. How he is knowing we are purchasing donkey?" and when at an airport toilet, the black attendant holds out his hand for a tip, he shakes it vigorously and invites him home.) *The Inscrutable Americans* administers a much-needed literary jolt to a theme which had perhaps been treated a little too solemnly so far.

In a later novel, *Making the Minister Smile (1996),* Mathur returns partially to the same theme, but with a difference. He now shows a young American, the son of an industrialist, coming to India. Sequels, it has wisely been said, are fatal; this novel corroborates the belief. Chris Stark's inevitable reaction to India's strange mixture of poverty and pelf, idealism and cynicism, private cleanliness and public dirt, is along entirely predictable lines. The delicacy of touch and the subtle humour of the first novel now give place to rather crude satire, especially in the depiction of bureaucratic and ministerial corruption.

But the international theme still does continue to provide the customary prop to a love story. The title of *The Romantics (2000)* by Pankaj Mishra (b. *1969),* probably alludes to the quest for the Romantic ideal of love of the protagonist, Samar, a Brahmin youth from North India. He travels with Catherine, a French girl, with whom he has a passionate but all too brief affair. After it ends, he settles down as a teacher in a small school in the Himalayan foothills. The European characters, Catherine, Miss West the Englishwoman living in Benares, and Mark, another expatriate, are not adequately realised. Nor is Samar's quest projected with sufficient complexity and intensity. Curiously enough, far more credible is Samar's friend, Rajesh, a student leader, with his politics of violence in the university campus.

*Chains (2000)* by G.B.Prabhat is another recent novel dealing with the East-West nexus, but from another angle. The "chains" are those of cultural norms which the protagonist, Janakiratnan , discovers lie cannot break. He is very much of an Indian when he arrives in the U.S.A. as a youth; but when he returns to India years later as a senior executive, he cannot shed the ethics and the mores he has absorbed in the U.S.A. Unfortunately, a major part of the narrative is occupied by matters of corporate business, which should be of interest only to the initiated.

Regional fiction, a genre of which R.K. Narayan is perhaps the greatest exponent in Indian English literature continues to flourish for obvious reasons. A country so vast and varied, and displaying such tremendous diversity of regional traditions and culture cannot but produce regional fiction displaying rich variety. For reasons which need to be investigated, the South has left a much stronger mark in this area than the North, the ancient land of Tamil Nadu leading the field.

Kasturi Sreenivasan's *The Light from Heaven (1990)* makes a striking beginning, with the protagonist, Balan, a Tamil Brahmin youth, resolving to renounce his Brahmin identity and break his traditional sacred thread, because heavy reservations for the backward castes prevents him from getting admission to a medical college, in spite of his high marks. He leaves home, actually becomes a sweeper - the lowest of the low - and even marries a sweeper girl. Here was a theme with a great potential. But the complete transformations in Balan's life and its far-reaching psychological effects have not been depicted with adequate subtlety and power.

*Children of the Street (1994)* by M.C.Gabriel is open to the same criticism. This is a rather flabby chronicle of South Indian rural life, showing the changes in the life of a small village with the arrival of a money-lender and merchant, who proceeds to exploit the villagers. The changes are observed through the eyes of young Baliah, and one wonders whether this was not a wrong choice, for a boy's understanding is bound to be extremely limited.

One of the most interesting of the regional novels is Manohar Devadoss's *Green Well Years (1997)* with the ancient temple town of Madurai as its setting. This is an account of the growing years of Sundaram, a bright boy, the son of a doctor. There is nothing particularly unusual about his childhood joys and sorrows, his pranks and exploits. But it is the ambience of the temple and the town that gives them a peculiar charm. The twenty graphic sketches of the temple and the town and its environs were perhaps not necessary, though inevitable, for Devadoss is also an artist of note. One cannot, however, justify the inclusion of a sixteen page long account of the history of Madurai. It gives the novel the aspect of a guide book, which it could have well done without.

Another Tamilian, P.A. Krishnan, covers the history of four generations of an lyengar family in the course of a century in *The Tiger Claw Tree (1998). The* detailed account of old religious rituals and the fanatically fought sectarian feuds make the social chronicle appealing.

The author's refusal to translate Tamil words into English, however, does not make things easy for the non-Tamil (let alone Western) reader, who does not enjoy the rare privilege to be a Tamilian. Thus, when the author tells us that Ponna, a fabulous cook, has made *"Parappu, uppuchchar, ... satrainudu, vazhaikkai,* and *avial",* nonTarnilian taste buds are likely to remain unstirred. (There is no glossary either, in keeping with recent practice.)

The hilly region between Tamil Nadu and Kerala is the setting for *Kunjaram Hills (1984)* by S.Gopalan. This is a historical novel set in the early nineteenth century, but is not so much the history as the geography that one remembers. On the other hand, it is not geography but sociology that dominates in P.Thomas's *The Death of a Harijan (1984),* a narrative with a singularly unprepossessing title. Kerala's varied landscape (but strangely enough, not its seascape) seems to fascinate its writers. Amanuddin Khan's *A Way Through the Woods (1997)* tells the story (the autobiographical flavour of which cannot be missed) of an aristocratic Muslim's love for the daughter of a British planter. The love-story runs in conventional grooves, but Khan's lyrical descriptions of the Travancore highlands are memorable. Recently, Shreekumar Varma, great-great grandson of the artist Raja Ravi Varma, and grandson of the last ruling Maharani of Travancore, has published *Lament of Mohini (2000),* a story of five generations of an aristocratic Kerala family, which could have gained considerably by a more taut construction.

Apart from S.Mokashi-Punekar's *Nana's Confession,* already considered in another context earlier, Karnataka is represented by K.B. Ganapati's *The Cross and Coorg (1993),* with its tell-tale subtitle, "Christian Saga in Coorg" and Jaideep Prabhu's *The Middle of Life (1998),* the story of a large family of Roman Catholics in the coastal town of Mangalore. And Andhra Pradesh has a solitary notable representative: *The Vultures (1984),* a study of rural life by Vasudeva Reddy.

Goa is the scene for two novels: *Angela's Goan Identity (1994)* by Carmo D'Souza who tries to grapple rather unsuccessfully with a large subject: the breakdown of the feudal system in Goa after its integration with India. Victor Rangel-Rebeiro's *Tivolem (1998)* has a much smaller range, but a far larger share of literary values. This quiet chronicle of life in a sleepy little village in Goa in the nineteen-thirties has something of the unruffled charm of *Cranford*. Village festivals and rural superstitions, the eventful interaction between neighbours, the exploits of the village thief, and the clash between the old colonial mores and the new democratic values - all these add colour to the seemingly drab diurnal routine of the people of Tivolem.

Orissa's chief fictional spokesman is Manoj Das, whose *Cyclones (1987),* a study of rustic life, has already been considered. Nikhil Khasnabish recounts the troubles of Assam in his *For Existence (1996).*

There is a very strong contingent of Bengali writers among recent novelists, but the work of some of them like Upamanyu Chatterjee and Amit Chaudhuri can hardly be grouped under the capacious umbrella of regional fiction, since their emphasis is primarily on how their characters react to their experience, and not on the milieu as such, though

the sights and sounds of Calcutta do come to life in Chaudhuri's novels. But a novel like *Hen and Football (1992)* by Nalinaksha Bhattacharya may safely be classified under regional fiction, since it deals with an aspect of Calcutta which is peculiar to it: women's football clubs. The regional ambience is also strong in Mukunda Rao's *The Mahatma (1992).* Rao certainly gives us a feel of both the Noakhali milieu and the "moment", with painstaking attention to detail. This cannot, however, be said about his treatment of Gandhiji's strange sexual experiments during this period; he does not tell us anything new, nor does he attempt a fresh interpretation.

The North figures prominently in *In the Light of the Black Sun (1996)* by Rohit Manchanda and P.V. Dhamija's *Beyond the Tunnel (1997).* The first is set in a coal-mining town in Bihar, which is observed through the eyes of Vipul, a school boy. It demonstrates how sharp childhood perceptions are. We see with Vipul the coal-dust lying on everything like "an extra skin," and join him in his game of killing mosquitoes, and keeping the score too. *Beyond the Tunnel* is in a sense a campus novel, but the picture of the rural institute near Delhi here is not distinctive enough; the rural ambience makes a greater impact.

The Punjab unrest has been mirrored in Raj Gill's *Jo Bole (1983),* and Partap Sharma's *Days of the Turban (1986),* considered earlier. Less appealing is *Nation of Fools (1984)* by Balraj Khanna (b. *1940),* the story of the coining of age of Omi, the son of a sweet vendor, who plies his trade in a village near Chandigarh. The time is the nineteen-fifties, when the Punjab had not yet become the boiling political and social cauldron it was fated to be twenty years later. In *Sweet Chillies (1991),* Khanna deals with the later period, but with a less sure touch than Partap Sharma.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace (2000)* annexes a new territory to Indian English fiction. Set in Burma, along with India, it tells the story of the deposition of King Thebaw of Burma in 1885 by the British, who then interned him in Ratnagiri, in Maharashtra, where he died two decades later. There are two other strands in the long narrative. The first concerns Rajkumar, a Hindu orphan who comes to Burma at the age of eleven, and rises to become a big businessman. He marries Dolly, one of the waiting maids of Thebaw's queen. In the second, we meet Uma, wife of the Collector of Ratnagiri. She later becomes an active member of the India League in London. The book is thoroughly researched, but the Thebaw story comes to life in a way the other two do not; and the chronicle aspect of *The Glass Palace* seems to overshadow the fictional one.

While the novel of social realism has flourished, its opposite, that is, the fiction of the interior landscape of the mind has also had some able practitioners. Amitav Ghosh, whose versatility is enviable, has produced in *The Shadow Lines (1988)* a novel entirely different from his earlier *Circle of Reason (1986)* and the later *In an Antique Land (1992).* The "Shadow Lines" are the lines that divide people and nations and they are often insubstantial like shadows; but they can create a lot of misery and even death, as in the case of Tridib, the protagonist, who is killed in a communal riot in East Pakistan. The motif of the lines that divide begins with the partitioning of the family house in Bengal and is repeated with variations as the narrative ranges over four countries including India, East Pakistan, Sri Lanka and England. Perhaps the picture of family life in Bengal, seen through the eyes of the narrator when he was a child is far more evocative than the larger concerns to which he turns later.

After the mordant satire in *English, August,* Upamanyu Chatterjee turns to a far more inward-looking narrative in *The Last Burden (1993).* This is the unbearable burden of family ties, as Jamun the protagonist comes to realise when he returns home, after being informed that his mother is critically ill. Bitter and sweet memories of the past mingle with the tensions and irritations of the present. This could have made for an absorbing drama in the theatre of the mind; but Chatterjee, who had written such crisp and limpid prose in his earlier novel, now chooses, for some reason, to employ a leaden-footed style, with Latinized diction, chockfull of recondite words like "edaciously" and "crapulous".

*The Shadow Lines* and *The Last Burden* have at least a recognizable narrative framework. In the four novels he has published so far, Amit Chaudhuri (b. 1962) seems to

dispense with the narrative altogether. *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) is a novella with nine short stories added to it. It is an impressionistic account of a Bombay-bred Bengali boy's visit to Calcutta during a vacation. Everything appears to him to be new and strange, and every little discovery a revelation to be recorded meticulously. In *Afternoon Raag* (1993), the boy is now a student at Oxford. His sojourn at the University, and his childhood memories of Bombay and Calcutta form the staple of the book. The entire action in *Freedom Song* (1998), which deals with middle class life in Calcutta has perhaps been neatly summed up in these words of the narrator: "They woke, slept, talked. They eked out the days with inconsequential chatter." Some of the descriptions are certainly evocative. but the narrative seldom rises above mere notations of quotidian preoccupations.

Cast in the same mould, *A New World* (2000) presents middle-aged Jayojit, a failed husband, who has come home with his schoolboy son, to spend a summer vacation with his aged parents. He whiles away his time doing nothing in particular; his mother over-feeds him; his father snores away and his son plays with his plastic dinosaurs. We are even given the important information, at one place, which Jayojit "had begun to feel the first movements in his bowels and was oddly grateful and relieved."

"Delicate," "lyrical," "elegant," "sensitive," "evocative," "charming," "enchanting," - are some of the adjectives which reviewers, both Indian and Western, have used in praise of Chaudhuri. While there are passages in his work which do qualify for this praise, it is a moot point whether his fiction does not ultimately suffer from the limitations which the work of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf also betrays. Of course, unlike these two, Chaudhuri does not use the stream-of-consciousness technique, but his passion for the notation of life lived from moment to moment is akin to theirs. The difficulty with this kind of fictional fare is that it delights in small doses, but palls after larger helpings, raising the question, "What does it all amount to?" And, "who reads Richardson now?" one may ask, while Woolf, highly praised at one time is today only a minor experimenter. It will not do to invoke the name of Marcel Proust either. Its vast social range, its wealth of characters, the unity given to it by the main themes of Love and Time have made *Remembrance of Things Past* a classic of fiction in which the passing moment is turned into eternity. In the total absence of all this, the novelist is in the danger of dwindling into merely a literary Autolycus, "The snapper up of unconsidered trifles."

Two more inward-looking novels have appeared recently: A *Short History of Everything* (1998) by Gautam Bhatia (b.1952) and *The Blue Bedspread* (1999) by Raj Kamal Jha (b.1966). Ram, in the first novel is born after Independence and goes through all the normal (and some abnormal) problems and pains of adolescence, including a growing sexual awareness which produces incestuous thoughts, and the sudden realization that Atma Ram, the family servant, meant more to his mistress than a servant should. The narrative, however, has very little of the immediacy which a chronicle of childhood and adolescence should normally have. *The Blue Bedspread,* like *A Short History of Everything,* is a "memory novel," but here the memories of the narrator are sadder and even more sordid. They include being abused by a drunken father, and an uncomfortable, incestuous relationship with his sister. The "Blue Bedspread" in the title becomes a symbol of escape into a more pleasant world of imagination for both the children. Raj Kamal Jha's evocation of the past is far more sensitively done than Bhatia's, but the attitude of his protagonist to his abnormal experience remains intriguingly ambivalent, raising suspicions of masochism.

Akhil Sharna's recently published *An Obedient Father (2000)* has been described in the blurb as "an astonishing character study ... recalls Dostoevsky's guild-ridden anti-heroes." The "achieved content" of the novel, however, fails to justify this tall claim. The private life of Ram Karan, the protagonist, is tainted by his repeated rape of his own daughter, while in his public life he is an extortionist, collecting bribes for a political leader. Only the establishment of a firm symbolic equation between the two lives of the protagonist could have invested the narrative with adequate meaning and power. In the

absence of it, *An Obedient Father* only succeeds in becoming, at best, an exercise in titillation.

A new genre, viz, Science Fiction, has recently been added to the repertoire of Indian English fiction, and appropriately enough, the pioneer here is a distinguished scientist: Jayant Narlikar (b. 1938). In *The Return of Vaman* (1989), Vaman is a self-replicating robot; *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992) tells an even more exciting story, beginning with the dropping of an infant on to the earth from a dying planet. Narlikar's style is rigidly functional, but what is sauce for the scientific goose is not sauce for the literary gander. Narlikar is no Isaac Asimov (at least not yet); but he has certainly planted the Indian English flag on hitherto unexplored territory.

The most versatile of recent Indian English novelists, Amitav Ghosh, has produced in *The Calcutta Chromosome (1996)* what is in a large measure a science fiction. In fact, it won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in *1997* as the best novel in this genre, though the narrative has other dimensions as well: it has distinct elements of dystopia, mystery and ghost story in it. At the centre of the narrative is Ronald Ross's well-known research on the malarial parasite. The novelist shows how an unlettered, destitute Bengali woman intuitively understands the malaria problem, and how she even goes beyond it, by using her homely remedy successfully as a cure for syphilis. The story moves from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, the scenes dealing with which make use of computer jargon ("Let me feed a little factoid into your data base"). The sudden disappearance of Murugan, the greatest authority on Ross, on his visit to Calcutta, and the search for him add an element of mystery to this strange, many-pronged narrative.

The "Mystery novel," or fiction of espionage is also gaining ground. Earlier, the only respectable example of it was Manohar Malgonkar's *Spy in Amber (1971)*. He has now written two more: *Bandicoot Run (1982)* and *The Garland Keepers (1987)*, both against the background of Indo-Pakistan tensions. They both prove once again that Malgonkar is a superb story-teller. Notable-among other examples of this genre are: K.R. Rai's *Telltale Teeth (1982);* N.C.Menon's *Mystery on the Mountain (1986); The Hunt for K (1992)* by Ramesh Menon; Ashok Banker's *Ten Dead Admen (1993);* and Shashi Warner's *Night of the Krait (1996), The Orphan (1998),* and *Sniper (1999)*. Vikram A. Chandra's *The Srinagar Conspiracy (2000)* employs the format of a thriller to study the Kashmir problem. *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes (1999)* by Jamyang Norbu (b. *1944)* describes the adventures of Holmes in Tibet; the narrator is Hurree Chunder Mooket jee, a character in Kipling's *Kim*. Norbu perfectly recreates the peculiar English Hurree Chunder would have used if he had played Watson to Holmes. This graceful literary tribute to Kipling's *Kim* and Arthur Conan Doyle tells us a lot about Tibetan life and culture.

Earlier, the only significant children's writer was Ruskin Bond, who has to his credit more than thirty books of stories and poems for children, including *The Blue Umbrella (1968)* and *Grandfather's Private Zoo (1969)*. The last two decades have witnessed a significant growth of children's literature. In addition to novels like Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories,* Farrukh Dhondy's *Poona Company* and Narlikar's *The Return of Vaman* which can be read with profit by children and adults alike, there are a number of books specifically for children. Arup Kumar Dutta's (b. *1946)* novels like *The Kaziranga Trail (1980), The Blind Witness (1985), Revenge (1986), Crystal Cave (1987), Smack (1990)* and *Trouble at Kolongjarn (1997)* can go a long way in weaning Indian children away from Enid Blyton. Partap Sharma (b. *1939),* playwright and novelist, has published four children's books, including the popular series on Dog Detective Ranjha which appeared as a cartoon strip in the children's magazine *Tinkle*.

Novels dealing with areas of experience largely unfamiliar to the common reader include: *The Flags of Convenience (1982)* by Dilip Mukerji which introduces us to the world of international shipping; J.C.Bhatt's *The Jagmohan Millions (1982),* in which we find ourselves in the world of big business: and Deepchand Behary's *That Others Might Live (1990)* which is unique in the annals of Indian English fiction in that it tells the fascinating story of the problems of the early Indian immigrants in Mauritius.

Among other novels of the period may be mentioned: B.L.Vohra's *The Thorn (1983);* Kewlian Sio's *What a Vieiv (1985),* a novella, the unprepossessing title of which does no justice to its expert portrayal of adolescent experience, redolent of a mood of nostalgia, so characteristic of this author; Sanjib Datta's *The Judas Tree (1985);* Akhileswar Jha's *Lessons in Love (1988)* and *The Motorcycle Mafia (1995);* Aniruddha Bahal's *A Crack in the Mirror (1991);* Banomali Goswami's *Circles of Hell (1991)* and *Untouchables (1994)* - a novel which (not unsurprisingly) compares extremely unfavourably with Mulk Raj Anand's novel on the same subject, which is now one of the classics of the world of fiction; Dilip Thakore's *Succession Derby (1991),* a highly entertaining picture of the corporate world, and its philosophy of one-upmanship, which would have been a far better novel but for the author's obsession with sex; R.K. Laxman's *The Messenger (1993),* a novel dealing with a young journalist's dilemmas, the best thing about which is the cartoon on the cover; R. W. Desai's *Frailty, Thy Name is Woman (1993),* which is probably the first Indian English novel written entirely in the epistolary form; Vijay Singh's *Whirlpool of Shadows (1993);* Jayabroto Chatterjee's *Last Train to Innocence (1995);* the travel writer Pico Iyer's *Cuba and the Night (1996)* set in Cuba; Tahir Shah's *Sorcerer's Apprentice (1998);* and *A Diplomatic Encounter (1999)* by S.K.Banerji. Two promising first novels published recently are: *The Beauty of These Present Things* (2000) by Avtar Singh, and *Bombay-Wallah* (2000) by Shiv Sharma, the Bombay ambience in both of which leaves a deeper impression than the characters.

# Raja Rao

Raja Rao as a novelist differs both from Anand and R. K. Narayan. His view of life is characterised by a spiritual vision. Born in a Kannada family, Raja Rao was much influenced by his grandfather who was spiritually inclined. Later, he was deeply influenced by sages like Pandit Taranath of Tungabhadra Ashram and Sri Atmananda Guru of Trivandrum. Raja Rao's passionate attachment to the Indian ethos has been actually strengthened by his long exile from India from 1929 when he sailed for France to do research on the Mysticism of the West.

*Kanthapura* (1938) is considered to be a political novel that depicts the influence of Gandhian struggle for freedom in Indian villages. Kanthapura, a small Indian village is transformed completely under the influence of freedom struggle. Moorthy, the Gandhian leader of the village influences people across caste and class and unites them for the common cause of freedom. He uses *Harikatha* and legendary stories to spread the message of freedom in the orthodox society of the village. They join hands with the workers of the coffee Plantations and court arrest. Policemen create terror in the whole village and villagers escape to nearby places. When Moorthy and his comrades come back from jail, Kanthapura is completely transformed. Most of the land is purchased by people of Bombay and were building houses of the new type. *Kanthapura* is written in the form of a *sthalapurana*. The Kanthapuriswari temple was at the centre of the life of the people of the village. The mythical story about Kenchamma and how the Goddess protected the village from a demon makes the *sthalapurana* more convincing.

*Kanthapura* is generally viewed as a political novel, perhaps the only political novel written by Raja Rao. It is true that the novel concentrates on the political theme of how the message of freedom transforms the innocent people of a village. To a certain extent, *Kanthapura* presents a realistic portrayal of the filtering of Gandhian struggle into Indian villages and how it unites people, divided on caste lines. The references to various struggles connected with Indian freedom struggle and the local agitations lead by Moorthy fills the fictional space with political events. The political nature of the novel is not limited to its theme. The form of the novel also shows political orientation as it adopts a unique style of narration. The narrator is an old lady. The style adopted is that of *Harikatha*. Raja Rao uses Kannada variety of English by incorporating Kannada terms in English as it is. Certain phrases and names are translated as it is into English, "those sons of concubine," "Waterfall Venkamma" etcetera are examples. These experiments with English language can be treated as a political act of struggle against the hegemony of the British English. Thus, *Kanthapura* can be read as a political novel in wide variety of ways.

*The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is the story of Ramaswamy, a young Hindu, who goes to France to do research in history. He marries Madeleive, a lecturer in History but the relationship ends very soon when he comes to realise the gulf between the Indian and the Western concepts of marriage and love. Ramaswamy met Savitri, a Cambridge educated modern girl, but Indian to the core. His love for Savitri develops beyond the physical and becomes an instrument for higher love. The novel ends with Ramaswamy setting out to go to his Guru, who alone can destroy his ego. The novel, to a certain extent is autobiographical in nature. The theme of true love and marriage thus lead to the larger theme of quest for self-knowledge suggested in the title, *The Serpent and the Rope*. The novel adopts a *puranic* structure, blending story, philosophy and religion. The novel also attempts to use the rhythm of Sanskrit speech on English. The style is very much Indian as he attempts to import Indian speech into English.

*The Cat and the Shakespeare* (1965) is considered to a metaphysical comedy. The past and present, fantasy and reality are mingled together in this fable. It is the story of a cat and two clerks – Ramakrishna Pai and his neighbour Govindan Nair. Ramakrishna Pai has a dream of marrying Shanta and building a big house. Govindan Nair's philosophy of life is that one should surrender oneself completely to the supreme energising principle in the universe which he symbolically calls the 'mother cat.' The Rationing Officer, the boss

of Nair dies of heart failure when the cat sits on his head. The cat is tried in the court. Ramakrishan Pai fulfils his dream of building a house and Nair is relieved of all problems. The epigraph drawn from Atmanandaguru explains the philosophical foundation of the novel. "There is the scent and the beauty (form) of the flower. But who knows what a flower really is?" This point to the central theme of the book – the affirmation of the ultimate reality behind all appearances. The cat symbolism is taken from the cat-hold theory (marjara-nyaya) which believes that man's surrender is so total that it involves complete dependence on the Divine as in the case of the young kitten lifted by the scuff of the neck by the mother-cat. Both Pai and Nair are examples of the cat-hold theory in operation and Nair's career illustrates the extreme aspect of the theory which holds that the pardoning God loves the sinner even more than he does the pure. Shakespeare in the title is an afterthought. It refers to several significant suggestions to the cat in Shakespeare.

*Comrade Kirillov* (1976) was originally written in English, but first published in French. The English version is a revised text. Kirillov was actually Padmanabha Iyer, an Indian intellectual. The name of Kirillov is that of a dedicated fanatic by that name in Dostovesky's *Possessed*. The novel is set in the 1930s and 1940s in London. It comprises Kirillov's opinion on Communism, the British, the war, the Indian freedom struggle, etcetera. He marries Irene—a Czech girl who shares his view. On her death he moves to Moscow. Though a professed Communist, Kirillov is presented as a true Indian at heart.

Raja Rao's novels are classes apart from R.K. Narayan's and Anand's novels. Preoccupied with philosophical and metaphysical issues they lack the social commitment and awareness that the other two writers share.

## Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand, known as the committed writer, was a novelist, a short story writer, essayist and an art critic whose preoccupation was always with the underdogs. As a result, his writings became a crusade against exploitation and discrimination. Anand, from his student days itself, actively participated in the political struggle for freedom. While in college, he was arrested and imprisoned for participating in the Gandhian movement. Later in England, he came in touch with *avant-garde* movements and left-wing politics.

Anand's vision as a writer is shaped by both the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions. He considers it as the "double burden" on his shoulders; "the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalayas of my Indian past." But his relation to both Indian and Western philosophical traditions is critical, thereby ambivalent. While adapting the rationalist and humanist traditions from the West, Anand is opposed to the authoritarian imperialism. Similarly, while admiring the creative traditions of Indian art, literature and philosophy, he is dead against the discriminatory tendencies of Indian past. Anand derives his socialist faith and vision of an egalitarian society mainly from the West.

Anand's first novel *Untouchable* (1935) was a revolutionary departure from the tradition of Indian fiction writing. He selected Bakha, a sweeper boy as the protagonist of *Untouchable*. According to C.D.Narasimhaiah, "Bakha seems to be a typical representative untouchable exemplifying the plight of not only the so-called Hindu untouchables but also of dispossessed people everywhere."(The Swan and the Eagle, 110) The novel *Untouchable* describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcaste colony of a North-Indian cantonment town. The humiliating experiences that Bakha suffers everyday are repeated on this particular day. He is beaten and abused for touching a high-caste Hindu. He is not allowed to enter the temple. Moreover, he is cursed for polluting a wounded boy whom he helps in reaching his home. In the end, three alternative solutions are suggested. Colonel Hutchinson, of the local Salvation Army suggests that Christianity is the only solution of untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi advocates social reform and equal rights for all Indians. The third solution is put forward by a modernist poet who advocates the introduction of the flush system. At the end, Bakha is found "thinking of everything he heard, he could not understand it all." But signs of social change are indicated in the last part of the novel. "His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand."

The novel also raises questions of existence of the untouchable. The abominable effects of discrimination keep the untouchables at a marginal position and alienate them from the mainstream. *Untouchable* interrogates this issue and poses the problem before the society. In the two novels that were published after *Untouchable, Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), Anand turns to the plight of another class of the underprivileged. The range and scope of Anand's fiction have widened and themes were expanded to include a lot of working class and the confrontation between the urban and the rural. *Coolie* depicts the pathetic Odyssey of Munoo, an orphaned village boy from Kangra Hills, who sets out in search of livelihood. He works as a domestic servant, a coolie, a factory worker and a rickshaw puller at various locations from Bombay to Simla. Munoo's plight is from that of a simple villager who is forced to migrate from the village to the city in order to support himself. *Coolie* has a wide canvas incorporating in its fold variety of characters from all classes of society and its wealth of eventful incident. The background of *Two Leaves and a Bud* is a tea-plantation in Assam. Gangu, a poor Punjabi peasant is lured by fabulous promises to join the plantation. Compelled to work in unhygienic conditions and starved, he is shot dead by a British officer who tries to rape Gangu's daughter. The novel presents how the White man deem themselves racially superior and the Indian labourer a sub-human being with no rights of his own.

*The Big Heart* (1945) describes the life of a young coppersmith Ananta who has a generous heart. Ananta was an enlightened member of the Thathiar community. He stands for the abolition of the caste system, leading to conflicts and tensions. He believes in the

unity of the labourers in the machine age. Mahatma Gandhi's followers share Gandhi's distrust for machines. Ananta, on the other hand, accepts the importance of machines, as well. The evils that the machines bring can be overcome if labourers, instead of Capitalists are able to control them. Ananta is confident that they will one day master machines. Just as in the *Untouchables*, The entire action takes place on a single day.

The next two novels written by Anand were autobiographies in nature. *The Private Lie of an Indian Prince* (1953) and *Seven Summers* (1951) belong to this group. *The Private Lie of an Indian Prince* describes the neurotic world of the Prince. The hero in this novel has a mental breakdown that Anand had experienced. But the four novels that are considered to be truly autobiographical are *Seven Summers* (1954), *Morning Face* (1968), *Confession of a Lover* (1976) and *The Bubble* (1984).

*Seven Summers* chronicles the first seven years of the life of Krishna Chander. Krishna's sensitive soul is stirred by the poverty and squalor that he sees around. He befriends with boys belonging to backward sections of the society and criticises social evils and malpractices around him. *Morning Face* describes the growth of the hero from his childhood to adolescence. His nationalist and patriotic feelings, his love affairs and his growth into a revolutionary are presented in it. *Confession of a Lover* traces Krishna's development from adolescence to manhood. He takes his B.A. Degree and decides to leave India. *The Bubble* narrates Krishna's five years stay in England as a scholar engaged in preparation of a doctoral thesis.

The strength of Anand's writings lies in its "vast range, its wealth of living characters, its ruthless realism, its deeply felt indignation at social wrongs, and its strong humanitarian compassion." Anand could be seen as an eternal crusader against social discrimination and exploitation. It is his compassion for the poor and humanitarian attitude towards the marginalised that made him a writer. Moreover, Anand writes in a realistic style using Indian words, phrases, expression and proverbs in English. He succeeded in bringing the life of the marginalised to the centre stage and in using fiction as a tool for social transformation.

# R.K.Narayan

R.K.Narayan's writing is marked by gentle, irony and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy. His style stands poles apart from Anand's militant humanism. Narayan was a Tamil Brahmin who spent major part of his life in Mysore. His novels are located in Malgudi, an imaginary small town in South India. His first novel, *Swami and His Friends* (1935) depicts the experiences of a schoolboy, Swaminathan and his friends with its usual rounds of pranks and punishments. Though the experiences narrated are quiet ordinary, it is Narayan's humourous style and understanding of the boy's wills that makes it memorable.

*The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) is the story of Chandran, a sensitive youth caught in a conflict between the Western and eastern approaches to life. He even thinks of becoming a sanyasi. Finally, he returns home to find that traditional arranged marriage is not, after all, an imposition. We feel sympathy for Chandran even while we laugh at him. *Dark Room* (1938) is a serious novel that depicts the silent suffering of Savitri. On finding that her husband is infatuated with a working woman, Savitri leaves her husband and her children. At the end, Savitri returns to her unrepentant husband. *The English Teacher* (1946) centres around the little middle class house of Krishnan, a young college lecturer. The first half describes the petty problems of the daily business of living. At the end of the first part, his young wife Suseela passes away. Krishnan establishes connection with the spirit of his dead wife and resolves to devote the rest of his life to a children's school.

*Mr Sampath*(1949) deals with the making of a mythological film. During the shooting of the climax scene, strange developments occur outside the official scenario. Ravi, the young artist, who had fallen in love with the actress Shanti, tries to carry her off. The picture, *The Burning of Kama* is ruined. Ravi lands in a police lock up. Sampath retires to the rest house with Shanti. Sampath who goes from one adventure to another, faces his failures with equanimity.

*The Financial Expert* (1952) is the story if the rise and fall of Margayya, who finds living by sitting in front of a bank and helping villagers with their loans. Humiliated by the Secretary of the bank, he fasts and worships Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth for forty days. He becomes extremely rich by printing and distributing a pornographic book by Dr. Pal, an eccentric sociologist. With this money he embarks on a money-lending career which flourishes beyond his expectations. Margayya's desire to lift himself from poverty to prosperity turns into an intense passion for wealth. In the end, he returns to his original position and realises the fundamental truth that happiness lies in contentment and reunion of human relations.

*The Guide* (1958) is considered to be the finest novel written by Narayan. Raju, the railway guide turned out to be a guide to Rose, the beautiful wife of Marco, a research scholar. Later he guides the villagers, but always fails in guiding himself through the right path. Raju's transformation from a railway guide to a half reluctant guru is worked through a neatly woven pattern of ironic complications. But the irony raises several disturbing questions about human motives and actions, compelling us to ponder problems such as appearance and reality, the man and the mask, ends and the means. The narrative technique is also subtle in *The Guide*. The narrative alters between past and present, "swinging backward and forward." He uses double narrators to deal with the past and the present. The novel that opens with Raju is the ruined village temple ends in the same locality with his enforced death, thus giving the tale a perfectly circular structure.

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962) is the retelling of the Hindu fable of Bhasmasura in the modern context. Bhasmasura, the *rakshasa* was granted the boon of reducing anyone he touched on the head to ashes by Lord Shiva. He was finally tricked by Vishnu, into touching himself to death. The modern Bhasmasura in the novel is Vasu, a selfish man who kills himself while he was waiting to kill the temple elephant. The accident occurs when he slaps a mosquito that buzzed near his forehead.

*Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) deals with the Gandhian freedom struggle. It also presents a love story ending in the union of Sriram, a weak-willed hero and Bharati, a

Congress volunteer. *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) portrays the clash of generations through the Gandhian Jagan on the one side and his son, Mali, who returns from U.S.A. with a Half-American- Half Korean girl, on the other.

*The Painter of Signs* (1976) deals with the relationship between Raman, the young, unattached sign-painter and 'Daisy' of the Family Planning Centre. Finally Raman loses both his would-be-wife and his aunt.

**Malgudi**

Narayan's novels reveal a strong sense of place. The common background to his novels, Malgudi develops from novel to novel. Malgudi, in his early novels, is neither village nor city but a town of modest size. River Sarayu flows by its side. Other landmarks of Malgudi are Nallappa's Mango Grove, the Mempi Forest, Malgudi Railway Station and Albert Mission Hospital. Malgudi comes under the influence of the Nationalist movement for freedom and other socio-political transformations. Just as in other parts of the nation, teh old and the new, the traditional and the modern jostle together in Malgudi. Malgudi, thus, could be considered to be a microcosm that represents the whole of India.

**Humour/Irony**

Narayan's views of life are essentially humorous. He includes various methods, including irony to create humour. In Narayan's fiction, irony is ingrained not only in occasional episodes of narrative, but it is built in phenomenon in plot, character and style. Most often, Humour originates out of irony. It is devoid of satiric spirit of condemnation. He observes the follies of the people of Malgudi with a humanistic vision.

# Sri Aurobindo

Of all the Indo-Anglian poets, Sri Aurobindo alone has the distinction of being a major poet critic—writing poetry and writing on poetry. He has left a significant body of criticism on the nature of poetry which is strikingly original, profound and even provocative. The hallmarks of his poetic genius are inspiration, sublimity, mastery of both, the lyric and epic forms, profound thought, symbolism and spiritualism and commendable technical devices.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic career covers a period of sixty years from 1890-1950. His early poetry is romantic, decadent and lyrical whereas his later poetry is imaginatively bold, mystical and original. His early poetry is represented by 'Songs to Myrtilla' (1895), 'More Death' (1895), 'Urvasie' (1896), 'Love and Death' (1921), 'Ahana and Other Poems' (1915) and 'Baji Prabhon' (1922) etc. The later poetry includes 'Poems' (1941), 'Poems : Past and Present' (1946), 'Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol' (1950-51) and 'Last Poems'. His 'Savitri' represents the peak of his poetic development and achievement, and the basis of his reputation as a poet.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the function of poetry is neither to teach truth, nor to pursue knowledge, but to have a life of its own to embody beauty and give delight. The future poetry, therefore, should be directed towards the forthcoming of the self of man and the large self of the universe. Poetry should enable to enjoy and realize the "Life Divine". He claimed that poetry is the 'Mantra of the Real' and considered the poem as the 'Rose of God'.

Sri Aurobindo thinks that there is a popular misconception about the essence of poetry. Both the ordinary reader and the intellectual critic are guilty of this error. The ordinary reader thinks that poetry is just an aesthetic pleasure for imagination, a sort of elevated pastime. But this pleasing appeal to the imagination and the senses is only the first element. Great poetry is aesthetically satisfying, but at the same time it goes far beyond the senses, imagination and intellect. These three elements are only channels or instruments. "The true creator and true hearer of poetry is the soul".

The intellectual critic, on the other hand, takes the view that poetry is a matter of exquisite technique. Certainly technique is important and is the first step towards perfection. But there are so many other steps, as well. Even perfect craftsmanship does not constitute great poetry. For, in the mysterious chemistry of poetry, form and technique, however indispensable, are not the determinant factors. In fact, poetry determines its own form. Form is not imposed on it. It comes spontaneously as poetic inspiration takes hold of the soul and seeks its own utterance.

Great poetry, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is vibrant, incantatory and rhythmic speech which rises from the heart of the seer when it is inspired by the Infinite. It is or should be the Mantra of the Real. Poetry as Mantra is possible only when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one. These three elements are:

(i) The highest intensity of rhythmic movement.

(ii) The highest intensity of style achieved by the integration of verbal-form and thought substance.

(iii) The highest intensity of the Soul's Vision of Truth.

Rhythm is of primary importance in poetic utterance. But it is not merely metrical rhythm. Metre, of course, is important to poetry both as an artistic device and as a truth of psychology. The metrical rhythm invests the poetic material with beauty. It is also an aid to memory. That was why in ancient India all kinds of knowledge were rendered in poetry. Yet, mere metrical rhythm is only a jog-trot of Pegasus. In great poetry there is a deeper and more subtle music, a rhythmical soul-movement, entering the metrical form and even over flooding it.

The metrical rhythm is only the physical basis of this soul rhythm and it is the latter that matters. The conductor of this orchestral movement is the soul itself, coming

forward to get its work done by its own higher unanalytic methods. The result is something as near to wordless music as word music can get. And at its highest, this soul rhythm is in harmony with the cosmic metres which in the Vedic view sustained the galactic movement of the universe itself.

The highest intensity of style is another hallmark of poetry as Mantra. In this connection, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between the aims of prose style and poetic style. Prose style aims at intellectual comprehension while poetic style caters to the imaginative or spiritual comprehension. At its highest, the latter makes one see not only by imagination but by the soul. This superior, higher style is achieved by tapping the soul-value of words. In poetry, words have a life of their own. They have a sound-value and a thought-value. It is the artistic and spiritual integration of these values that confers soul-value to words.

The style of such poetry corresponds to its substance. Between the word and vision, there are certain equations. Various kinds of style - the vital, the emotional, the intellectual and the imaginative are ways of working out these equations. But none of these, as such, rises to the level of poetry as Mantra. Yet each of these can rise to this intensity if it can achieve the integration of the verbal form and thought substance and make us see.

Vision is the characteristic power of the poet. The 'Kavi' is the seer and revealer of Truth. Great poets have been those who have had a powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of life and rendered that vision in revelatory utterance. But of late, thought appears to dominate our vision as we call upon the poets to offer an intellectual explanation to the enigma of modern life. But thought is no substitute for vision. In poetry as Mantra, it is vision which pours itself in to thought images. The Mantra is not in its substance. Nor does it form poetic enunciations of philosophical truths. It is the rhythmic revelation of the soul's sight of God, Nature and Man.

This vision is a soul-view. It comes from the poet. He creates it out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly. The outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its task. In fact any object may trigger that vision. The only thing is that the poet should be able to go beyond the object and get in to the light of that which it has the power to reveal. The object is then submerged by the light in a similar way when at the highest level the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision. The spirit alone remains.

Sri Aurobindo's poetry is not only full of grandeur but also rich in form. He did not attempt a meter that he did not make his, by a sovereign right. With the great English measure, blank verse, he is of the supreme class. He has also succeeded in adapting the epic hexameter and other classical meters and showing the possibility of a really quantitative English poetry.

# Kamala Markandaya's Indian Women Protagonists

Across the centuries, woman has been the focus of many literary works. In this age of development and flux, occurring in almost every field, this major bulk of the population cannot be easily neglected. Indian writers in English have also come out of their cocoons of 'non-attachment' and 'non-involvement' and have started acknowledging the status of the Indian woman in a, hitherto, male-dominated society. The concept of Indian womanhood is as divergent as the country itself and has undergone drastic and dramatic changes from era to era. India has travelled from her glorious past to the present state of degeneration, from spiritual ascendancy to communal clashes, from captivity to independence, from agrarian revolution to cyber technology. The role of the Indian woman has also changed from that of deity to devadasi, from shakti to abala and from a home-bound creature to a professional.

Every human being is conditioned by his/her race and milieu. The women of India reflect the respective society they live in. Surveying the history and vicissitudes of the status of Indian women one observes that women once enjoyed considerable honour, freedom and privileges in both private and public fields. But with the centuries rolling by, the situation changed adversely for women. Medieval forms of victimisation like child marriage and *sati* are replaced by female infanticide and more recently by amniocentesis. The average Indian woman has now begun to stir out of stoical acceptance of her tradition bound roles, yet "the air of 'freedom' which touches the women is like the kite though flying yet, being stringed into the manipulative and manoeuvring hands of their men". The figure of the Indian woman struggling her way through an exploitative and sexually discriminated world serves as an appropriate symbol and befits a close study.

Post-Independence writer, Kamala Markandaya draws her canvas on the changing socio-economic scene, thereby, making her novels a wonderful kaleidoscope. She shows dexterity in her selection of characters and situations. Her characters represent a wide spectrum - peasants, queens and concubines, rural and city-breds, English officials in India and Indian emigrants in England. An adept teller of tales, "she claims to be on the side of the human and life, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence". Woman's struggle is one that ranges from survival at the sheer physical level to the quest for identity. Most women have to grapple with conflicting situations at home and outside, as well. In Markandaya's wide repertoire of women characters, ranging from the harassed, victimised peasant women to the princesses of *havelis* we discern the plight of the Indian woman crippled by her sex, society and economic condition.

Traditional patriarchal Indian society confines woman to the taboo-ridden path. Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* - Markandaya's debut novel, exemplifies the large mass of underprivileged rural women whose backs are bent with ill-rewarded labour. She narrates her life with tenant farmer Nathan "who was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife, whom he took at the age of twelve". They gradually become victims of two evils: the zamindari system and industrialisation. The construction of a tannery changes the face of their village and alters the lives of its inhabitants "in a myriad ways". Misfortunes engulf her: one of her sons is killed at the tannery, the crops fail, another son dies of starvation, her daughter becomes a prostitute and finally they are evicted from the land, their only hope. Nathan and Rukmani remove themselves to town and there, their attempt to be united with their son fails: Nathan dies under the strain of breaking stones in a quarry and Rukmani returns with her adopted leper son to the village.

Degradation of the female is neatly woven into the fabric of this novel. When Ira is born Rukmani sheds "tears of weakness and disappointment, for what woman wants a girl for her 'firstborn?' It is male progeny that elevates the status of a woman in our society and not a "pulling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind". Illiteracy and ignorance often breed fear and superstition. Though a literate, Rukmani also seeks the power of the stone lingam to fight sterility. In her despair she crosses the social taboo in consulting a foreign male doctor. But then science

triumphs, as she begets sons one after another. She has scarcely any means to feed her sons.

Literature, as well as the society around us, reinforces the image of the Indian woman as *pativrata*, the paragon of all virtues. Yet the same society does not chastise a husband for marital disloyalty. Rukmani is shocked to learn about the infidelity of Nathan. “Disbelief first, disillusionment, anger, reproach, pain. To find out, after so many years, in such a cruel way”. The callousness with which he asserts himself as the father of Kunthi’s sons is unbearable to her. Neither does he hesitate to rob her of rice during famine to provide for Kunthi.

That the life of an Indian woman runs an unpredictable course becomes evident when we witness the fate of Ira. The docile girl who accepts the man of her parents’ choice as her husband is soon sent back accused of being barren, “a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child”. The odds that weigh heavily against her toss her life. In her anxiety and desire to regain her position she seeks the help of Dr. Kenny. But it is too late for her husband had already re-married. She withdraws into “that chill hopelessness”. Ira again bears eloquent witness to the fact that prostitutes are made, not born. During the famine she sells her body, for there is nothing else to sell, to feed her ailing brother. Though she fails to save his life, she who is deprived of a happy married life on account of her barrenness gives birth to an albino child. The traditional Indian society, does not welcome such a child nor does it respect an unmarried mother. Saddled with an illegitimate child, Ira fights her battle alone.

Indian womanhood has “to be explored, experienced, and understood in its entire vicissitudes, multiplicities, contradictions and complexities”. Indian woman’s journey from the cradle to the tomb passes through different stages, playing familial roles. Yet she remains an enigma. Misfortunes, loss and societal sanctions restrict her freedom but they can never destroy the spirit within. Markandaya’s women, though victims of nature and society never give in completely. Beneath the veneer of fragility and weakness lies an inherent strength. They are like leaves of grass: the humblest, the most downtrodden, continually being rooted up and continually reappearing, pushing their way, surviving all pressures and sprouting again with vigour and vitality. Sensitive, sensible and intelligent, they possess life-affirming qualities.

Misfortunes engulf Rukmani. Her family is tormented not only by socio-economic factors but also by the vagaries of nature. Yet she survives the ordeal by remaining the axis, around which other lives revolve. Reluctant to run way from her responsibilities she accepts her roles as wife and mother. When the gods turn a deaf ear to her prayers for a son she boldly seeks the help of a foreign doctor. The same resolution, coupled with her anxiety for Ira’s future drives her once again to jeopardize her situation. A woman of spirit, she rises up against the officials when they warn her not to demand any compensation for the death of her son in the tannery. Accepting her loss she asks, “What compensation is there for death?” Her serenity, calmness “and stoic acceptance of the inevitable help her endure her ordeal. It enables her to forgive Nathan’s pre-marital and extra-marital affairs. A new peace dawns upon them “freed at last from the necessity for lies and concealment and deceit...”. There is dignity in her acceptance of misfortunes and sorrows as essential ingredients of life. This elevated outlook is the result of her heroic struggle and mute suffering. She stands as the symbol of the all encompassing, loving and forgiving mother figure. As Krishna Rao comments, “the real truth of the novel is the spiritual stamina of Rukmani...”.

Even when a woman is not biologically a mother, she can function as one emotionally. As a young girl Ira was a surrogate mother to her brothers. When her youngest brother is born “Ira’s feminine instinct of nurturance takes precedence over hurt, sorrow and resentment”. She becomes a “harlot,” a “common strumpet” not to quench any burning fire in her body but to feed her ailing brother. A strange and bewildering change comes over her. She ceases to be a child “to be cowed or forced into submission, but a grown woman with a definite purpose and an invincible determination”.

She defies society, but fails to give life to her brother. What she gets in return is an illegitimate albino child. Physical or mental aberrations of an offspring cannot annihilate the innate love and understanding of a mother. Unperturbed, Ira accepts proudly her child's 'fairness.' "Her bearing astounded and even awed" the fault-finders. Krishnaswamy lauds the inborn gentleness and resilience with which "the likes of Ira and Rukmani care and nurture all around them, even under the worst circumstances".

Compared to Nalini in *A Handful of Rice,* Rukmani is relatively free. The fun-loving, bright eyed girl confronts the realities and hardships of life once she is married to Ravi. When Apu, the anchor of the family dies, poverty grinds them down. Trapped with his responsibilities of running joint-family, Ravi's gentleness towards Nalini evaporates and she becomes the victim of his angry outbursts. Even when his frustrations and cantankerous feelings ventilate through brutality imposed on her, she does not complain. "Nalini took it stoically; she was used to obedience and saw no point in banging her head against a stone wall". When she is accused of infidelity she has no other way but to go to her sister. Yet when Ravi comes to call her back she obeys unquestioningly. "'Come,' he said, and she rose at once obediently". She cannot function as an autonomous being when even her existence is at stake.

Though not of the calibre of Rukmani or Ira, Nalini survives the pressures of their deteriorating financial position and the brutality of her husband. Her gentleness and sensibility enable her to guide Ravi gradually from the clutches of the underworld. In spite of his fury and fretfulness, her tender and loving approach restores peace in the family. "She was constant, a rock to which he could cling and keep his head level when his views and values began their mad dance". Her children take refuge in her constant and undemanding love. Her first born's fatal sickness and death drain out all her energy. Yet she does not allow herself to be shattered, for she knows "life has to be lived and other children have to be looked after". In this urban atmosphere of poverty, exploitation and corruption, Markandaya highlights a woman's power of endurance, patience and inexhaustible love. This unflinching feminine spirit armours the women in their struggle for a handful of rice.

Even amidst material prosperity, "many women live with harrowing feelings of psychological insecurity, lack of personal status" and a sense of alienation. Though better equipped with education and wealth than their counterparts in the earlier novels self-fulfilment becomes a distant and unattainable goal to the women in *Some Inner Fury*. It chronicles the repercussions of the freedom struggle on the lives of educated upper-class women. Premala epitomises the traditional concept of upper-class women. Hailing from a conservative Hindu family she tries to remould herself to her husband's modern anglicised tastes ''though she tried desperately, she plainly found it difficult to adapt herself to him". She sacrifices all aspirations for personal freedom and happiness, yet she fails to bridge the cultural gap between herself and Kit, her husband. Mira, her sister-in-law, feels sorry for her: "If she had not loved Kit so much, she would not have tried so much to please him".

Hedged in by the traditional Indian spirit, she prolongs her anguish and frustration. Her unfulfilled maternal feelings find an outlet in nurturing an orphan child. School work releases her to an extent from her frustrations, misery and loneliness but there she meets with her tragic death. As Srinivasa Iyengar opines, "she is symbolic of Mother India who is compassion and sufferance, who must indeed suffer all hurts and survive all disasters". Through her Markandaya projects the bewilderment and vulnerability of traditional Indian woman confronting a culture in flux. Despite her being a victim she shows a streak of inner strength in her attempt at saving the school on fire risking her own life. Torn between her West-oriented husband and her own conventional upbringing, she sublimates herself through sacrifice: "Her silence is stronger than all rhetoric, her seeming capacity for resignation is the true measure of her unfathomable strength".

Traditional Indian society does not leave much scope for an individual to transcend the role boundaries. Yet, Roshan Merchant, of the same novel, withstands the conflicting

social forces and seeks independence. Outspoken and educated she stands as a contrast to both Premala and Kit. The most striking and autonomous among Markandaya's heroines, she bestows her outstanding qualities upon her less fortunate sisters. From a columnist, she becomes the owner of the paper she was writing for. Her magnetic dynamism appeals even to the conventional Premala. Her quest for identity and autonomy cannot be separated from her desire for national independence. Though not an advocate of terrorism she does not restrain from vouching a sound alibi for Govind, Mira's brother. No other woman would have sworn in the court that he had spent the night, in question, with her. With her simplicity, calm and composure she can even control a violent mob. Her foreign education does not distance her from her people, but instils in them the need for personal as well as national freedom. Mira appreciates her: "born in one world, educated in another, she entered both and moved in both with ease and nonchalance". She is indeed a remarkable human being.

Apart from Premala and Roshan, Markandaya portrays another educated woman engaged in the war between tradition and modernity, romanticism and realism and aspiration for personal freedom and patriotism in Mira, the objective reporter of her family tale. Her rich Hindu background and exposure to western life style equip her with the knowledge to select the best from both Indian and British culture. Like her pro-British and anti-British brothers she too is torn between her passionate love for the English official Richard and her patriotism. Despite their deep and lasting love for each other she is mature enough to understand the hindrances to their union. It is a love between two individuals who happen to belong to two different races. The rigidity and orthodoxy of her own society help her to understand the conventions of her caste. When Roshan rises above the narrow confines of family and society, Mira finds it hard to eschew her private happiness in the name of patriotism. Yet she knows as she says forlornly: "You belong to one side - if you don't, you belong to the other". There is no in-between. She shows immense courage in her decision. But she has no regrets for "they had known love together; whatever happened the sweetness of that knowledge would always remain". Had they been united they would have risen above racial and cultural disparities through the purity of their love.

Since India is a land where religion, rationalism and mysticism go together, most novels with an Indian background have a religious figure, a sanyasi. Most often he functions as a social leader also. The problem in *A Silence of Desire* originates from Sarojini's blind faith in the healing power of a swamy. A middle class woman and an ideal wife, she seeks refuge in the swamy rather than succumbing to an operation to remove a tumour. Their domestic harmony is threatened by her secret visits to the swamy. Dandekar and Sarojini drift apart mainly because of the growing silence between them. His suspicion of her fidelity stems from this communication gap. Tension hovers over the house. The hold of the swamy becomes evident when she secretly hands the precious articles of her house to him. Finally when the swami is evicted, Sarojini resignedly accepts her situation. She undergoes a successful operation not because of any change of attitude but because the swamy has asked her to. Sarojini has her own reasons for her clandestine visits to the swamy because she does not expect her rational husband to believe in faith-healing. She does not explain to Dandekar even after their confrontation because she does not think she has done anything wrong. When he spies on her and almost accuses her of infidelity, her sense of righteousness enables her to remain calm and restrained for she knows that she is still a *pativrata*. Her silence ensues from her inner strength, the conviction that she is pure. Sarojini tries to sustain the image of a dutiful wife catering to the needs of her family, but she does not allow her domestic chores to curtail her faith. Behind her determination is the fact that surgery failed to save the lives of her mother and grandmother. Though she agrees to the operation, she guards her faith. Women like her are typically Indian in their attitude to life. Neither as active as Roshan nor as submissive as Premala "she has quiet powers of resilience and indomitable faith which will enable her to survive, if not win outright, in the battle for life".

Though the central character of *The Nowhere Man* is Srinivas, an uprooted Indian Brahmin in England, Vasantha - his assiduously Indian wife, becomes conspicuous through the different trials she goes through: physical, spiritual and psychological. Just as in her homeland, Vasantha also becomes a victim of British assault. Her life in the native, as well as the alien soil, has all the elements of a tragedy. A terrible transformation takes place in her when a young British officer lifts up her skirt while searching their house for her terrorist brother. This incident colours her attitude to life. "Suddenly in those frantic moments, nubile and naked before men, her childhood had gone". Vasantha emerges from that ordeal to "a closed stricken woman, thirteen years old, locked in fright, in shock, and in tragedy".

Brought up conventionally, she never feels pure again though her virginity has not been assaulted. It has repercussions on her sexual life with her husband too. This uncompromising attitude rules the rest of her life. Her life abroad, in the land of her exploiter, also has the echoes of a tragedy. One son dies in war and the mother in her becomes sadder on account of the widening gap between herself and her only surviving son. When even the birth of a grandchild does not bring about a family reunion, her death is hastened. But death cannot efface her for she remains a living presence to the lonely Srinivas. Without her he feels a vacuum never to be filled again.

Transplanted into an alien soil, she guards her essential Indianness. While she willingly makes many an adjustment, she stubbornly sticks to Indian ways of life and plans for the future of her sons in the Indian way. She persuades Srinivas to acquire a house. It is her religion that sustains her when her children desert her. In the alien land, relying on her inner resource of courage and endurance she is able to offer nurturance and support to her husband. Till her death she remains so "irredeemably Indian in style and cut" that Srinivas regrets throwing her ashes in the alien river Thames. Though weak in many respects Vasantha deserves admiration for it needs tremendous inner strength to be rooted in one's own culture when confronted with an alien one.

Regarded as a novel that falls far below Markandaya's standards, *Two Virgins* narrates the journey from adolescence to womanhood of two sisters, Lalitha and Saroja. The two sisters refuse to adjust to the squalor and poverty of their village life and aspire for freedom and riches. Born under the same roof they develop differently. The elder one who aspires for glamour and autonomy becomes a victim while the younger one matures through the experience of her sister and propels her life carefully. Physical beauty and feminine charm help Lalitha to be in focus: "Lalitha had status. She had no husband yet, but everyone could see when she did, she would have more than her fair proportion". But lured by the glamour of the film world she falls a victim to the film magnate Gupta who refuses to take the responsibility of her pregnancy. Amma, their mother has to shield her from the eyes of the neighbours. There is no way to keep her illegitimate child because motherhood is not considered a blessing when not sanctified by marriage. The mother in her mourns the loss. "It isn't fair," she said, "You'd think there was some other way, wouldn't you? To keep a child if you wanted to, whether you were married or not? But there isn't no way at all".

Lalitha's transgression of moral norms is engendered not solely by her beauty, vulnerability and sensuousness but by heredity. Saroja admits, "Amma was free with her looks...you could spot the seeds which have sprouted in Lalitha...though Lalitha had added finesse of her own". She acts foolishly and risks her reputation and life. She defies the code of the society and is "paying the penalty, that is all". Being a fallen woman she has no escape routes. Though endowed with intelligence and beauty she fails to use them judiciously to elevate herself and her society. Once having erred, there is no absolution. Saroja puts it succinctly: "women had no boltholes. There was no escape for them, they had to stand where they were and take it".

Saroja, a witness to Lalitha's transgression, wisely decides to stay within the prescribed code despite temptations. She, too, experiences the conflict between tradition and modernity, passion and reason. She also aspires to move to fresher pastures to

establish her own identity, but her aspiration for autonomy is curtailed by her acute awareness of Lalitha's dilemma and the age old wisdom of Alamelu. She awakens to a new understanding and develops to be a mature woman gleaning wisdom through observation and experience. Saroja, young though she is, is strong enough to resist men's allurements for "she knew too much, she had gone through too much to be afraid of anything". She is pragmatic enough not to add to her burdens as a woman. She is not averse to modernity and male friends but unlike Lalitha, she knows where to stop. She perceives, changes, and grows. We tend to agree with Krishnaswamy who says, "we witness the development of the Indian woman phantasmagoric infancy to almost discretionary adulthood'

*The Golden Honeycomb* is hailed as Markandeya's *magnum opus*. Once again her attention is focused on the momentous historical events during the regime. Rabi, the chief protagonist develops into an autonomous being thanks to the different women whom he comes into contact with. These women, from different walks of life, fashion his conscience. His grandmother, the Dowager Rani Manjula is a remarkable figure. Sculpted in the pattern of the great Indian heroines she proves a spirited companion to her husband. Though controlled by the British Resident, her spirit remains free and this helps her enlighten her grandson with the legends of the country. One cannot but admire the poise with which she ends the misery of her husband, bed-ridden after an accident. Her tremendous will power enables her to don the mantle of a widow courageously. As the supervisor of Rabi's education she does not fail to inculate patriotic as well as human values in him.

History records not only the merits and demerits of powerful kings, but also the private lives of the royal palaces. Life in the there is not as rosy as we believe. Living in the shadow of their husbands, most queens are forced to eschew their identity. Most often it is a life of compromise. Shanta Devi is married to Bawajiraj because of her suitability, her royal lineage. The docility of the girl enchants the Agent. But the very docility that has been eulogised in her causes marital discord. To worsen the alienation the king enters into liaisons until he meets Mohini with whom he has a son. Blessed are those who can give birth to a male child. Even the royal chambers are not free from double standards. The obloquy for failing to bear an heir in royal wedlock is attributed to the while "Bawajiraj, whose sperm sexes the child is not even named". Shanta Devi's lack of a strong will, her submission to the royal commands makes her accept Rabi as the royal heir. The king boasts that "he would never accept a child of his wife's that he has not sired. That she accepts his, he considers both natural and his due". Patiently waiting for the king's visits to her chamber, she ungrudgingly plays the role that is expected of her. In her Krishnaswamy discerns "the symbol of the passive feminine, stunted in her womanhood, stunted as a human being".

Mohini, the concubine, proves herself to be more spirited and independent than the passive queen. She refuses to be drawn into a royal marriage despite her great love for the king and her concern for Rabi's future. She asserts herself when the king proposes marriage: "I don't want to be your queen. I want to be free". A true patriot, she does not hesitate to criticise the king for his unflinching loyalty to the British rulers. She insists on educating her son in the Indian way and arranges a pandit with the help of the Maharani. This discernment on her part enhances his nationalistic feelings and makes him aware of his responsibility to his people. She does not need a royal marriage to make her unorthodox union with the king meaningful and enduring: "I can make you happy without that. I have no wish to be your second wife either". He is forced to accept her spirit of independence. She maintains her freedom and makes the king accept the doctrine of equality.

Markandaya's fictional canvas thus portrays certain social conventions and attitudes that victimise women. Yet neither the struggle for survival nor the social inequalities can defeat them completely. The women in the earlier novels are victims of poverty. Material prosperity also does not guarantee any autonomy as is evidenced by Premala. Sarojini's crisis ensues from her blind faith as well as in communication. In the

royal setting Shanta Devi ceases to be an independent individual with emotions and feelings. While Vasantha suffers from an alien onslaught on her, Lalitha becomes a victim of her own wantonness and urbanisation. But the docility and acceptance of these women do not suggest that they are forever weak. In times of crisis, it is the woman who shows strength and courage which she transmits to others. Her soul is strong and resilient. Tragedy only wakes her up to reality Rukmani, Ira and Nalini show remarkable resilience for they know that work without hope draws nectar in a sieve and hope without an object cannot survive. Markandaya's relatively emancipated women like Roshan, Mira, Rani Manjula and Mohini not only overcome social inhibitions but even rise above the men in stature.

From the first to the last, Markandaya's novels present women who prove themselves to be as a resilient and resourceful as the earth. The positive attitude of these women is an- outcome of their inner strength which can withstand social oppression. Their strength does not lie in their muscular power but in their inherent capacity for compassion, sacrifice, nurturance and acceptance of the inevitable. Chronicling the experience of the Indian woman Markandaya shows her as the pillar of the society supporting, strengthening and enduring everyone around her. She is the progenitor, sustainer and nourisher of the human species; the guardian of culture and the advocate of tolerance and acceptance. Markandaya cannot but admire these women, who bend but never break and who have found their anchor within.

# Shashi Deshpande

One of the prominent figures in modern Indian writing in English, Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwar as daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shriranga. She started writing stories in 1970, after graduating in Economics and gaining a degree in Law. Apart from novels she has as well published several collections of short. Her first three novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors, If I Die Today* and *Come up and Be Dead* were all great successes and her fourth novel *Roots and Shadows* won a prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. *That Long Silence* has been widely acknowledged as her best novel.

The processes of industrialization, urbanization and secularization have spelled various changes in the tradition-oriented Indian scenario. The socio-economic emancipation of women in India stands as one of the major changes. The concept of love, marriage and sex has undergone much change. Woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal India, now gained strength to rebel against the socio-cultural oppressions. But at the same time, she fails to reject totally her social and cultural background. She stands, therefore, at crossroads - between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt with the problems of this new woman in all her novels. She concentrates specially on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by women in the traditional institutions. The reality of modern Indian woman is that when it comes to the matter of even the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex, she is in a state of utter confusion. In the works of most of the Indian women novelists, however, complete answers to these problems could not be found. But Shashi Deshpande shows the right path which is necessary to live a happy life for modern, emancipated, educated and intelligent middle-class working women.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is about the quest for self by an eager, ambitious and anxious woman, Sarita, who has suffered terribly all her life and then finds the courage to take control of her life. She is the protagonist who feels the crisis of identity. Unable to bear the nightmarish brutality that her husband inflicts on her every night, she returns to her father's house where she recalls her past life. This helps her attain self-realisation and self-awareness. As she struggles with her emotions and anxieties, she realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions. By the end, she faces the realities with full courage.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* could be taken as a psychological novel. Sarita, the protagonist, faces psychological trauma. She passes through a hard, bitter and long journey in her mind where she tries to seek answer for the present dilemma by remembering the past. Being a girl in the patriarchal society, Sarita feels that she is looked down upon as a transitory member of the family. In contrast, her younger brother, Dhruva, the supposed transmitter of the family name is more carefully and lovingly brought up. The awareness of this biased attitude makes her self-reliant and defiant towards her parents and she decides to seek her own identity outside the parental hold. This is further intensified with her brother's death by drowning. The bitter words uttered by her mother,"Why are you still alive….. Why didn't you die?" becomes the root cause of the trauma that Sarita experiences.

A woman in a male dominated society is conditioned into the emotional and cognitive trades of subordination and dependence. In the novel, Sarita as a young girl is prevented from developing her individuality when she is constantly reminded by her mother that the purpose of her life is to make a man happy. She is advised to keep up her good looks to attract a man.

Sarita is disinherited by her parents after her runaway marriage with Manohar who belongs to the lower caste. The concept of marriage in ancient Indian middle-class families, especially like the orthodox Brahmin family in the novel, was spiritual and considered sacred. A girl choosing her partner was regarded as an offense committed

against the interest of religion, culture and tradition. Sarita breaks away from the traditional concept of marriage and shatters the barriers of marital distinctions. Though there are financial difficulties in the initial stage, Sarita emerges as a successful professional who begins to earn, “not only the butter, but the bread as well.” The novelist also exposes the crude form of patriarchy through Manohar who turns vicious when he finds that his career is crashing while his wife has overtaken him professionally. Sarita realizes that marriage has thwarted her identity and has hampered her pursuit of self-realisation and self actualization. She yearns to be recognized as a complete individual in her own right.

Though Sarita has to undergo a host of problems we find her coping with and adjusting herself to most of the problems. Finally she is found to be mentally prepared for reconciliation with Manohar. She cannot forget her children or the sick needing her expert attention. She realizes that escapism has no meaning in life. She comes to terms with the fact that one can never opt out or relieve oneself of the burden of belonging to human race.

The first step in the healing process Sarita undergoes, starts when she unconsciously tries to imitate her mother by her style of dressing and behaviour and by doing the household works in the way her mother did. Regretfully Sarita realizes that she had been a guilty sister, undutiful daughter and the unloving wife. She understands that she has to accept these facts to become whole again.

The canvas of *The Binding Vine* is broader than that of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In *The Binding Vine*, three stories are brought together, interwoven imperceptibly, so as to comment on each other. Urmila, the narrator who is a college teacher, dealing with her private grief over the loss of a baby daughter, gradually uncovers the stories of the other two. Urmila pieces together the secret life of her mother-in-law, Mira who died at childbirth, more than thirty years before the story begins. She collects the story through the poems that Mira wrote in Kannada. It is Urmila who connects the nature of Mira’s sufferings with that of Kalpana, a young Marathi girl, victim of a horrific act of violence and rape. Kalpana lies in a comma in the hospital, where Urmila’s friend and sister-in-law Vaana works. As Urmila wades through the labyrinth of relationships, she witnesses, experiences and analyses the confusion and guilt, the pain and anger, the joy and suffering.

The individual plots are strongly developed with different emphasis at different times on the sharply particularized portraits of the three protagonists. The only self-discovery that the novelist successfully attains in the novel is that of Urmila. But she takes the risks of suggesting others as well - that of Mira and the mute Kalpana. The mode of narration is such that there is a genuine suspense by the ending.

The two central ideas that lead the protagonist into an analysis of women’s issues are death and rape. The sufferings of the female consciousness by such external events usually suppress her into roles that are traditional and submissive. But Shashi Deshpande shows the emergence of the modern woman who is individualistic and confident preparing herself to face relationships that are healthy and satisfying that which is based on love and readiness to help.

The innermost recesses of a woman’s heart are brought to light through the perspectives of the protagonist, Urmila. As a feminist, Deshpande does not advocate upheavals or revolutions. She aims at moves which will bring about changes without resentment and oppression.

Vaana and Urmi represent two types of women. Vaana, educated, cheerful and optimistic, is a social worker who is submissive and willing to go along with her husband in whatever he wants. She is solicitous and caring and does not resent female who is the symbol of love. Urmi calls her a “Superwoman”. Urmi, the educated and liberated woman with her social contacts and confidence is a role model in whom women place their hope. She wants to assert herself and is not prepared to be subjugated before her man. She is

also presented as the most natural woman, revolting and finally adjusting herself to the bondage of love.

Priti, is a symbol of the shallow female who is opportunistic and lacks integrity. She represents the female who is addicted to achievement and praise, one who dreams of success and of awards at festivals. On the other hand, both Inni and Shakuthai, representatives of traditional Indian womanhood, despair about their inability to protect their younger ones. Of all the women in *The Binding Vine*, Shakuthai is the most unfortunate. Deserted by her husband and living in poverty, she is a totally oppressed woman.

Another area of female concern, that is marriage, figures prominently in this novel. The traditional mode of arranged marriage did not work for Meera. Her husband was obsessed with her, but there had been no room for Mira's feelings. As a consequence, her encounters with her husband become rape within the institution of marriage. Through her poems, Mira becomes to Urmi, a symbol of oppression. At the same time, Shashi Deshpande shows that Mira is a model of female survival.

The novelist also shows that male sexuality and female sexuality differ in the Indian context. While the male succumbs to his urges, the woman even in her liberated state, disciplines herself in the interest of the family. This factor is clear by Urmi's friendship with Bhaskar. Shakuthai and Sulu want Kalpana to marry her "Mausaji". When she refuses, she is not only oppressed by the two women, but is also raped by the man she rejected. Sulu, who is an embodiment of love and submissiveness, goes home to finish her work after the submission of which commits suicide.

Through the female characters in her novel, Shashi Deshpande gets to the roots of existence itself. Human nature itself is the "hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to break." Both living and dying, terrifies. The terror can be overcome only by the healing touch of love, that which is the "binding vine".

According to Pramila Paul, "Shashi Deshpande's canvas is the psychological milieu of the individual." Many women in their novels begin a journey of self-realisation in which some get weary, while some others live to survive and discover the various socio-psycholgical and existential facets of life. The loss of identity and the ultimate self-realisation that results in sexual and intellectual freedom in a woman's life are portrayed through her characters in the best possible manner.

# Arun Joshi

After the great trio of Indian novel—Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Naryan and Raja Rao, there was a sudden rise of a host of young and enthusiastic Indo-Anglian novelists, which includes Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Josh, G.V. Desani. Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Salman Rushdie, Khuswant Singh and the list goes on. There were a myriad events that influenced, shaped and led these modern novelists – strong and prolific – are influenced by the second World War, Independence of India, women's emancipation, and a sense of alienation, rootlessness and a host of existential issues. These second generation writers of Indo-Anglian fiction were largely influenced by the Western style of life and ideas and followed suit of the nineteenth century British writers like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Besides, the problem of how to lead a peaceful and productive life led them to think about man, his way of life, the means he has to employ and other problem. In this respect the works of present day Indo-Anglian novelists resemble the works of Camus, Sartre and Kafka.

Among the writers who qualify as existentialist writers, Arun Joshi stands prominent. His works clearly shows a strong influence of Camus and Sarte. His fictions are characterized by frustration, disintegration and a sense of alienation. Like Joseph Conrad and V.S. Naipaul, Arun Joshi seems to be preoccupied with the themes of man's existence, bad faith and aimlessness in life. In the words of Hari Mohan Prasad, "His novel is both a chronicle of chaos and a mode of quest".

Arun Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* was published in 1968. In fact, it was written two years before the date of publication, when he was a student in an American University. The novel, like many of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's novels is about the East-West Encounter. The other aspects it covers are quest for a "meaningful stance of life," rootlessness and so on. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of the novel is a product of the East and West. He is born of an English woman and a Kenyan-Indian father, thus a child of mixed parentage. He is an orphaned by the illustrious death of his parents in a plane crash. He is brought up by an uncle in Kenya. Rootless as he is, he travels worldwide – first to London for education, then to Boston for job and lastly to New Delhi for self realization. He gets his education in London where he falls in love with Anna, a minor Soho artist. Like the stranger, bereft of his roots, in Camus's *Outsider,* Sindi wanders around. Denied of love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, he seeks fulfillment wherever it is possible. He becomes a lone sojourner. He calls himself "an uprooted young man living in the later half of the twentieth century who had detached from everything except himself."

In London, although he is in love with Anna, he sleeps with Kathya. Sindi's split personality and eccentric behaviour convinces both these ladies to part ways with him. Kathya leaves him for the sacredness of marriage.

Later he goes to Boston where he completes his education and does some business. It is in Boston that he falls in love with June, a benign and beautiful lady. Their love matures and at a point of time when she wants to marry him, he dislikes it. As a consequence, June marries Babu, an Indian. But when Babu comes to know the fact that June had been in love with Sindi too, he commits suicide. June too dies later. Hari Mohan Prasad calls this phase of life, a symbol of "cultural lag". The character of Babu is simple, but the persona of June is complex; and Sindi is responsible for the death of both. At the end of the novel we see Sindi living in Delhi in the company of Sheila and Khemka. His life is delineated as a web of complicated relationships. His rootlessness and inconstancy, his ignorance and eccentricity, all lead him to bad faith or what Sartre calls 'Mauvaise force'.

An eccentric and self-alienated person, Sindi's sense of detachment and lack of any basic values always land him in trouble. His predicament is spelt in clear terms in his dialogue with Khemka:

> But you at least knew what made as ass of a man. We don't even know that. You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all.

> You Had to do: You had a God: you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me, I have no roots. I have no systems of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man, I have no reason to be one thing rather than another. You ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to become, to think of it. I don't even have a reason to live.

Though Sindi is an emotional figure, his eccentricity, lust and rootlessness are harrowing. About Sindi, Hari Mohan Prasad remarks: "His life in Kenya, London or Boston and the varied experiences he undergoes illustrate his predicament of anomie and its further deepening into ontological insecurity." The novel ends with Sindi's understanding of life's realities. He is like G.V. Desani's Hatter, a frustrated and self-alienated figure who, despite his efforts, does not get fulfillment in life.

Arun Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Mr. Billy Biswas* was published in 1971, three years after *The Foreigner*. But the theme of the novel is again the same Bimal Biswas, popularly known as Billy Biswas - a Banjara Indian by case, is the hero of the novel. He has studied anthropology at Columbia and lives in America. He is well settled there. The novel shows the continuation of the theme, search for self-realization which abruptly came to an end in *The Foreigner*. However, the character of Billy Biswas is much different from Sindi Oberoi.

Billy Biswas is a pagan, a primitive man. Basically he is tribal though urbanized in his appearance. He is educated in America but he dislikes the corrupt modern civilization. According to him the material reality is not good for a peaceful and productive co-existence. He thinks that sex too is poisonous if it is not maintained judiciously and could damage both physical and mental harmony. Billy Biswas does not like the artificial mode of life prevalent in America. As a matter of fact, he is a stranger to the civilized world. In Billy's view modern civilization is a monster, and certainly degrades human co-existence and weakens man's moral fibre. He boldly asserts:

> I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money. What else the civilized men do? And if there are those who are not busy earning and spending – the so-called thinkers and philosophers and men like that – they are merely hired to find solution, throw light, as they say, on complications caused by this making and pending of money.

Billy Biswas comes across Meena Mukherjee who falls in love with him. Though he is eccentric in behaviour, she marries him. But their life does not run smoothly. The prime reason for this appears to be her seeking material prosperity. Similarly, he does not like Rima Kaul, sensuous and fascinating girl of Indian origin. He thinks neither Meena nor Rima Kaul are ladies meant for him as both drastically differ from him. If Meena is in quest of material wealth, Rima Kaul is searching for sexual ecstasy, while Bily wants primitive happiness that his primeval ancestors aspired for. Then he finds Bilasia, a woman of his own taste and temperament. He finds happiness in her company. Each finds a real partner in her. They enjoy each other's companionship to the full. His happiness is indescribable. "When Bilasia," Hari Mohan Prasad affirms, "makes herself available to him, he does not feel that it is a union of flesh as with Rima. It is merging of a split-self to realize the whole."

Billy Biswas is a Gandhian as far as his understanding of the present civilization goes; a Wordsworthian as he finds happiness in the life of simplicity and grace. He is thoroughly simplistic in his search of divine values. He believes that man's greed for materialistic values will take him now here. Talking of the civilization and corrupt society around him, he tells Romi, his friend,

> I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or go to one of these wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a

> thirty year old tune. Nobody remembers the old songs or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loudmouther women and men in three piece suits dreaming their little adulteries.

The novel is a brilliant satire on modern civilization. Like Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, it successfully portrays the old idealistic mode of life. That is why the hero is called "The Primitive Pilgrim." R.K. Dhawan observes that the novel is about a mystical urge. Commenting on his first two novels Arun Joshi states, "Both these novels are primarily concerned with religious issues – the problems of an essentially Hindu mind."

Arun Joshi's next novel *The Apprentice* is a very powerful work of art that holds mirror to the present day life. It is a work of a mature novelist written in the confessional mode. In this regard, *The Apprentice* resembles R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*. But the essential difference between the two novels is that if Ratan, the protagonist of *The Apprentice* moves from the right path to the wrong, Raju, the rouge hero of *The Guide* follows the opposite course. However, both the heroes repent and regret their "fallenness".

The story of the novel is the 1940s struggle for Independence. Ratan's father Rathod sacrifices everything and participates in the freedom struggle. One day when he is in a procession against the British, he becomes a martyr due to a police's bullet. In course of time the nation becomes liberated from the shackles of the foreign rule. But what goes wrong is that the values of the pre-Independence India undergo a total change and the complete ideal mode of life is just reversed. Good people begin to follow the favourable means for favourable ends. They forget the fact that means are equally important as the ends. They work to become rich and respectable regardless of the means they employ for the realization of their desires.

Then Ratan becomes a responsible man in the family as his mother, a widow, cannot shoulder the many responsibilities herself, he searches for a job. His friends, those who admired his father's martyrdom and the politicians of the independent India pretend to help him. But to his surprise none really helps. Ratan, an honest and virtuous man, realizes the gravity of the situation. He finds himself in owing to his goodness, love of truth and the like. Then he changes his stance. He begins to tell lies, pretends in accordance to the need, and follows favourable means for a happy life. Thus, easily he gets a job. His officer sees to it that his cousin's daughter marries him. His material status dramatically improves. But mentally he is in doldrums as his consciousness is always split like that of Sindi or Billy. He repents his depersonalization caused by the materialism of modern science and commerce. "I had become, at the age of twenty one, hypocrite and a liar, in short, a sham… From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker."

According to H.M. Prasad and K.R.S. Iyengar the failure of faith in nobility, education, justice, friendship and hard work shocked him earlier, but later he becomes one of those who see that the old values are useful no more. At this point, he regrets and repents his past deeds. He becomes restless. He makes compromises, but every compromise gnaws at his conscience. For instance when he goes to a temple, he is bribed by a pujari to give a job to the pujari's son.

The novel is confessional in tone. It exposes the evils of the world. Iyengar rightly observes. "As a fictional study of the anatomy and dynamics of the almost omnipresent corruption in the country, *The Apprentice* is a powerful indictment. The human story and the stark message both come through". Indeed, the novel is a powerful social document and a "threnody of a tormented soul" of modern world.

Arun Joshi's recent novel *The Last Labyrinth* is a study of modern man's mental tumult. It treats man's split state of mind and its causes and consequences. It portrays a modern Hamlet whose confusion is the choice of becoming materialistic or spiritualistic.

Som Bhaskar is a young and educated business tycoon. This novel is autobiographical. It depicts Som Bhaskar's quest for both physical and mental fulfilments

in life. However, his desire for materialistic comfort as well as mental harmony takes him nowhere.

*The Last Labyrinth* explores the crannies of Som, his Jungian and Sartrean struggle, for an authentic mode of life. His mind is a labyrinth and so are his life, ambition, reality and existence. The reasons for Som Bhaskar's erratic way of life are many and varied. His family background is the *primum mobile* for his present situation in life. His grandfather was a happy and fun loving man. He was a lazy womanizer, as well. He led a happy life and was never worried about God or heaven. Som's father was different from his grandfather. He was an educated man, a brilliant scholar and a scientist. Som Bhaskar, is a harmonious blend of his father and grandfather. Like the latter he is a womanizer, and like the former he is a rationalist. However, he appears to be a compound of two elements, he behaves like an inert gas—not at all co-existing with Geeta, his wife, Leela Sabnis, his lover and Anuradha, whom he pursues. He does not find fulfilment in Geeta's serene company. Nor is he happy in Leela Sabnis's company, who is a sensual and rational woman and understands him. When he aspires for otherworldliness, different from the materialism of Leela, she tells him, "You haven't got the stamina, for that, I know. You haven't got the faith. You have always been a sceptic. You always will be".

Like Billy Biswas he goes in search of the otherworldliness. But in Som Bhaskar's case it is not "primitivism" but "spiritualism". So he befriends Gargi, Aftab and Anuradha. These three are saint-like, similar to Sabrai of Khushwant Singh's novel *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. They are warm-hearted and well-cultured. Neither Gargi nor Aftab, nor Anuradha have committed any unpardonable mistakes in life. All are unmarried and pure. But Anuradha, a woman who like June of *The Foreigner* wants to help all, regardless of her own happiness and shares Bhaskar's bed to please him. However, it does not lower her image in the view of her friends or the readers. Nevertheless, Bhaskar, the merry-go-lucky free lancer insists upon her being with him all the time. In allowing Som enjoy her; Anuradha's intention is to inspire joy in him. Throughout the novel a keen observer can find that Som's quest is for fulfilment. H.M. Prasad calls this "the pilgrims' progress." But the degree of progress he makes is negligible. According to Prasad, "He develops an intense feeling of inadequacy, a feeling of rootlessness, a feeling of a rudderless boat being tossed on turbulent waves."

Besides the novels, Arun Joshi has written *The Survivor*, a collection of short stories. His stories like "The Survivor," "The Gherao" and "Harmik" evidence his excellent craftsmanship, vivid mode of narration and mature style. These works of Arun Joshi, according to scholars like R.K. Dhawan, O.P. Bhatnagar, V.Gopal Reddy and others, are songs of his mature genius, skilled narrative style and profound vision of life.

# *The Shadow Lines*

*The Shadow Lines* was published in 1988 and it captures the perspectival view of time and events—of lines that bring people together and hold them apart, lines that are clearly visible on one perspective and non-existent on another. Lines that exist in the memory of one, and therefore in another's imagination. A narrative built out of an intricate and constantly criss-crossing web of memories of many people. It never pretends to tell a story, rather invites the reader to invent one out of the memories of those involved, memories that hold mirrors of differing shades to the same experience.

**Plot Summary**

The book chronicles a series of events lived differently by different people. The narrator has an unusual fascination for his second-uncle, Tridib—the eldest son of the Indian diplomat Himangshu Shekhar Dutta-Chaudhuri who is abroad. Tridib never "lives" the story, except through memories of others - the narrator's, his brother Robi's, and lover May's. He is a link that connects them, a shadow line that never materialises. Beginning with the narrator's memories of his early interactions with Tridib, who had "given me eyes" to see the world with, the narrative keeps travelling back and forth in time as well as space, moving along with the train of thoughts that shift wildly from Calcutta's Gole Park to Ballygunge, and further into London's Brick Lane of the War, or Lymington Road of today and Jindabahar lane in Bangladesh (formerly East-Pakistan). The outlines of these places are as vivid to the reader as to those who lived in them, or those who did not actually live in them, but could nevertheless invent them through memories of those who did. The lines that divide places and even times are mere shadows, and hence forever trespassed. The narrator remains unnamed until the end of the novel and can be, in a way, envisioned as Tridib's alter ego who vicariously lives time past and all those places that he had never actually visited through Tridib's eyes. In his intimate and somewhat complicated relationship with his uncle Tridib, which the narrator/author explores at length in the novel, he decides that his uncle who was so intricately bound to his life 'had looked like me'. The non-linear narrative of the book moves back and forth through time and place and explores the complex relationship between the narrator and his cousin Ila, who aroused in him unfulfilled sexual desire. There is also the May-Tridib romance, 'a man without a country who fell in love with a woman across the seas...' which never matures given Tridib's unfortunate death at the hands of a riotous mob in East Pakistan. *The Shadow Lines* is the narrator's bildungsroman that interrogates the viability and relevance of man-made divisions necessitating the various acts of transgressions of these state-codified boundaries through the precise use of imagination as taught by Tridib. The man-made divisions that Ghosh talks about are invariably that of 'home' and 'aboard' and 'private spaces' and 'public spaces' and the tenuous construction of them in a hap hazard manner.

**The pubic and the private world debates**

The distinction between public and private world is one which in some sense or other many philosophers feel impelled to draw. The private world belongs to someone exclusively. Public world is the functional space where we have nations and regions. It is shared and located in the objective realm. Whereas the private world is the subjective domain of experience, both psychological and real.

**Title of the Novel**

The title of this fascinating work relates to a key concern of post-colonialism - that of borders and boundaries, not only the public and the private spheres and how they are created and sustained but also how they are easily ruptured and shown to be illusory. *The Shadow Lines* is an amazing story that transgresses multiple borders. It also examines and criticises man-made boundaries and borders of 'home' and 'abroad' as attempts to define

a particular group as against another("the other"). The novel attempts to rupture these apparently secure boundaries by examining these notions by exploring the case of India as a nation. The "invention" of India the nation, with the Partition of 1947, drew imaginary lines across India, creating the countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India and also causing death of many from the resulting riots. In colonial, then ex-colonial, or postcolonial space such structures often disclose systems and patterns of dominion, expropriation, and negotiation generated by and for imperial centres but developed operationally to complex effect at and within colonized margins

The novel is about three generations. The three geneses from the narrator's family spread over Calcutta, Dhaka and London weave the ground of the novel. The title philosophically unfolds the inner struggle of mankind in choosing light and darkness, home and abroad, which is again symbolically presented in the novel. The narrative in *Shadow Lines* constantly transgresses boundaries of space and time, thus giving the novel its title, as the lines that divide places. Even the temporal aspect is shown as being easily transgressed – "Shadow Lines."

In this context, it is worthwhile to consider this quote regarding the inherent fragility of boundaries which separates the concepts of 'home' and 'abroad', the 'private' and the 'public' selves. :

> [About seeing the border from the air] But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day . . . (151)

Or consider Robi's disgruntled take on borders and nationalism, when he suggests "...why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage." These are the shadow lines that the title of this work refers to.

The novel debates a picture of symbolism and realism that covers both time and space. The title itself is a good example for ennumerating the symbolist and the realist elements. The story begins with the presentation of the family and friends of the nameless narrator, who in one way or another, seems to be a so-called "outsider" who sees the positives and negatives of everyone from another point of view, distinguishing between good and evil. Going further on the novel's plot we can say that the reader is catapulted from one place to another, also from one time to another, starting from the image of a conscious family and by the next moment showing the reader. For example, riots that take place on the streets. It could be said that the novel is one of exploration. Ghosh uses Shadow Lines as a way of telling us that the way one views oneself is not necessarily the way others do, and until the readers are capable of getting into a deeper understanding they remain in the "shadow" of their own enlightenment.

Ghosh's narrator traverses borders with ease and re-invents himself with all the liberating energy implied by the postcolonial state - a condition that allows for and acknowledges dissonance rather than coherence. Nevertheless, his narration of fragmented self upsets the whole separate notions of 'home' and 'abroad'. It posits the possibility of the self that belongs to many places and can live freely in its moment accommodating itself to the various pressures placed upon it. For Ila, cultural differences create only a small quivering self, the one that is incapable of action, and more importantly, even of self-respect. It seems that it is not enough to read Ila as an example of how cultural stress operates on women, but rather to suggest that the particular nuances created by gender lead, in Ghosh's text, to impotence of the women he represents. Ila and May are therefore condemned to different but similarly lonely lives. Only Tha'mma, the narrator's strong grandmother, is allowed the conviction of her beliefs in a substantial way.

For if Ghosh is interested in questioning and rewriting the novel as it has contributed to nation formation (in his response to Kipling, for example), Tha'mma's

notion of freedom is completely defined by the idea of the nation and therefore limited. For her, freedom has meant not just wrestling India away from the British but also the conviction that war and blood defines nations and that the nations of the subcontinent still need to outline their boundaries in blood in order to erase the distinctions between various regional groups. As her grandson, the narrator, puts it: All she wanted was a middle-class life in which, like the middle classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power; that was all she wanted; a modern middle-class life, a small thing, that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it.

Thus through the lives and memories of multifarious characters (Ghosh ropes in places as well to show the uncongenial nature of Geographical spaces as well), the author lays bare the transience, insignificance and the meaninglessness of the public spaces created by colonial cartographers and administrators for convenient political jurisprudence. He enlightens us through the lives of Tridip, Tha'mma, Ila, May and the narrator himself as of how the public worlds become whimsical and irrelevant in the realm of the private, a place where experiences and memories trespass the man-made borderlines bifurcate and divide rather indiscriminately.

# Early Indian English Poetry

**Historical Perspective: Early English Education in India**

The East India Company was formed in 1599 and the company won over the trade monopoly in India with the battle of Plassey in 1757. Contemporary research on the consequential imperial rule in India generally takes the controversy between Anglicists and Orientalists as a useful explanatory framework. Under the British rule, the Anglicists were a group of people who found Indian culture and society intrinsically corrupt from the very beginning. Orientalists, however, saw India's culture as being based on sound principles which steadily degenerated. But the cause of corruption, however, was in both cases the same, that is, 'brahmanism'. Some of the noteworthy Orientalists who were administrators like Warren Hastings established the Calcutta Madrasah in 1781, Sir William Jones established the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and Sir Thomas Munro too was much impressed by the Indian culture. Ironically, they were derisively called the 'Brahmanised Britons'.

The Anglicists took the position that the first order of education business in India was, in today's terminology, to "modernize": to introduce Western subjects, Western knowledge, Western morals, and Western modes of thought, so as to raise the country from its backward economic, administrative, and social conditions.

When Thomas Babington Macaulay entered the Anglicist-Orientalist Controversy in Bengal and wrote his famous Minute of 2 February 1835, he not only blasted the Orientalists off the battlefield but he imparted a literary and dramatic quality which has given lasting interest to an episode that was of the utmost importance to the future of India. In his Minutes on English education in 1835, he makes his position clear : "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population."

After Macaulay's minutes in 1835, during the years between 1835 and 1855, the number of those educated in English had been rapidly increasing. Western education was a new force - part elixir, part poison-injected into Indian life. But the immediate effects were seen only on the surface. The introduction of western culture, the study of English literature and the adoption of western scientific techniques, nevertheless gave a new awareness, a sense of urgency, a flair for practicality and alertness in thought and action. The 'phoenix hour' which bread Indo-Anglian literature was the time when Indians first learnt at first to read and speak and comprehend English. Soon they began to write as well. Once it got started there was no stopping it. Due to this, Indian writing in English had to range from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse-epics, for example.

**Indian Writing in English: the literary Renaissance in India**

English was not simply a useful medium for the Indian to absorb the technology and political language of the western world; it was a medium of aesthetic creation, imaginative expression and an art in itself. The use of English as a literary medium was the direct result of British colonization and education in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bengal, where European missionaries, traders and soldiers had profoundly disturbed the cultural situation of declining Mogul power and an orthodox Hinduism, saw the emergence of brilliant Indians as "English" men-of-letters.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, scholar, philosopher and reformer, employed English as his favoured medium, and there were others: Keshab Chunder Sen, Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the like Their works - scholarly, religious, poetic - appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century coloured by the romantic nationalism of that time. Later in the century came the poet Toru Dutt, a young woman who like Keats died

tragically young, Romesh Dutt, translator of the Indian epics into English verse and at the beginning of the twentieth century were Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. The culmination point came in 1913 when Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for the English poems collected in Gitanjali. Thus the twentieth century opened with English writing in India as a harvest of poems, philosophical treatises, translations, and religious works. The image of India as a country of long-bearded poets and long-haired gurus, the India of poets, rishis and yogis was established so firmly in the view of the world outside India that Indians have spent the rest of this century either denying the image or modifying it in various ways (sometimes treating the conventional picture humorously or satirically) so as to present a more balanced picture. Not consciously but certainly subconsciously, all Indian writers in English since Tagore have stood in his enormous shadow. "We are all children of Gogol's *Overcoat*" becomes in Indian terms, "We are all children of Rabindranath's Gitanjali." Tagore's influence and success were so overpowering that the would-be Anglo-Indian poets were dwarfed. He was nearly rivalled in his own day by the great poet-philosopher Sri Aurobindo, best-known to the west as the author of a profound and brilliantly-written metaphysical treatise in English. Aurobindo was also the author of a long poem in English, *Savitri*. Only recently have Indian poets (prolific though they are) attempted anything to match the achievements of Tagore and Aurobindo. Though poetry would now seem highly challenging to a writer coming to English as a second language, it may have seemed less challenging to the Indians of the nineteenth century who were steeped in the epic traditions of their own past and in English romantic poetry and prose which they read at home with parents or tutors or in mission-run Europeanized schools. It was from such sources that Toru Dutt and Tagore created their English romantic music. In the novel and the short story - Dickens, George Eliot, Fielding—these appeared more alien, less accessible.

The first generation of Indian poets writing in English invariably imitated the British literary Canons. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) was Indian only on his mother's side, his father was Portuguese. He became a teacher of English language in Hindu college when he was barely 18. He

- was a fiery Indian teacher and poet. As a lecturer at the Hindu College of Calcutta, he invigorated a large group of students to think independently; this Young Bengal group played a key role in the Bengal renaissance.
- was generally considered an Anglo-Indian, being of mixed Portuguese descent, but he was fired by a patriotic spirit for his native Bengal, and considered himself Indian. In his poem 'To My Native Land' he wrote:

  *My Country! In the days of Glory Past*
  *A beauteous halo circled round thy brow*
  *And worshipped as deity thou wast,*
  *Where is that Glory, where is that reverence now?*
- was appointed teacher in English literature and history at the new Hindu College at the age of 17, which had been set up recently to meet the interest in English education among Indians.
- had unorthodox views on society, culture and religion, the Hindu-dominated management committee of the college, under the chairmanship of Radhakanta Deb, expelled him as a faculty member by a 6:1 vote, for having
- "materially injured [the student's] Morals and introduced some strange system the tendency of which is destruction to their moral character and to the peace in Society. ... In consequence of his misunderstanding no less than 25 Pupils of respectable families have been withdrawn from the College."
- faced penury, he continued his interaction with his students, indeed, he was able to do more, helping them bring out several newspapers, etc. However, at the end of the year, he contracted cholera, which was fatal at the time, and died on 26 December 1831 at the age of 22.

As a poet and teacher of poetry, Derozio was influenced by Byron, Scott, Moore and Shelley and his familiarity with the Romantic Movement penetrates deep into his poems that speak about his love for India as well as nature. Derozio idolized Byron, modeling many of his poems in the romantic vein. Much of his poetry reflects native Indian stories, told in the Victorian style. *The Fakeer of Jungheera* (1828) is a long lyrical poem, abundant in descriptions of the region around Bhagalpur. The melancholy narrative involves a religious mendicant, who saves his erstwhile lover from satihood, but comes to a romantic end fighting her pursuers. Among his short poems, there are several ballads, such as *The Song of the Hindustanee Minstrel*:

*Dildar! There's many a valued pearl /In richest Oman's sea;*
*But none, my fair Cashmerian girl! /O! none can rival thee.*

Fired by a patriotic zeal he also wrote a good chunk of nationalistic poetry, some quite openly rebellious, as in *The Golden Vase*:

*Oh! when our country writhes in galling chains*
*When her proud masters scourge her like a dog;*
*If her wild cry be borne upon the gale,*
*Our bosoms to the melancholy sound*
*Should swell, and we should rush to her relief,*
*Like some, at an unhappy parent's wail!*
*And when we know the flash of patriot swords*
*Is unto spirits longing to be free,*
*Like Hope'e returning light; we should not pause*
*Till every tyrant dread our feet, or till we find Graves.*

**Toru Dutt (March 4, 1856 – August 30, 1877)**

In the poignant letters to Mary Martin, her English friend, one sees how her territorial displacements (the family lived in Calcutta, in England and in France) alienate her from any possible world in which she might have been at home, though perhaps even that presumption is naive, ringing false to a woman raised without choice to the sorts of cultural and geographic complexities that Toru Dutt inherited. Toru came into contact with Mary Martin at Cambridge and the two fostered a life-long bond of friendship and affection. The correspondence with Mary Martin is a valuable source to know the mental make-up of the young poetess. The letters reveal the young writer's childlike joy in life with her intellectual maturity. They speak of flowers and birds and of artistic vision, scholarly pursuits and morbid illness

Like Sarojini Naidu who wrote many years later, Toru Dutt was made much of in the literary circles of London, her 'exotic' femininity an object of scrutiny. In 1875, two years before her death at the age of twenty one, she started the study of Sanskrit, a language she found enormously difficult. She learned the language well enough to be able to translate portions from *The Ramayana, The Mahabharata* and *The Vishnu Puranas*. Most of her work was published posthumously, *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden* was published in *The Bengal Magazin*e of 1878, her French novel *Le Journal de Mlle. d' Arvers* in Paris in 1879. A third edition of her *Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* appeared in 1878 with a foreword by Arthur Symons, and in 1882 her translations from the Sanskrit were published with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. While this might seem on the surface a life of literary fulfillment, Toru Dutt was haunted to the end of her short life by a sense of unreality, the double bind in which she found herself, a woman from the colonised world working in a language, which even as she refined it for poetry, was not truly hers; this sense tormented her.

Toru's father, a devotee of Wordsworth had wanted to retire to Westmoreland in the Lake Country, realm of the fabled Wordsworths. She herself uses Wordsworthian allusions in her most celebrated poem 'Our Casurina Tree' where the tree in her Calcutta garden is likened to ones in the Lake District- "Mayest though be numbered when my days are done/With deathless trees-like those in Borrowdale." Yet the English language, even

as it granted her a seeming authority, extending its psychic landscapes to the elite of the hinterlands who had learnt their lessons well, contorted her sense of her own bodily self.

***A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876)**

Toru's first publication *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) consisting of translations of seventy French poets (including Hugo, Gautier, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, Nerval, Sainte-Beauve), brought her to the attention of Edmund Gosse. Most of the poems were translated by Toru and her translations are highly striking:

*Ha! There's the seagull. See it springs,*
*Pearls scattering from its tawny wings,*
*Then plunges in the gulfs once more,*
*'Tis lost in caverns of the main!*
*No! No! It upward soars again,*
*As souls from trials upward soar.*
('Lines:Victor Hugo

The most interesting part of the collection was the Notes appended at the end of volume, consisting of critical comments on the French poetry translated in the volume. They were largely written by Toru. Gosse found them 'curious' and 'bewildering' as 'nothing could be more naïve than the writer's ignorance at some points, or more startling than her learning at others. Thompson admired the 'independence and masculinity' of her criticism.

**Her poems**

On her return to India from England, she published her only collection of poems, some poems in the collection showed the influence of Keats.

And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close
Sun darkling from out tree

Our Casuarina Tree
Love Came to Flora Asking for a Flower
Sonnet
Lakshman
My Vocation

**Michael Madusudan Dutta**

Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873), the 19th century Bengali poet and playwright, was born on 25 January 1824 in a landed family in the village of Sagardari in Jessore district, Bengal (now in Bangladesh). He was the only son of a well-to-do Kayastha Family. His father, Rajnarayan Dutta, was a law practitioner in Kolkata. Madhusudan in his early years was taught at home by his mother, Jahnabi Devi, and later he joined Sagardari Primary School. At the age of 7 he went to Khidirpur School, Kolkata. In 1843 he got admitted to Kolkata's famous Hindu College. Here, amongst other subjects, he also studied Bengali, Sanskrit and Persian.

Madhusudan began writing while at Hindu College. He drew everyone's attention at a college function when he recited a self-composed poem. He won several scholarships in college exams as well as a gold medal for an essay on women's education. While a student at Hindu College, Madhusudan's poems in Bengali and English were published in Jnananvesan, Bengal Spectator, Literary Gleamer, Calcutta Library Gazette, Literary Blossom and Comet. Lord Byron was Madhusudan's inspiration.

Michael's exceptionally colourful personality and his unconventional, dramatic and in many ways, tragic life have added to the magnetism and glamour of his name. Generous in friendship, romantic and passionate by temperament, he was also fond of the good life; he was financially irresponsible, and an incorrigible spendthrift. He experimented not only in the field of writing, but also in his personal life.

On 9 February 1843, Madhusudan ran away from home and converted to Christianity, to escape a marriage his father had arranged and also to satiate his fascination with everything English and Western. He took the name 'Michael' upon his conversion and wrote a hymn to be recited on the day of his Baptism. However, on becoming a Christian, Madhusudan had to leave Hindu College as Christians were not allowed to study there during that time. In 1844, he got admitted to Bishop's College and remained there until 1847. There, he also studied Greek and Latin.

Madhusudan's conversion to Christianity estranged him from his family, and his father stopped sending him money. In 1848, Michael left for Madras where he started teaching, first at Madras Male Orphan Asylum School (1848-1852) and then at Madras University High School (1852-1856). Besides teaching, Madhusudan was also involved with a number of newspapers and journals. He edited the Eurasian (later known as the Eastern Guardian), the Madras Circulator and General Chronicle and the Hindu Chronicle. He also worked as Assistant Editor of the Madras Spectator (1848-1856).

While in Madras, Madhusudan married Rebecca Mactavys Thompson and had a family by her. Meanwhile, his mother died and then his father. After his father's death, Madhusudan abandoned Rebecca and his first family due to a failed marriage and returned to Kolkata in February 1856 to live with a French woman named Henrietta White and had a second family by her. She and Michael did not seem to have been formally married, presumably because Rebecca had never granted him divorce. There is no record either of their marriage or of Michael obtaining a divorce from Rebecca.

In Kolkata, Michael first worked as a clerk at the police court and then as interpreter. He also started contributing to different journals. His friends urged him to write in Bengali. Madhusudan realized the paucity of good writing in Bengali as well as his own ability to fill this vacuum. While translating Ramnarayan Tarkaratna's play *Ratnavali* (1858) into English, he felt the absence of good plays in Bengali. He became associated with the Belgachhiya Theatre in Kolkata patronized by the Rajas of Paikpara. In 1858, he wrote the western-style play *Sharmistha* based on the *Mahabharata* story of Devayani and Yayati. This was the first original play in Bengali, making Madhusudan the first Bengali playwright.

By dint of his genius, he removed the stagnation in Bengali literature both in style and content. He was the first to use blank verse in 1860 in the play *Padmavati* based on a Greek myth. This use of blank verse freed Bengali poetry from the limitations of rhymed verse. This success prompted Madhusudan to write his first Bengali poem, *Tilottama-Sambhava* in blank verse in that very same year. It is based on the Puranic story of the war waged on the Gods by the demon brothers Sunda and Upasunda. The two later poems *Meghnad-Badh Kavya* (Ballad of Meghnad's Demise in Ramayana) in 1861 and *Virangana* were written in blank verse. The later poems silenced the critics and detractors, and permanently established the vogue of blank verse literature. Written in blank verse, this epic was based on the *Ramayana* but inspired by Milton's Paradise Lost. Madhusudan transformed the villainous Ravana into a Hero. This grand heroic-tragic epic was written in nine cantos which is quite unique in the history of Bengali Poetry. *Meghnad-Badh Kavya* was Bengali literature's first original epic and gave Madhusudan the status of an Epic Poet.

Madhusudan used to collect themes for his poetry from the Sanskrit Puranas, ancient Hindu epics and also English and French literature. He also wrote poems about the sorrows and pains of love as spoken by women. He is considered as the Father of Bengali Sonnet. He was also a wonderful linguist. Besides Bengali, Sanskrit and Tamil, he studied Greek, Latin, Italian and French and could read and write the last two languages with perfect grace and ease. His first anthology of English poetry—*The Captive Ladie* and *Visions of the Past* were published in 1849. Though these were well acknowledged by the English educated, these publications didn't get big success and not literary up to the mark as Dutta wanted. They were written under the pen name Timothy Penpoem.

Madhusudan's life was a stupendous boon and also an enormous sorrow. Loss of self-control was mainly responsible for his life's financial and emotional sorrows and yet it

was a God-gifted boon for his over-flowing poetic originality. The all-inviting epitaph on his grave came from the poet himself:

*Stop a while, traveller!*
*Should Mother Bengal claim thee for her son.*
*As a child takes repose on his mother's elysian lap,*
*Even so here in the Long Home,*
*On the bosom of the earth,*
*Enjoys the sweet eternal sleep.*

**Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)**

Language has of course been an immensely controversial issue for Indian writers, the colonial trappings of English, when raised to consciousness, impossible to evade. Sarojini Naidu, the celebrated poet and politician of the nationalist movement, close friend and associate of Gandhi, first came to the public eye as a poet in English, the colonial language her father had forced her to learn. The learned chemist locked his daughter up, alone in a room for a whole day, as a punishment for refusing to study English. She was nine years old. The shock of that first incarceration remained with her, and a certain anger that she no doubt translated into her fiery, anti-colonial politics. "I came out of it [the room/the experience] a full-blown linguist." She later wrote, "I have never spoken any other language to him or to my mother who always speaks to me in Hindustani." Yet it was English that Naidu used in both her poetry and her political speeches to cut herself loose of the passive, weak images of femininity-in turn-of-the-century British poetry, in the colonial depictions of her countrymen—moving forwards then into a powerful political attack on colonialism.

Sarojini Chattopadhyay was born at Hyderabad on February 13, 1879 the eldest of a large family, all of whom were taught English at an early age. At the age of twelve she passed the Matriculation of the Madras University, and awoke to find herself famous throughout India. Her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title "Golden Threshold". After that, she published two other collections of poems—"The Bird of Time" and "The Broken Wings". In 1918, "Feast of Youth" was published. Later, "The Magic Tree", "The Wizard Mask" and "A Treasury of Poems" were published. Mahashree Arvind, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands of admirers of her work.

Sarojini Naidu's poems had English words, but an Indian soul. She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She travelled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India. After independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first woman Governor. She passed away on March 2, 1949.

Contemporary Indian critics often dismiss nineteenth century Indian poets as mawkish, imitative and lacking originality. However, English translations of Rabindranath Tagore, poems of Toru Dutt, and Sarojini Naidu reveal a skilled verse form which contains a spirituality which is to be found in lesser known English Romantic poets such as Robert Bridges. The early Indian poets' use of Indian words and metaphors in their English verse (the vina strings in Tagore as quoted in the footnote, Sarojini Naidu's lyrical celebration of the exoticism of bangles in an otherwise patriarchal poem "The Bangle Sellers") points to the sense of self they were said to lack. The localization of the metaphors and imagery render to this poetry an Indianness which a merely imitative and unoriginal poet would tend to lack.

Like in Nationalist art, the early Indian poets articulated a language which was linguistically alien, but their parlance touched the strings of a culture which they held very close to their heart. In fact, by perfecting the techniques and stylistics of the colonizer's language, the early poets sang praises of their homeland, upholding a pride in the opulence and the variety of a culture that nurtured them.

# Contemporary Indian English Poetry

The authenticity and position of Indian English Literature, today, in the larger canvas of world literature is one question that arouses interrogation. The identity of any literature is derived from the idiom in which it is written and not the theme dealt with. Australian literature, American literature, African literature and Commonwealth literature, though written in English, bear the stamp of individuality. The use of language, idioms and nuances give, as it were "a local habitation and a name" to literatures. Indian English poetry has made use of Indian English idiom and established its identity in no uncertain terms.

The movement of the Indian English poetry in the 1960s and after shows its distinctiveness and reveals its authenticity. It no longer follows blindly either the genteel British or confessing Americans. Post-1960, Indian English poetry has proved increasingly robust, varied and responsive to the times. It has acquired a distinct character and discovered its own voice. The voice is discovered by the poet's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world.

Poets like A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy and Kamala Das turned inward to get at their roots and made an attempt to acclimatize an indigenous tradition to English. R.Parthasarathy gave a clarion call to the Indian English poets to return to their respective linguistic traditions. He asks:

> How long can foreign poets
> Provide the staple of your lines?
> Turn inward, scrape the bottom of your past.

A.K. Ramanujan makes an effort to assimilate into English, the Kannada and Tamil traditions, where his roots lie. In "Conventions of Despair" expresses this zeal to get to his own roots:

> I must seek and will find
> my particular hen only in my Hindu mind.

On a close reading of Ramanujan's poetry, it could be concluded that "Indianness" in his verse is enough to indicate a complex interaction of psychological forces kept under linguistic and formal control. His poetic sensibility operates more in terms of the landscape of the mind, the interior landscape in which memories of India are re-lived with a gusto which belongs to the present.

Taking clue from Ramanujan to acclimatize the English language to an indigenous tradition like Tamil, Parthasarathy writes: "I saw my task as one of acclimatizing the English language to an indigenous tradition." In fact the tenor of *Rough Passage* is explicit: "to initiate a dialogue between myself and my Tamil past."

Kamala Das works out her emotional and sexual traumas in poems of unexceptional frankness reminiscent of medieval Sahaja poets who espoused free love as a means of realizing oneself. While Ramanujan's mind seems to be perpetually busy probing the areas of strength and weakness of his Hindu heritage, Kamala Das highlights with boldness the sexual permissiveness and uninhibition rooted in her native culture and produces arresting effect on the readers.

Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Margaret Chatterjee and Lila Ray who are unable to share the indigenous tradition take a different attitude—a historical, amoral, neutral, stoic and ironic. These poets too have tried and succeeded to some extent in evolving a new kind of idiom in post-l960 Indian English Poetry. Ezekiel has taken a lead in this direction.

Ezekiel's contribution to Indian English idiom lies in his attempt to re-create Indian characters in their situations. The tone seems to be mocking but Ezekiel reproduces these characters as they appear in their real life. The language in these poems is based on colloquial speech; rhythm and the tone are conventional. Poems like "Healers," "Hangover," "The Professor," "Irani Restaurant Instruction" are the cases in point. Here

Ezekiel uses English the way most semi-literate Indians write, speak and perhaps understand it. The following lines bear testimony to it:

Sex is prohibited or allowed.
Meat and drink are prohibited
or allowed. Give up everything
or nothing and be saved.
"Healers"

No Indian whisky sir all imported this is Taj.
Yes, sir soda is Indian sir
Midnight. .
Taxi strike. George Fernandes. . . .
Half the day hazy with the previous night
"Hangover"

Remember me? I am professor Sheth
once I taught you geography Now
I am retired though my health is good. . . .
If you are coming again this side by chance,

Visit please my humble residence also,
I am living just on opposite house's backside.

"The Professor"

Come again
All are welcome whatever caste
If not satisfied tell us
Otherwise tell others
God is great "Irani Restaurant Instructions"

Ezekiel has tried to re-create the Indian characters that happen to speak English in an un-English manner and with a native accent.

Your are going?
But you will visit again
Anytime any day
I am not believing in ceremony
Always I am enjoying your company. "The Patriot"

The use of present progressive tense in place of simple present tense is a habit and perhaps a way with Indians. Moreover, there are common errors among Indians when they frame questions in English. Apart from this Ezekiel is fond of using paradoxical language for a greater poetic effect.

Keki N. Daruwalla's "The Professor Condoles" is set in the right direction of creating a new idiom. The death of a boy which occasions the poem is interpreted by the professor in the light of the "definition of tragedy" and hence appears ludicrous. By the end of the poem a full circle is drawn and the death is accepted as a tragedy. Behind this funny interpretation lies the effort of the poet to create a new idiom. Both the beginning and the ending are interesting:

Your brother died, you said?
Eleven years old and runover by a car?
I am so terribly sorry to hear it!
Pardon me, not tragic, as you said just now.
Unfortunate is the word, terribly unfortunate. . . .

Tragedy today is private, insular:
A depraved enzyme,
in the belley of chance

It digests you
Skull, hair, dentures and all!
Yes in an absurd scheme of things
accidents are the order

The conversation is typically Indian in character and the language used attains the desired effect.

In Ezekiel's poetry, one encounters a number of Indian words (Hindi words in particular) such as "Goonda," "Guru," "Indirabhen," "Rama Rajya," "ashram," "burkha," "bhikshuks," "chapati," "pan," "mantras" and a few other Indian words are used with a purpose to create a new Indian English idiom. Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar use a new kind of unconventional vocabulary in their love poetry.

The Indian English poets are concerned with the "Indianness" of their experience. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, Shiv K. Kumar, Keki N. Daruwalla, A.P. Bhatnagar, A.K. Mehrotra, and a host of others are essentially concerned with the "Indianness" of their experience in order to create a typically Indian idiom, distinct from the idioms of the writers all over the world who write in English. African writers in English, Australian writers in English and Carribean writers in English, to mention a few, have discovered their own English idioms and established the validity of their respective literatures. Thus there is a need, as it were, for the creation of an Indian English idiom, to give authenticity and identity to post-1960 Indian English Poetry, independent of and different from other world literatures written in English including English and American literatures.

What makes Indian English poetry Indian may be evident in the nature of the poet's response to the landscape (topographical as well as metaphysical) of his country as distinct from or conjoined with or merging into, an intellectual and religious tradition whenever available. The Englishness of William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, John Keats and Alfred Tennyson lies in their intimacy with the English landscape, which gives as it were "a local habitation and a name" to their poetry. Similarly, Indian landscape has inspired the Indian English poets to create newer and more fascinating images as well as distinct idioms. The communion of an Indian with nature leads to the worshiping of the Himalayas and the Ganges. Many of India's religious rites are performed on the banks of the "holy rivers" after ceremonial bathing. Beggars, priests and carnivorous animals together with vultures surround cremation places and the Ghats of Benaras.

Shiv K. Kumar refuses to be swayed away by mere rituals and instead sees the horror and reality within. He records these incidents with a subtle touch of irony and skilful art of sarcasm in the following words:

Between its carrion teeth
the Ganges can hold three live fishes-Fins, bones and
eyes.
A child's lissom body
in a jute bag,
the warm ashes of a young courtesan and once I saw a
man ferry across on a sleazy raft to drop
his pet dog and bless
the sharks that carried the prize away.
"At the Ghats of Banaras"

Shiv K Kumar says:

> I was the only one to caution
> that God had trapped us
> into belief
>
> "Pilgrimage"

Post-1960 Indian English poets render an Indian flavour to their poetry by making use of the current situation in contemporary society, thereby creating a new Indian English idiom. K. Ayyappa Paniker has rightly drawn our attention to this aspect.

> "Indian poetry in English" necessarily refers to two parameters: Indian and English. "Indian" may mean, either written by Indian citizens or written about Indian subjects or even expressing Indian sensibility. This implies that there is a sensibility that is identified with the land and the people of India. National sensibilities are ultimately based on racial and cultural factors. Whether they are inherited or acquired is another moot question.

Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, O.P. Bhatnagar, Shiv Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Kamala Das and a host of others underline this typical Indian sensibility in their poetry. Jayanta Mahapatra's *Relationship* (1981) and two recent volumes, *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988) and *Temple* (1989) reveal a distinct Indian sensibility that immediately arrest the reader's attention. History, myths, legends, folklore all work together to establish a distinct idiom and identity in these volumes. The publisher's note to *Burden of Waves and Fruit* rightly stresses this aspect: "There are many rivers in these works, much rain and sun, long evenings and a few dawns - occasionally, there are intimate glimpses of friends, lovers, and a son. India is everywhere and nowhere."

Recent Indian English poets, increasingly becoming conscious of their own identity have turned looking inwards, to discover their roots. John Oliver Perry has rightly stressed this aspect: "the most significant Indian English Poetry since the early 1970's has turned increasingly toward indigenous themes. . . materials and possibly even forms of poetry." This aspect of Indian English poetry has also been reiterated by Paniker in a straightforward manner by linking it to Indian Aesthetic Tradition. "The link between Indian poetry in English and the Indian aesthetic tradition may be looked for in two or three areas or aspects—the identification of thematic recurrences, revealing influences, developments, repetitions, subversion, and etcetera.

Post-1960 Indian English poets have overcome nostalgia for the past and began perceiving the world with all its "boredom and horror devoid of glory." They take the world as it is and make their poetry out of contemporary situation. This trend leads to a search for identity and makes them sensitive to the stresses and challenges of their world - a world of screaming headlines and double dealings. The poets are determined to come to grips with the real problems of the day - political, social and economic. They try to catch the public ear with "a poetry of popular impersonation trying to imitate the talks of Indian politicians, clerks, reporters, professors, officials and so on." Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy and Keki N. Daruwalla are great exponents of the "poetry of popular impersonation." Ezekiel's poem, like "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S," "The Railway Clerk", "Touching," "Family," "The Professor," etcetera are typical examples of "poetry of popular impersonation."

A sense of patriotism prompts the minds of the poets to look within and think of the country, which ultimately gives distinct "Indianness" to their poetry. With the curiosity of an artist, the keenness of an intellectual and insight of a critic, O.P. Bhatnagar observes the vital problem of brain-drain in India and makes the fellow Indians aware of such a vital situation. The very title of the poem is ironic for that is the

appropriate mode to analyze such a subject of public importance and contemporary interest. The poet says,

> Even birds that are forced out of home
> At the turn of every season
> Return to their land
> Traversing incredible distances
> Flapping dreams with weary wings.
> But their fancy forbids them
> To look beyond glamour and gold.

The contemporary Indian English poet is concerned with the "Indianness" of his experience. That is why Indian English poetry has now taken for its theme various Indian subjects from legend and folklore to contemporary Indian situations. The contemporary Indian English poets are in the pursuit of creating new idioms in order to give a distinct identity and status to their poetry. Therefore, they do not write their poetry in the conventional English poetic diction but in a typically Indian English language.

# The Use of Irony in Indian English Poetry

Irony is the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, what is said and what is done, what is expected or intended and what happens, what is meant or said and what others understand. To go deep into the definition, Thomas Hanna defines irony as "the consciousness of existing in terms of a contradiction and this contradiction is precisely the awareness, on the one hand, of being a finite creature compelled by and subject to the demands of the world, and on the other hand of being a free, responsible being, who can never be compelled or subjected by any external force. The irony is that one is a contradiction that one exists dialectically."

While analyzing irony as a technique in Indian English poetry, a look at Modernism and its waves that swept across Europe like a whirlwind, is needed. The impact of Modernism was so sweeping that eventually it became an international phenomenon. It has to be understood that the ironic structure, though not exclusively, is an important feature of modernist poetry. In fact some theorists, such as the American new critic Cleanth Brooks, would claim irony as the primary condition of being of poetry, and that modernist poetry foregrounds it.

Not surprisingly, irony as a technique emerged as a predominant feature of Indian English Poetry. In modernist Indian English poetry, irony often springs from the location of the speaker. The speaker/author is haunted by an ambiguity, which haunts his voice, as well. This ambiguity is to do with the question of Indians writing in English, primarily. Often this ambiguity about the language of the poem, one which wants to articulate the common man's life yet in a language that is not of the common man, seems to structure the irony that modernist Indian English poets deploy. Keeping this in mind, it will perhaps be a lot easier to understand the use of irony in Indian Modernist Poetry.

Along with the post-colonial dislocation, the disjuncture of culture is also subtly voiced by the ironical tone of the poet. It has to be noted that, in India, Modernist poetry was written soon after Independence, a time when English was still seen as the language of the colonizer. It is interesting to find that, in Independent India, the 1950's and 1960's saw poets like Dom Moraes, A K Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, K.N. Daruwalla and Kamala Das to name a few; each having a style and craftsmanship of their own, but lacked a literary ancestry to nurture their poetic impetus.

Nissim Ezekiel occupies a unique position among Indo-Anglian poets of Post-Independence era. His first book of poems is titled *Time to Change* (1952). A critic, P. Lal wrote, "After the death of Sri Aurobindo, Nissim Ezekiel is the first major voice that represents, more or less, the change of an era" in the History of Indian English Poetry. Ezekiel opposed the idealism and romanticism of the earlier group of Indian writers in English, who used to write before independence. He tried to look at the typically Indian situations with an Indian attitude, with a novel and dynamic Indian insight. He cleverly manipulated Indian English to bring out the Indian worldview.

Irony in Ezekiel is often directed toward his own self with a view of achieving a desired perfection. His irony exerts a therapeutic effect. In "The Worm" the poet suggests how irony can serve as an instrument to bring about perfection. At the beginning of the poem the lyric persona is full of praise for the worm, lauding its "astounding strength," its "inner eye," and its "straight movement." Toward the middle of the poem, however, because of his own egotism, the speaker crushes the worm and kills it. Ezekiel aptly depicts the incongruity hidden in the persona: "It's dead. Pretty worm, where's your strength? /The God who made you wiser than /the cunning subtleties within my brain / Shall know by this the anger of man. Only in anger can I emulate /the worm's directness. I've killed the worm.

In "At the Hotel," Ezekiel exposes the real intention of the visitors, who come to the hotel not to drink but to view the Cuban dancer: "On the spot she came and shook her breasts / all over us and dropped / The thin transparent skirt she wore. / Was it not this for which we came?". The poet does not hesitate to expose the hidden intentions of the

hotel-goers. Gieve Patel rightly mentions in the introduction to Ezekiel's Collected Poems 1952-1988: "Many of the encounters described were clearly brief. The poems admit these were clearly exploitative, and there is some self-condemnation expressed for this. But by far the largest number move out of the area of guilt, into wonder and redemption."

Ezekiel is perhaps the most finished poet as an ironist in his 1960 collection *The Unfinished Man*. In "Urban" the poet tries to depict the peculiar contradictions with which a city-dweller lives. One who resides in the city is in love with the hills, rivers, dawns, and dusks; but to his misery, he has no time to enjoy them. He spends his lifetime in an uninteresting routine and remains contented with the urban squalor: "But still his mind its traffic turns / Away from beach and tree and stone / To kindred clamour close at hand". Ezekiel's dig is directed at human weaknesses and limitations. He brings his protagonists to an awareness of such follies with a view toward apprising them of the availability of a higher-level value system which could contribute to the desired perfection.

Self-analysis and self-criticism remain central to Ezekiel's creative art as an ironist. "Enterprise" is conspicuously comical. Ezekiel's choice of title for a poem is the surest ways of making readers feel the pinch of irony. In the gap between the beginning and the end of the poem lies irony: the beginning harping on the purpose, quite sanctimonious and dignified; the end reflecting the utter purposelessness of the journey. The seriousness and the sense of purity and sincerity with which the journey had begun are lost in the end, as the poet's intention is to expose the spiritual vacancy of the city-dwellers. These so-called pilgrims in "Enterprise" do not understand the spiritual significance of the thunder. At the end of an enterprise, one is rewarded with a rare sense of delight, one feels elevated; but here in this poem the enterprise ends in purposelessness, and all the participants wear a "darkened face." Irony reaches climax when the meaninglessness of the enterprise is revealed: "When finally we reached the place / we hardly knew why we were there".

In "Event," "Marriage," and "Case Study" Ezekiel's main device is irony, which predictably shows the poet's willingness to achieve objectivity, on the one hand, and his desire to bring to the surface "the reflections of the cheated mind" on the other. The lady in "Event" declares her choice for the poet. She presents to him a book that she has hardly read. She talks about films, hoping that he will appreciate all she does. The poet, on the other hand, expresses his disgust over the lady, who lives in daydreams. For lovers, marriage is bliss, a certitude that guarantees an enduring relationship. In "Marriage," however, what is intensely being felt is the suffering. Ezekiel's irony in this poem comes full circle when he ruefully states, "Then suddenly the mark of Cain / began to show in her and me". In "Case Study" irony is operative in a lower key. The lyric persona here is a typical failure in all areas of his life: in love, in marriage, in his profession. This is partly due to his inability to assert himself, and partly due to his psychic weakness. The irony becomes biting when the poet consoles him with such suggestions as, "The pattern will remain unless you break / It with a sudden jerk". A suggestion to a weak person seems to work very forcefully on him. This is how Ezekiel makes his characters realize and feel their inner dichotomies and deficiencies.

In "Night of the Scorpion,' a much-discussed poem, Ezekiel uses irony in a very subtle manner. The poet's mother is stung by a scorpion, and a crowd of peasants come to the poet's house after hearing the news. The superstitious villagers believe that the scorpion's poison in the mother's blood will purify it, but the mother is writhing in pain. The priest in his own way tries to control the poison by uttering some hymns. The poet's father, who is skeptical, scientific, and objective, begins treating his wife with herbs, medicines, and paraffin. Both methods, the traditional and the modern, fail to cure the mother. Still, the poison's effect ultimately subsides, and the mother is heard to declare only: "Thank God, the scorpion picked on me / and spared my children".

Nissim's style is very refreshing, adding humor to irony. Before Nissim Ezekiel, there was no Indian poet writing in English, who took the risk of treating such topics using typical Indian English in poetry. High sounding learned words and phrases, metaphors from the British ways of thinking and writing, expressions of Victorian English, long and complex

syntax, and perfect idiomatic usage, etc. usually mark formal Indian writing in English. From this high road, Nissim made some interesting detours which gave a special Indian aura to several of his poems.

Creating a very Indian flavour, Ezekiel's devotion to Indian writing in English is unique. His three poems "A Very Indian Poem in Indian English", "A Good Bye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S." and "The Professor" describe the characteristic Indian attitude in so-called "Swadeshi Angrezi". These poems depict the syntactical oddities of English used by Indian speakers. R. Parthasarathy comments:

> These poems imitate the idiolect features of English used by Gujarati speakers. Some of these features are also present in other Indian languages: the use of the present progressive tense for the simple present tense, un-English collocation of lexical items, and literal translation of phrases and idioms.

Ezekiel exploits the commonly found Indian use of present progressive tense instead of the simple present tense to create an India aura. In his poem "A Very Indian Poem in Indian English", he uses the progressive tense, reduplication processes modelled after Indian languages, and typical expressions that are employed in Indian English:

A.K. Ramanujan described himself as the perpetual "hyphen in Indian-English", living between two or more languages, two countries, and two disciplines. Ramanujan's poetry seemed to grow out of Indian experience and sensibility with all its memories of family, local places, images, beliefs and history. At the same time his writings included a modern stance with its skepticism, ironies and sense of living from moment to moment in an ever changing world in which older values and beliefs are often considered as unrealistic. Ramanujan, through his writing could evoke the warmth of traditional family life and closeness of long remembered relationships. More often, he showed conflicts, arguments and surprises. He also showed that the supposed glory of Tamil cultural heritage is a fiction which ignored the reality of the past.

The word plays, puns, inner rhymes, rhetorical devices, ironies, distanced neutrality of tones, understatement, compression and elliptical progression of the poems had similarities to his translations. This does not mean that Ramanujan was not affected by the reading of Yeats and other contemporary writers but as a writer he was highly aware of the conventions, techniques and structures of Indian verse and these had been used and transformed in his English poetry. The complexity, instability and irony of Ramanujan's poems seemed very modern as was the way they appeared to offer themselves as imagistic statements to be appreciated and interpreted as the reader wishes. But one gets introduced with various introductions, prefaces and afterwards to Ramanujan's translation of medieval Kannada and Tamil verse revealed that what seems to be original and modern is partly based on older Indian poetic conventions. The understated, neutral standing at a distance from descriptions can be found in the Tamil classics which he had translated. The use of the self as a centre for a poem filled with ironies which unpredictably changed directions and attitudes and which resisted conclusion is within the tradition of medieval poetry of the saints. The poetry by Ramanujan is vast in its output. His poems vividly depicted the modern style and some of the popular poems are *The Striders* published in the year 1966, *Interior Landscapes: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* in 1967, *Relations* published in 1971, *Selected Poems of 1976*, *Hymns for the Drowning* in 1981, *Poems of Love and War* published in the year 1985 and a lot more.

'A River' by A.K. Ramanujan is an account of the Vaigai River flowing through the temple town of Madurai, a South Indian city, known for its temples and ancient poets. It is a subjective critique on the age-old orthodoxy of the Hindu religion. It has another sub-theme that is a comparative analysis of the old poets and the new poets. The poem flows like a river. The emblematic nature of poetry interprets life imaginatively and emotionally, thus dealing with facts. The poem shows the view of Ramanujan against the orthodoxy of the Hindu religion, as well about the old poets and the new poets.

Ramanujan criticised the old poets for writing poems about the river and the cause by the river during the rainy seasons. Both the old and Modern poets do not care for the other people suffering from the flood but only about their poem. The Modern poets only followed what the old poets had done in the past. Ramanujan wants to bring to light the selfishness and self-centredness of the poets. They just wrote what they saw and not what they really felt. Ramanujan was against the orthodox rules of the Hindu religion.

Ramanujan's allegorical portrait of India is of one as a great house through which everything circulates. "Things come in every day to lose themselves among other things lost long ago among other things lost long ago...." ("Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House," Collected Poems 96) "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House", with its antithetical title is a catalogue of memories, combining comedy and pathos while bringing out the truth that life is a journey comprising of joy, sorrow, success, failure, good times and bad times all stored in one's memories. The poem begins with the poet stating that the house retains everything that comes in. "Sometimes I think that nothing that ever comes into this house goes out." Trivial things that would come in would only "lose themselves among other things lost long ago among other things lost long ago." Giving the impression that the big house was filled with lost objects into which other lost objects would merge. A hint of irony is seem when the poet speaks of borrowed library books that were never read which are long overdue and still remain in the house. He mentions little eggs that have been laid in ledgers by insects in the "old man's office room" where silverfish "breed dynasties among" succulent legal parchments dating back to the Victorian era which speaks of how old the house really us. The poet mentions servants, who went on to stay in the house for generations and whose children too did the same, the phonograph that was never sold, as well hereditary diseases such as "epilepsies in the blood" that were passed on in each generation and never quite left the house. With tongue-in-cheek humour, the poet scoffs at "son in laws who forget their mothers" as they have become so comfortable in their wife's home and being inept, do petty tasks around the house like "check accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces."

Since the sixties, Indian contemporaries like Nissim Ezekiel and R. Parthasarathy have hailed Ramanujan as the best Indian English poet. If Ramanujan's earlier poetry is sometimes overwhelmed by the satiric ferocities of Pound and Eliot, Anglo-modernist influences nevertheless helped Ramanujan to fend off the sentimentality and abstraction that often clouded Indian English verse after independence. His later volumes, above all, *Second Sight,* ever more successfully absorb and remake the forms, tonalities, and tropes inherited from English-language poets like William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and William Butler Yeats, brilliantly fusing them with the traditions of ancient and medieval Dravidian poetry.

Perhaps any discussion on Indian English Poetry is incomplete without reference to the poetical works of Jayanta Mahapatra. Physicist, bilingual poet and essayist, Jayanta Mahapatra holds the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981) for his *Relationship*. He started writing poetry at the age of thirty-eight, quite late in normal standard. And immediately his poetry received accolades from knowledgeable quarters. Rooted in mythical-historical past of Orissa, and yet not unaware of the sociological changes in the contemporary society, he beautifully recreates in the mode of his poetic expression the landscape and people around him. In his poetry, Mahapatra sings of the hearts and minds of many things of nature, on the basis of his sincere love for all creation. Poverty, deprivation, social injustice, the plight of the Indian woman and prostitution recur in his verses. He says, "All these things happen around me." He cannot ignore them and write about the 'better things' of life - about the lives of the upper classes. His belief in poetry as a social reality sets him off from other contemporary poets writing in English.

His collections of poems include *A Rain of Rites*, *Life Signs* and *A Whiteness of Bone*. One of Mahapatra's better remembered works is the long poem *Relationship*, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981. He is the first Indian English Poet to

receive the honour. Besides being one of the most popular Indian poets of his generation, Mahapatra was also part of the trio of poets who laid the foundations of modern Indian English Poetry.

Kamala Das is an investigator of the impulses and her poetry is the most moving and tortured one. The poet had succeeded in writing delightful poetry and has gained the applause of the people who once showered on her the venom of negative criticism. It is with extreme sincerity that she yearns for her quest for identity. It appears in the songs of a heart that longs for sexual satisfaction in the recollections of the purity and playfulness of the childhood, in the broken womanhood, in the love of the grandmother, in the cruelty and hypocrisy of men, in the painful realization of failing youth and approaching old age and in the despair of old age itself.

There is a sexual 'brazenness to her persona', which barely hides her inner ferment. Credited as the most outspoken—and even controversial—writer, Kamala Das earned fame as the "voice of women's sexuality". She used irony in the confessional mode where she attacked patriarchal systems with her abrasive honesty. Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms". She has also ventured into areas of the dark psyche of women, where she transcended the role of the poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. The poems that begin with a biting ironical tone are "The Introduction", "The Old play house", etcetera.

"Irony postulates a double audience", observes Fowler, "consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand and another party when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware that both of that more and the outsider's incomprehension". With this double-edged ironical sword as a weapon, the first generation of poets writing in Independent India, brandished their literary cudgels to entertain as well as rebuild the torn fabrics of the post-colonial society.

# A.K. Ramanujan

**Introduction**

A.K. Ramanujan was one of the most important Indian English poets of the 20th century. He was a poet in English, Kannada and Tamil, and a translator of classical and medieval Tamil and Kannada poetry, in addition to being a philologist and folklorist. Born in 1929 in a Tamil Brahmin family in Mysore, Ramanujan received his B.A and M.A in English language and literature from the University of Mysore. He then spent time teaching at some universities in South India before getting a graduate diploma in theoretical linguistics from the Deccan University in Poona in 1958. The following year, he went to Indiana University where he got a Ph.D. in linguistics in 1963.

In 1962, he became an assistant professor at the University of Chicago, where he was affiliated throughout the rest of his career. However, he did teach at several other U.S. universities at times, including Harvard, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and Carlton College. At the University of Chicago, Ramanujan was instrumental in shaping the South Asian Studies program. He worked in the departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Linguistics, and with the Committee on Social Thought. In 1976, the Government of India awarded him the Padmashri and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship. He died in Chicago in 1993.

**Background and Influences**

Ramanujan's father was a Mathematics professor of international repute and an astrologer of considerable local fame. Therefore, the house in which Ramanujan grew up used to receive two very different kinds of visitors – English and American professors. This steeped in him, the idiom of modern science and rationality on the one hand, and traditional Mysore Brahmins who came to understand the bearing that the planets and stars had on their lives, on the other. While the young Ramanujan struggled to find consistency between these epistemic traditions that stood in such sharp contrast to each other, his father, much to the young poet's bewilderment, simply didn't seem to care about it. He moved between the one and the other as if both formed part of a seamless whole. This was to have a tremendous lifelong impact on Ramanujan; his poetic themes and his academic interests.

Ramanujan came under the influence of English poetry by the age of 17, when he started writing poetry. At first, he admired the works of Shelley and W.B. Yeats in his father's library and later on, the oeuvre of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. These two American poets, as we see, appear to be very different from each other. Stevens has been characterized as a 'poet of ideas' whereas Williams is decidedly an Imagist, with his poetry consisting largely of clearly drawn vignettes. But the mutual exclusivity of poetic substance is more apparent than real. Ramanujan was fond of quoting Williams' famous observation that there are, "no thoughts but in things." The reviewer Bruce King has listed Ramanujan, along with two other poets, as an "Indo-Anglian harbinger of literary modernism".

A major Indian influence on Ramanujan's poetry was the Tamil Sangam tradition, especially with its dichotomy between *Agam* and *Puram*, the inner and the outer worlds, private emotion and public vice and virtue. This dichotomy was not, by any means, rigid. In fact, it derives its beauty as a poetic subject from its fluidity, from the constant interaction between the two worlds. It was in the light of this tradition that Ramanujan viewed the cultural plurality and his own makeup as an intellectual and a poet. As an Indian who went on to become an American citizen, Ramanujan was influenced deeply by traditions of thought and art from both the East and the West and was to remark famously that he could never tell where one influence ended and the other began.

Ramanujan is also a poet who was fascinated by India's numerous subaltern oral narrative traditions, starting with the *Harikatha* and the *Yakshagana* of his native state.

He argued tirelessly, lifelong, that although such traditions constituted numerous bodies of what he called “literature without literacy”, they demanded no less erudition and were no less important in shaping the minds of Indians across the country than the more formal pan-Indian written literature that existed in Sanskrit in “classic” epics and scriptures. He also observed that the hiatus between the two was more apparent than real and drew his readers’ attention instead to the ongoing, vibrant cross-fertilization between them.

## THEMES IN HIS POETRY

### Family, Society and the Self

The family is the most frequently seen metaphor in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. It is a medium through which he imagines reality and transmutes it into poetry. While a poem like “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House” is about a large extended family with scattered members going in and out all the time, “Man and Woman in Camera and Out” and “This Pair” are about the husband-wife dyad of a nuclear family. There are also numerous other poems centred around individual family members –”Lines to Granny”, “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”, “Of Mothers, among other things”, “Love Poem for Wife, 1”, “Love Poem for Wife, 2”, “Obituary”, “Ecology”, “Son to Father to Son” and “Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees”. Apart from all these, there are poems which are not about families of their members *per se*, which use family relationships as metaphors either in their title, as in “Still Another for Mother” and “Excerpts from a Father’s Wisdom”, or in their body, e.g. “On the Very Possible Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter” and “The Ruler”.

The sheer extent to which the family and its members pervade Ramanujan’s poetic consciousness comes out strikingly in his poem “Extended Family.” Making an unexpected departure from the sense in which the term is normally used, the poem is actually about the poet going through the routine of his morning bath in far away Chicago. As he performs each step in the process of this very mundane activity, he resembles, nay, reincarnates, a member of his family – his grandfather, father, mother, daughter, son and unborn grandson. The concluding lines of the poem forcefully bring home the idea that the poet’s self has no existence, either in time or in space, that is altogether exclusive of his family members. Nor do they have any, exclusive of him. This condition binds forebear and descendant equally fast:

> Like my great
> great-grandson
>
> I am not yet
> may never be
>
> my future
> dependent
>
> on several
> people
>
> yet
> to come

However, important as the family is to Ramanujan’s poetry, he does not view this institution through a haze of sentimentality. Instead, most of his poems on this theme are portraits of honesty and irony. The confusion that marks attitudes to sex, the suffering of women and the quaint nature of rituals and of patriarchal figures – all of these show up under Ramanujan’s scanner. Many of these things can be seen in “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House”:

lame wandering cows from nowhere
have been known to be tethered,
given a name, encouraged

to get pregnant in the broad daylight
of the street under the elders'
supervision, the girls hiding

behind windows with holes in them.

And:

Nothing stays out: daughters
get married to short-lived idiots;
sons who run away come back

in grandchildren who recite Sanskrit
to approving old men, or bring
betelnuts for visiting uncles

who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water

in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestors' rattle in the throat.

**The Individual and History**

Another theme that runs through Ramanujan's work is the intersection between individual lives or histories, and the History of "larger" entities such as societies, nations and cities. Poems that explore this include "A River", "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day", "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", "The Last of the Princes", "Bosnia", "A Report" and "As Eichmann Said, My Brother Said". In these poems, the Ramanujan's major concern is with how the grand narration of History often devalues individual loss and pathos. Here too, Ramanujan brings honesty and irony to bear on his observations. In "A River" we are told how:

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

The ironically titled "The Last of the Princes" describes the penurious condition of a surviving descendant of the Mughals after talking about the dynasty's long-drawn out decrepitude following the death of Emperor Aurangzeb ('falling in slow motion from Aurangzeb's time'). The casualness with which history is often narrated is another concern of the poet that receives direct treatment in some of Ramanujan's posthumously published poems. In "Bosnia", he asks us:

How can one write about Bosnia,
Biafra, Bangladesh, just to take
only the atrocities that begin with B,

alphabetize cruelties,
eating persimmons and sleeping safe
in the arms of a lover, a wet moon

in the mullioned window?

A contemplation of this seems to lead the poet to a rather dark conclusion about the dynamics of power that make (and unmake) History. We see this articulated in "A Report". The poem opens with the dethroning of the invincible Hitler, Stalin and Lenin in the annals of history. It goes on to talk about how Vietnam 'is a box office hit' and Gandhi and King are 'black and white photographs smiling /away in beedi shops'. This leads to the observation that, 'The new dictators hunt, arraign, /and hang the old ones two hours before dawn'.

**The Human Body, Nature and Culture**

Another abiding theme in Ramanujan's poetry is the relationship between the individual human body, nature and culture. This is explored in poems like "Ecology", "Elements of Composition", "Death and the Good Citizen", "Dream in an Old Language", "One More on a Deathless Theme" and "On Not Learning from Animals".

The poet explores the deep connectedness between these three things, even to the extent of suggesting that one is constantly becoming another in a never ending cycle. "Elements of Composition" traces the life of the poet from its origins in 'father's seed' and 'mother's egg' through a lifetime of accretions, some as concrete as calcium, carbon, gold and magnesium, and others such as memories of downtown Nairobi after riots, lepers of Madurai and Muharram tigers that are no less vivid for their being intangible.

"One More on a Deathless Theme" begins by noting the disembodiment of sorts that all of us experience as creatures who can contemplate our physical selves from a notional Archimedean point outside. By the third stanza, Ramanujan reveals how culturally constructed the human animal is, even in an act that is as "instinctive" and "spontaneous" as lovemaking:

a momentary legend, a mythic
beast with two backs,
mammal and quadruped, even
a four armed androgyne like our god
who used to be everywhere but is now housed
in the kitchen

However, nowhere in his work does the poet romanticize nature or demonize culture. In "Ecology" the champak trees that his mother does not permit her children to cut down, give her and many others in the family 'blinding' migraines every flowering season. "Dream in an Old Language" is about the night-long predicament of a frog struggling in the mouth of a snake that is too old and decrepit to make a prey of it and satiate its hunger. "On Not Learning from Animals" pointedly talks about how the world of animals is not really the place for us to look for examples of just male-female relations.

**Ramanujan as a Postcolonial Poet**

Ramanujan is not a so explicitly a Postcolonial poet as many of his contemporaries. He does not take head-on the question of which language an Indian poet should write in, the way Kamala Das does in her "An Introduction", or Parthasarathy does when he writes of his tongue being bound "in English chains". Nor does he insist, as Jayanta Mahapatra did, that he is an Oriya [in his case, Tamil or Kannadiga] poet working in English. His references to his colonial past are more oblique. Rather than confront issues arising from it, he prefers to view them, as he views nearly everything else, with indulgent irony.

Ramanujan was once told by an interviewer that there were over 300 Indian poets writing in English. His response was, “I wish them well! 300 is not such a large number for such a big country.”

Ramanujan’s poetic style is largely Western, clearly revealing his “apprenticeship” under the Modernist and Imagist masters. But his themes are Indian, especially his preoccupation with the relationship between body and soul, and the family and genealogies. His postcolonial sensibility comes out in the way he views body and soul as a continuum rather than a binary. It is also very striking, not just in the sheer mind-space that the family occupies in his poems, but the fact that frames from the family colour almost everything else in the world of his poetic subjects. A good example of this is the title of his second collection of poems, *Relations* (1971). The use of the word to denote people rather than equations between them is a typical South-Indianism. At the same time, the more ‘proper’ English sense of that word does not stand stripped of meaning. Indeed, like in the case of W.H. Auden’s dancer and dance, the denizens of our extended families and the equations that we share with them at various points in time cannot be told apart from one-another.

Another object of Ramanujan’s ironic gaze is the Indian use of history. Ramanujan rejects the colonial-modernist historical model that looks at history as a complete, finite body of knowledge. Instead he views it as an ongoing discourse with which individuals engage at different levels. Ramanujan may be said to exemplify T.S. Eliot’s prescription in ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’, for a poet whose work is deeply informed not merely by “the pastness of the past, but also its presence.” History is an instrument that is used to constitute this presence and comment on it, and in doing this, Ramanujan has drawn not only on Eliot and other Western influences, but also on the folktale telling traditions of India and the dynamism of the Yakshagana pantomime form of his native Karnataka.

Some poems which may be said to have an overt postcolonial tone are: “Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day”, “Old Indian Belief”, “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House” and “Prayers to Lord Murugan”. The first of these poems merely has a few Orientalist images; the second one has a mere hint of the Western stereotyping of exotic India. In “Small-Scale Reflections” there are references to the colonial act of taking things from the East and “processing” them only to dump them back here as finished products. There is an allusion to the British empire taking destroying our handloom industry by shipping away “hooped bales of cotton” to “invisible Manchesters” and bringing them back “milled and folded/ for a price”. There is another to a similar process of intellectual expropriation where, “every Plotinus we read/ is what some Alexander looted/ between the malarial rivers.”

“Prayers to Lord Murugan” gives us some vignettes of the epistemic violence perpetrated by English learning in a colonial context:

> We eat legends and leavings,
> remember he ivory, the apes,
> the peacocks we sent in the Bible
> to Solomon . . .

Stanza 9 of the poem has a plea to the Lord to deliver the “modern” educated Indian from the thrall of an education in the colonial model:

> Deliver us O presence
> from proxies
> and absences
>
> from sanskrit and the mythologies
> of night and the several
> roundtable mornings
>
> of London and return
> the future to what
> it was.

Here, we meet the problem which Ashis Nandy identified as the psychology of colonialism in his *Intimate Enemy* – the colonial subject being coerced into grading his own traditions of learning in moulds dictated by the metropolitan centre. The location of this issue in an invocatory poem to a Dravidian god is in itself a significant expression of a postcolonial sensibility.

In the sections above, only three of the abiding themes and concerns that run through nearly all of A.K. Ramanujan's poetry have been discussed. There are other themes in his work such as sexuality, the suffering of women and cultural hybridism, which animate a good deal of his work, standing testimony to his scholarship and versatility. In all his work there is a characteristic stamp of irony, not of the lacerating kind, but of a gentle sort, tempered by humour and a fascination with the human condition. The human self is explored and celebrated as much at the individual level as at the cosmic level, as much for its vulnerability as for its heroism.

# Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel, the outstanding poet of Post-Independence India was born in Bombay in 1924. A Jewish expatriate, he made India his home. He was educated at Antonio D' Souza High School, Wilson College, Bombay and Birbeck College, London. He returned to India from England, in 1952 and worked for sometime as Professor and Head of the Department of English, Mittibhai College of Arts, Bombay. Besides literary articles and essays, dramas, art and social criticism, Ezekiel has brought out a number of collections of poems. 'A Time to Change and other Poems' (1952), 'Sixty Poems' (1953), 'The Third' (1959), 'The Unfinished Man' (1960), 'The Exact Name' (1965), 'Collected Poems' (1966), 'Hymns in Darkness and Poster Prayers' (1976) and 'Latter Day Psalms' (1982) are his poems, to mention a few.

One of the major factors of Ezekiel's poetry was that he belonged to a Bene-Israel family which immigrated to India, generations ago. Substantially alienated from the core of the Indian ethos, Ezekiel was actually aware of this alienation being accentuated by the fact that he has spend most of his life in highly westernized circles in cosmopolitan Bombay. With Marathi as his 'lost mother tongue' and English as his 'second mother tongue', Ezekiel's quest for integration made for a restless career of quick changes and experiments including 'philosophy, poverty and poetry' in a London basement room, and attempts at journalism, and even a spell of working as a factory manager before he settled down as a university teacher in his 'bitter native city' -Bombay.

Ezekiel's poetry is the record of his confrontation with the tension between the opposites. These opposites are emotional involvements in life and desire for a detachment from it, as sensuous perception of the tangible world and a spiritual abstraction out of the tangible world, a passion for this world and a hankering for the gullibility of the rural folk.

Writing poetry is a serious occasion with Ezekiel. In 'Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher', Ezekiel attempts to define the poet in terms of the lover and the bird watcher. William Shakespeare categorizes the poet, the lover and the lunatic under a single class in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Ezekiel in his poem compares the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher, together. What is common to all of them is the mechanics of their operation. The poet cannot compel himself to write poetry. The lover cannot force his woman to fall in love with him. If the bird watcher forces his pace, the bird flies away. All the three use waiting as a strategy. In fact, the waiting becomes a form of pursuit. It can be said that they conquer by surrendering. "The best poet wait for words". There is close resemblance among the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher in their search for word, love and bird, respectively. All the three become one in spirit and Ezekiel expresses this in imagery noted for its precision and decorum.

> The hunt is not an exercise of will
> But patient love relaxing on a hill
> To note the movement of a timid wing.

He uses effective images connecting the search of the birdwatcher to that of the poet and the lover. It is striking that the transition from one image to the other is so unobtrusive, that the poet, lover and birdwatcher lose their separate identities and merge into one another to carry the poem forward to its end.

Ezekiel's striving to become a finished man compels him to the self-analysis and introspection that a reader comes across in some of his poems. He believes:

> To see things as they are is a habit
> An acquisition in the blood
> That will not let the eye grow old.

In 'Philosophy', he speaks of a place to which he often goes "by a flow / Away from all existence, to a cold / Lucidity" in which, "The landscape in its geologic prime / Dissolves to show its quintessential slime". He looks at the past with a neutral eye and thinks "of each historic passion as a blink that happened to the sad eye of Time".

Like most of the new Indian poets in English, Ezekiel is also self-revelatory. Some of the poems are self-confessional and plainly autobiographical. “Background Casually” is a brilliant example.

Ezekiel has a special gift of making poems out of the ordinariness of events. Ordinary human situations and common human relationships are dealt with in “Night of the Scorpion” and “The Visitor”. Ezekiel's handling of the situations shows that a poem can be equally impressive and revealing even without dealing with great philosophical truths.

Ezekiel’s verse is sharp, shapely and austere. He uses free verse to find a rhythm that suits the emotional mood of the poems. ‘Night of the Scorpion’, a poem in which superstition is pitted against scientific temperament, the poet achieves a careful variation of rhythm where the rhythms of the speaking voice shift with the sense: even an incantatory effect is achieved.

“May he sit still, they said / May the sins of your previous birth / be burned away tonight, they said”.

Ezekiel is obsessed with “words as fresh as women’s eyes” and with the quest for the right idiom. Form to Ezekiel is not a dress, a manner or style, but an organic, integrated blind of all the elements that go into the making of a poem. In one of his poems, Ezekiel seeks God’s blessings to be able to write “not only a new poem, but new poetry by a new man”. His poetry reveals technical skill of a high order. His mastery of the colloquial idiom is matched by a sure command of rhythm and rhyme.

# Kamala Das

Kamala Das was born at Punnayurkulam, in Malabar to parents who were poets. Time and again she speaks of her Dravidian blood and of her Nair heritage. She was educated mainly at home and got married at the early age of fifteen. Kamala's poetic output in English is rather thin. It consists of three slender volumes, "Summer in Calcutta" (1965), "The Descendants" (1957) and "The Old Playhouse and Other Poems" (1973). The last volume includes many of the poems published in earlier volumes. Nevertheless, Kamala is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest Indian poets writing in English, as one who had the courage to express her essentially feminine sensibility.

Kamala Das' poems are pre-eminently poems of love which include anguish and pain in a near-neurotic world. She is perhaps the first Indian woman to unveil her heart, constantly yearning for love, in verse. She has written about love and its non-fulfilment and her verse is generally dominated by the detailed nuances of sexual emotions and acts. Her world of love is essentially a personal world depicting the agonizing ambivalence of the search for security in love even while desiring "independence consistent with a non-domestic mode of living".

Kamala Das's poetry is largely an expression of her frustration in love. In poem after poem, she speaks of her unfulfilled love and the yearning for love. She identifies love with physical desire and speaks of "endless female hungers" with an uninhibited frankness not generally seen in women's writings.

The failure to discover meaningful relationship between the sexes invests her poetry with a deep sense of pathos bordering on tragedy. She has revealed her personal experiences with a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context. In her poem, 'The Freaks,' through images of repulsion and horror she brings out the emotional emptiness and sterility of her married life, the intensity of her misery as a wife who had to submit to her husband whom she found repulsive, and with whom she had no emotional engagement at all. She speaks of the want of affection and intensity of passion in her sexual relationship within marriage.

Kamala Das has been assigned to the category of confessional poets like Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood. She has stated that her poetry is a "psychic striptease", that it is an exploration of the geography of her own mind. She dissects her mind and physic freely, dwelling upon matters which are strictly personal and private. In 'The Sunshine Cat', she speaks of the brutal treatment of husband and her frustrations after suffering such sexual humiliations at the hands of men. The image of the sunshine cat, thin like a streak of light, symbolizes all her sufferings in the male dominated world.

'The Looking Glass' shows the frankness with which she deals with the theme of sex. In this poem, she gives advice to the members of the female sex, the means by which a woman can achieve maximum possible pleasure out of her sexual experiences. 'An Introduction' is a candid piece of self-revelation. Her husband's rejection of her love, her loneliness, resulting from her refusal to fit in with the 'Categories' and her non-conformism, all are sensitively expressed in the poem.

Her sense of alienation makes her nostalgic. The poem 'My Grandmother's House' brings out the poet's nostalgic yearning for her family-home in Malabar, where she had passed some of the happiest days of her life and where her old grandmother had showered her love and affection on her. The family house and the grandmother are closely identified. The old house is to the poet, a place of symbolic retreat, to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity, and Edenic world where love and happiness are still possible. In the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar', Kamala Das successfully creates the atmosphere of her Malabar home at noon through the imagery depicting the men and women who passed the house or visited it. The feeling that she is now far away from that house is a torture to her.

Kamala Das is a serious pursuer, trying to reveal the quintessential woman. In her poetry, the expression of female sensibility is at its best. The poem ‘Invitation’ is a fascinating psychological self-portrait. It embodies Kamala Das’s struggle to keep up her faith in life, inspite of the betrayal by a lover, although she feels an irresistible temptation to end her life in the sea.

Kamala Das has been criticized for her pre-occupation with the human anatomy. Her poetry has sometimes been called indecent and even vulgar because of the freedom she employs in her explicit references to the physical activities and the sexual act. But such physical details enable the poetess to image lustful relationships in all their ugliness, barrenness and spiritual sterility. They are integral to the total design of the poems which give the reader a peep into the working of the feminine consciousness where even such barren experiences linger for long.

The world of Kamala Das’s poems is purely a personal one, a world that she has made her own. The world is thoroughly India and the sensibility she expresses is also Indian. The primary fact about her, however, is that her poetry is a quest for personality as well as a struggle for self-realization. The condition of loneliness and disillusionment from which she writes and which influences much of her experience gives her poetry its distinctive character and idiom.

As K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, Kamala Das is as different from Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu as Walt Whitman is different from Henry Longfellow. Her sensibility is fiercely feminine, daring and uninhibited. She does not try to make her poems obscure as some modern poets do. Her style is simple and it suits her purpose. She has something to say and she says it in simple language so that the readers can understand her. But she has mastery of phrase and control over rhythm. Her words are often pointed and envenomed too. Her characteristic trick is to split phrases and meanings between two lines.

Kamala Das has a fine poetic sensibility and she has mastered the poetic art. But she has failed to develop a comprehensive vision of life which makes a poet truly great. Yet, she has been regarded as a truly authentic feminine voice of power dealing with the “conflict between passivity and rebellion against the male oriented universe”. Her poetry is “an acknowledgement and a celebration of the beauty and courage of being a woman”.

# Girish Karnad as a Playwright

Modern Indian theatre had virtually been relegated to a plant of stunted growth till a decade after the nation threw off its colonial yoke. It is a sad truth that the modern Indian stagecraft was largely a mediocre affair despite the towering presence of such a rich theatrical tradition and stalwarts like Tagore and Aurobindo. This hapless condition of the Indian dramatic enterprise turned the tide with the explosion of a group of talented, young, vibrant playwrights on the Indian stage. This welcome whiff of change was ushered in by the likes of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Mohan Rakesh.

Girish Karnad was undoubtedly the most prominent of the new crop of promising dramatists and is today one of the foremost dramatists on the contemporary world stage. The fabulous history of the miraculous development and bold innovations of the modern Indian stage are inseparably linked with the glorious dramatic career of Girish Karnad.

Unlike his illustrious contemporaries like Sircar and Tendulkar who sought to delve into the quagmire of issues of middle-class lives, Karnad was content to revert to the rich depository of his land's mythology and history; the subjects of his plays reflect the confounding problems and trying challenges that contemporary life entails and endeavour to forge a valid link between the past and the present. In other words, as a creative individual, Karnad obviously perceives the subjects of his plays from his own unique perspective, develops them in the crucible of his own imagination and personal experiences and artfully employs them as a medium to communicate his own singularly independent and original feelings, thoughts and interpretations.

Karnad was born in Matheran in 1938 and had his education at Karnatak University, Dharwad and at Oxford where he was a prestigious Rhodes Scholar. Though a multifaceted genius, Karnad is admittedly at his best in playwriting. He reminisces: "I've been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I've been an actor, a publisher, a filmmaker. But in none of these, I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting."

Karnad spent his impressionable childhood in Sirsi, where he had his memorable first-hand experience of indigenous folk theatre. He was adequately exposed to two forms of theatre; plays staged by troupes of professional actors called *Natak companies* and the more traditional costume drama of *Yakshagana* performances acted out in the open air. In the course of his studies, Karnad came across the plays of the western dramatists like Brecht, Anouilh, Sartre and Beckett. This acquaintance with western thought and theatre has exerted an indelible influence on his dramatic art *per se*. The resulting voice is the subtle fusion of the grandeur of Sanskrit drama, the profundity of the Greek theatre and the sophistication of the western mode of dramaturgy. In this regard, Karnad's theatre had been hailed as "a theatre of in-betweenness."

In Karnad's theatre, drama depends less on plot and more on the total theatrical experience. Towards this end, he borrows heavily from the Western theatre and blends them deftly with the indigenous folk arts. For instance in *Hayavadana*, the Brechtian principles of alienation are wonderfully suffused with a number of folk motifs. He believes that the visual aspect of the theatrical performance is much more significant than any other aspect and draws on the conventions of folktales to create a world of his own. In fact, Karnad owes a lot to the ritualistic theatre of Indian folk art, where the aspects of meta-theatre are found to abound in.

Karnad has more than a dozen major plays to his credit. Many of them have been translated into English and staged with aplomb throughout the world. The impressive list includes *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hittina Hunja* (1970), *Hayavadana* (1971) and *Nagamandala* (1988). Other notable contributions include *Anjumallige* (1985), *Tale-Danda* (1990), *Agni Muttu Male* (1995), *Tippuvina Kanasugalu* (2000) and *Bali, The Sacrifice* (2002).

Reworking of potent myths or historical events has always been the favourite mode of Karnad. His dramatic oeuvre amounts to a reworking of either mythical plots or folk-

legends or history, which are already quite familiar to his audience. However, this inability to invent an original plot has led to the stringent criticism that Karnad, as a playwright, lacks originality. Karnad himself is aware of this drawback and he remonstrates: "First of all I don't choose a plot because it has any relevance to anything, I choose it rather because it hits me and I get excited over what seems to me a marvellous story. I ask myself why it is exciting to me. The process of writing a play is an attempt at capturing that excitement again, understanding it and in some way communicating it."

The peculiar reason for the fascination that Karnad entertains for myths is that Indian myths offer solid basis of a common background which permeates the collective consciousness of the entire nation. Unlike any other nation, the Indian people are deeply conscious of their rich culture and cherish their past. As this mythology is an inseparable part of the entire nation's heritage, the deft employment of these myths become a facile artistic solution to overcome the stumbling block of the heterogeneity of the Indian audience.

It was while engaged in the creation of his first play, *Yayati* that Karnad discovered the latent potential of myths to represent current dilemmas and stupefying worries as he found himself at ease inscribing his own dissatisfaction with the society into the pliable readymade framework of the mythical pattern. He had won the prestigious Rhodes scholarship to study in England. But his family and his friends wanting him to stay with them, thus demanding the total sacrifice of his future prospects seemed to reverberate the self-centred nature of the mythical king, Yayati who had exchanged his old age for his son's (Puru's) youth. In this play, Karnad poses the existential problems of identity and responsibility. A critic notes: "While Karnad made free use of the Mahabharata legend with all its elemental passions and conflicts, he made it the vehicle of a new vision - the conflict between idealism and altruism of youth and fear of death haunting the old."

Karnad's groundbreaking second play, *Tughlaq* is a historical one loosely based on the life of Sultan Muhammed-bin-Tughlaq of fourteenth century India who is ignominiously dubbed the "mad king." Here, Karnad poses a philosophical question as to how a self-righteous idealist with absolute power over his subjects can be detrimental to the destiny of the whole nation. The overall treatment of plot and character in the play resembles Camus' treatment of ancient Roman legend in his *Caligula*.

Karnad's next venture, *Hittina Hunja* reworks an age-old Kannada myth. The play deals with a Jain king who comes to realise the shocking adultery which his wife committed in her mind. The solution to this tricky problem is the sacrifice of a cock to the gods to atone for the guilt. However, as a true Jain, the king cannot put it to practice. So, he makes a cock out of dough and just as he begins the sacrifice, it amazingly begins to crow. The fascinating play seems to suggest that all kinds of violence are equally offensive and therefore condemnable.

*Hayavadana* and *Nagamandala* are often considered twin plays as they share numerous features in common. Both interpret ancient stories from a refreshingly new contemporary angle. In *Hayavadana*, Karnad dramatises an archetypal riddle of identity posed by the story of the 'Transposed Heads' in the Sanskrit work, *Vetala Panchavimsati* which forms a part of Kshemendra's *Brihatkathamanjari* and Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*. In this play, Karnad operates within a complex frame work of myths and legends, effecting a perfect synthesis of eastern and western modes of dramaturgy. Karnad invests the myth with new meanings, making it the vehicle of highly contentious contemporary issues like the problem of being, the search for identity (especially feminine), the search for completeness and the existential agonies of man. At another level, the play presents the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of human nature.

In *Hayavadana,* Karnad suffuses Brechtian techniques of alienation with a number of folk motifs. In this play, alienation is both the theme and the technique. Karnad presents us with a number of alienated characters like Hayavadana, Goddess Kali, Padmini, Devadatta and Kapila. He also uses a number of alienation devices like songs,

masks, the chorus, dolls and etcetera. Of these, the stage manager, the use of masks to figuratively represent characters, the device of entry curtains and etcetera are directly borrowed from the Kannada folk theatre, *Yakshagana Bayalata*. The use of myth as the basic source of the play also serves a purpose; it alienates the audience.

*Nagamandala* deals with a woman's quest for an ideal husband. It is a play based on a Kannada folk-tale related to Karnad by the noted literateur A.K. Ramanujan. Karnad claims it to "be essentially a love story." The work displays a number of parallel mythical plots and like *Hayavadana* it addresses several momentous comtemporary concerns. Karnad handles the sources in *Nagamandala* to emphasize a modern woman's craving for love and recognition. This play gave him the Karnataka Sahithya Academy Award for the most creative work of 1989. This play delivers a scathing critique of the patriarchal discourse and deflates many a masculine construct such as *Pativratya*.

*Agni Muttu Male* (*The Fire and The Rain*) treats the intriguing problem of amorality in contemporary life. It is an evocative re-enactment of a powerful fratricide myth from the Mahabharata of Indra's destruction of his own brother out of pure petty jealously. Arvasi's cry, "Why brother? Why?" echoes through the play, expressing the confused anger and soul breaking agony of betrayal. The ending of *The Fire and the Rain* however seems to echo *The Waste Land* with reference to the interpretation of "Da."

The plays *Driven Snow* (*Anju Mallige* in Kannada) and *Bali: The Sacrifice* are intense and riveting and reveal many dimensions. These plays foreground the complex issue of social conflict, subliminal pressure and violence which provoke not so much physical as emotional and psychological repercussions. About *Bali, the Sacrifice*, Lynn Gardner comments: "The experience is greater than the sum of its parts and it is as enjoyable as it is thought provoking."

The play *Tale-Danda* deals with the rise of Veerashivism, a radical protest and reform movement in twentieth century. This play deals explicitly with the influence of the larger social and intellectual milieu on individual action. *A Heap of Broken Images* is the latest play of Girish Karnad. This play has won critical accolades for its brilliant use of technology as well as dramatic denouement.

Thus Girish Karnad virtually redefines contemporary experience by using the intricate grammar of literary archetypes, achieving meaning through myths, legends and folklore. His plays are notable for their outstanding dramatic style and technique. He concerns himself with the problems of existence, search for identity and the problems of isolation and frustration. For Karnad, drama is not merely literary existence, but a direct offspring of the living stage.