The changing images of India in Steel, Bain and Myers indicate a phase of British fiction dealing with a large variety of new and exciting themes collected from an exotic environment of human activity, and these images, again, enable such British novelists to portray new types of characters and to contrive new patterns of plots and events to accommodate sometimes two distinct spheres of life and culture and two different sets of values.

However, the nineteenth century in English literature marks the halcyon days of fiction. With the Queen's accession in 1837 does the Victorian era start and with her death in 1901 does it come to an end. But a new era really begins with the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 - a year of great reform laying the solid foundation of political democracy - and the era comes to a close at the end of the Boer War in 1902. The British society before 1832 had been shaken to its very foundation by numerous pressing problems crying for immediate solution, and it is only during the eighteen-thirties, a period of progressive social reform, that the social conscience was awakened. And it is this awakening of a new spirit to redress the long-standing grievances of a problem-ridden society that, among other factors, promotes the growth of fiction as an adequate form of literary art in the Victorian age. The date of publication of Steel's first novel on India entitled *Miss Stuart's Legacy* is 1893 and that of Myers's first historical fiction caption-
ed The Year and the Far is 1929 while Bain's first Indian fiction christened A Digt of the Moon comes out in 1899 and his last fiction, i.e. The Substance of a Dream in 1919. Historically speaking, therefore, these fiction writers belong more to the twentieth century than to the nineteenth. But in tone, temper and technique F.A. Steel and F.W. Bain follow the great Victorian novelists such as Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot, Meredith and Emily Bronte while L.H. Myers like Aldous Huxley uses fiction as a vehicle for his ideas, although the Victorian hangover survives in his work. And it is important to note that though Steel, Bain and Myers deal with India, Great Britain was the centre of their literary activity, especially in the case of Myers and Steel. For Myers never visited India. Steel returned to Britain in 1889, and all her novels of India are published thereafter, although she came back to India for a brief spell to make an on-the-spot study of relevant materials for her novel on the Mutiny entitled On the Face of the Waters. And Bain visited England at least four times on furlough between 1900 and 1915, and spent there about five years in all before retirement. Bain wrote his Indian fictions perhaps in close liaison between Great Britain and India. It is no denying the fact that by culture these novelists remained British in character. It was but natural for them to inherit a tradition current in the sphere of British fiction-writing. And so they did, and consciously. For the Western writer's conventional impression that the East is rich in poetry with no tradition of fiction-writing was carried on until Lady Murasaki's (c.975-
c.1025) Tales of Genii was presented to the West through Arthur Waley's English translation in 1923.

Indo-British relations of a few centuries have thus produced an abundant harvest in the form of an enormous corpus of works of fiction. One wonders why Steel and Bain are not given the place they deserve in the history of British fiction, and for that matter in English literature. Steel, like Kipling, is a prolific writer, and has to her credit ten full-length novels besides numerous stories about India. And Bain's works of fiction are a superb blending of modernism and archaism, reality and romance, history and myth. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* does not mention them. Only *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1931 to 1940, comes out with a brief coverage about Bain. *The Concise Cambridge History of Literature* mentions only F.A. Steel, but no mention is made of the three fiction-writers in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature*. Nevertheless, in this chapter an attempt is made to examine in depth the varied aspects of the works of fiction of Steel, Bain and Myers, and thereby to assess what position they deserve in the history of British fiction.

*Miss Stuart’s Legacy* (1893) mingles history with disguised autobiography. Mowbray Morris rechristened the novel as *Miss Stuart’s Legacy* but F.A. Steel prefers her title *Legacy Duty*. It partly reproduces history of the stirring times in the context of the Anglo-Afghan War. Steel, like Dickens in *David

1 F.A.Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity*, p.195
Copnerfield partly rediscovers herself in Miss Stuart's experiences of India. The novel starts with her father and ends with her child. It records Belle's varied experiences in a strange land through different phases of her life—maidenhood, marriage and subsequent motherhood. As a sophisticated woman she comes in contact with the male-folk of her own race—Dick Smith, Baby and Philip. She likes Dick who loves her at first sight, dislikes Baby who marries her, and initially does not encourage the amorous approaches of Philip who adores her. Both Dick and Philip make a legacy of £30,000 each for Belle. But chance or fate enters the scene and is allowed to play its part. For Dick's death in the Anglo-Afghan War and Philip's supposed death make room for Baby to step in her life as husband whose principal motive in marrying Belle is to use the money. However, Philip's reappearance on the scene turns the tide of her life. His silent devotion to her finally overcomes her heart. And now she loves the man long ignored and proposes marriage, although with a posthumous child, which does not materialise because love is sometimes better than marriage. The plot of the novel is constructed round the issue of irrigation over which a friction is generated between Baby and Shunker Das. Shunker Das has an old grudge against Baby who while in government service promised government honours for Das, accepted money from him, has now left service due to "cooking of accounts" without living up to the commitment he made to Das and has recently turned to an independent living by way of introducing irrigation in India and that, too, through the legacy money of Bella. However, unexpected flood
breaks through the dam and upsets the whole plan of Raby.

This is how Belle's problem is solved. Fate plays its part in the world of Steel, but it is not the fate of Hardy's understanding. Inscrutable, indeed, are the ways of fate. Sometimes it smiles; sometimes it frowns, and this is exactly what happens in the life of Belle who under its malignant power was forced under pressing circumstances to marry an unnecessary husband removed a few years later by death by a kindly Providence.

Mrs. Steel's excellence lies in revealing the subtle nuances of feelings of the feminine mind with amazing accuracy. In this respect F.A. Steel foreshadows D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) who in *Sons and Lovers* (1913) unfolds with astonishing credibility the different levels of feminine consciousness in the portrayal of Paul Morel's mother. The twists and tangles of the feminine mind have been exposed here by a female novelist with a startling candour with which Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights* analyses the inner mechanism of Catherine. The novel in part bears reminiscences of George Eliot who in her novels busies herself with moral problems. For Shunker Das and John Raby representing forces of evil die while Philip standing for virtue survives the crisis. Miss Stuart's Legacy is, indeed, a mature novel. For it portrays characters torn by conflicts and problems. And they develop under every situation. Every character possesses a distinct personality in the frame.

2 F.A. Steel, *Miss Stuart's Legacy*, p.440
work of a carefully constructed plot. And the prose depicting
scenes of nature and revealing in depth the sufferings and ago-
nies of Belle is easy-flowing, and adequately communicative.

* The Potter's Thumb (1894) is an arresting story
of Eastern intrigue. The plot structure is constructed around
the missing of Ayodhya pot and the pearls from the Hodinuggur
palace. Together with this is interwoven the conspiracy over
opening the Hodinuggur sluice-gate. Lewis Gordon, Miss Rose
Tweedie, Dan, Gwen Boynton, and George Keene represent the West-
tern world while Fazl Elahi, the potter of Hodinuggur who made
the pot for George, Agizan, Ghandni, and Dalol Beg represent the
Eastern world, and much of the charm of the novel lies in the
power with which Mrs. Steel institutes a contrast between the
European world and the Asiatic world and solves the twisted
question. It is the conflict between the spirit of progress and
the force of vested interest that lends dynamism to the story.
The novel is a mingling of tragedy and comedy of life. George,
Dan, and the old Diwan are dead while Gwen Boynton survives to
marry, against her wish at the decree of fate, Colonel Tweedie
two years after the death of Dan whom she loved. A sense of
Hardy's fatalism is partly at work here, for a person, under
the ruling power of destiny, is forced to do a thing not liked
by her. 'Life', she said, 'was so mysterious. Humanity is a
mere shuttlecock in the hand of Fate .......'

3 F.A. Steel, Miss Stuart's Legacy, p. 369, p. 389
4 F.A. Steel, The Potter's Thumb, p. 317
character in the novel has his or her own way of interpreting and doing things, and convinces as a warm and breathing reality and the glowing prose is in keeping with the fluidity of things in the novel. The Potter's Thumb is an artistic success in spite of the shadow of foregone conclusion, purporting the invulnerability of the Raj, spoiling much of the charm of some of her novels.

On the Face of the Waters (1896) is a historical novel on the Sepoy Sepoy Mutiny. Here Steel mingles historical fact with fiction. Initial British reverses and losses drive them to the brink of despair for the time being and Mrs. Erlton grown mystical under the stress of grim circumstances awaits the emergence of a Spirit "to heal and cleanse" her husband who is going astray. The novel is the fruit of a laborious work, and seeks to recapture the spirit of history with fidelity to fact, and this is perhaps why most of the characters impress not as artistically drawn round portraits, but as puppets pulled by strings of history. But it is of absorbing interest to note that Kate Erlton, not a historical character but the child of Steel's imagination, develops a distinct personality of her own, and in spite of an experience of gruesome cruelty in the Mutiny, she is strong enough to survive it, and moves ahead in tune with the march of time after the Mutiny. She comes from England with a traditional British idea about India, but keeps her mind open, and receives impressions from the Indian actuality to

5 F.A. Steel, On the Face of the Waters, p.19
alter her attitude towards Indian asceticism, and marries Jim Douglas after Major Briton’s death in the Mutiny and settles back, like the Raj, into the normal climate of life.

Voices in the Night (1900) is a great creation of Mrs. Steel in the sphere of novel. In characterization and plot-construction she exhibits here her power and deft handling. The subtle but sure way in which she allows Chris and Grace to develop their personality in adverse circumstances is a treat to enjoy. Chris and Grace suffer for unmatched marriage. Chris, an anglicised brahmin, marries Viva, a Christian lady. But the yawning gulf between the East and the West makes the marriage extremely unhappy. The conflict in the mind of Chris is deepened as the reminiscences of the early life freshen up at the sight of the familiar surrounding and face. He is willing to switch back to his former identity and announces himself a Brahmin which his mother stoutly opposes ‘you are not twice-born’ but ‘twice-dead’, for he has become a renegade and so an outcaste. Nor does the Indian priesthood accept him, ‘He is not of us, nor of the Huzoors’. Grace’s social vanity stands in the way of marrying Jack Raymond whom she loves, and makes her marry Mr. Arbuthnot, whom she never loves. Conflict between love and status adds to her miseries. The delicate suggestiveness with which Mrs. Steel has depicted the interplay between characters and characters, between characters

6 F.A. Steel, On the Face of the Waters, pp. 366-367
7 F.A. Steel, Voices in the Night, p. 112
8 Ibid., p. 129
and situations is a sure sign of her artistic skill. This is manifest in the parting remark of John Allison who rescues Chris from a predicament into which he was thrown on account of defiling the Hindoo temple, "It is the uncertainty, sir, that does the mischief. Beer's beer, an 'whisky is whisky. It's when you come to mixin' 'em that you dun'no where you are". The plot-fabric of the novel is woven around the plague-episode on which a row is created between the British and the Indians at Nushapore over the adoption of effective medical measures to tackle the fatal disease. The conflict is between medicine and amulet, between science and superstition. The entire atmosphere of the novel is imbued with the spirit of conflict - conflict between reason and prejudice, between Chris and Viva, between George and Raymond, between Lesley and Grace, between the East and the West, between the Indians and the British community over the question of plague. Together with the issue of plague is intertwined Grace's string of pearls episode. In concord with the physical crisis is the spiritual chaos of Chris and Grace for unmatched marriage. But at the end the twist of the plot is solved; Chris is heard of no more, Viva goes back to England; Grace gets back her string of pearls, with, of course, one pearl still missing; Miss Drummond and Jack Raymond are married while Nushapore after the wild pandemonium settles back into normalcy, and the British repose their confidence in the Raj with renewed enthusiasm.

9 F.A. Steel, Voices in the Night, p.117
In The Hosts of the Lord (1900) F.A. Steel deals with the theme of modern irrigation methods employed earlier in The Potter's Thumb. The mechanism of the plot is knit on a row between the British and the Indians in Bishwara, a garrison town, over the digging of a canal meant for watering the desert. The Indians are worried over the sacred waters to be defiled by the British who through irrigation methods seek to make the vast waste fertile. A spirit of antagonism is displayed here, too, between science and superstition, between progress and reaction. Laila, Vincent, Roshan, and Father Ninian succumb to the crisis. Nevertheless, the British prevail over the Indians as the troopers side with them. The troopers' revolt that held out a promise of light to come in the East ended in smoke and Roshan is defeated. Of course, F.A. Steel shows a sound sense of form in having artfully contrived sufficient motivation behind the troopers' uprising. Finally, Erda and Carylon's love consummates into marriage. And there is no trace of furor left, and Bishwara gets back into the normal climate of life. The title bears a forked meaning — the British people like Dr. Dillion, Dering, Carylon are the hosts of Lord Viceroy who was to open the canal, and the Hindoo pilgrims proceeding to the Cradle of the Gods on the Vaisakh festival are also the Hosts of the Lord. Much of the quality of the novel is spoilt by the treatment of the hackneyed theme which, again, is marred by that fond foregone conclusion about the Raj.

10 F.A. Steel, The Hosts of the Lord, p.211, p.314
The Law of the Threshold (1924) is a historical novel interweaving politics and religion in a well-constructed plot-fabric. It is highly representative of the troubled time through which India passed during the period of intense struggle for freedom. The creative writer has cleverly introduced a sub-plot dealing with Kali's cult of blood within the larger context of the main plot. The disquieting tremor experienced in the political sphere is ingenuously mingled with the furore over the religious question of Kali's cult of cruelty, presented with a marvellous artistic skill through a violent turmoil in Kali's temple over the predicament of Hastings, Pillicott and Maya Dey, a Bengalee woman with Western education. Besides, Bolshevik terrorism represented in the portrayal of the characters of Markham and Whitehill has also been scrupulously integrated into the principal plot-structure which is chiefly concerned with the depiction of the Indian Independence Movement. The novel ends with that fond, foregone British attitude towards India as revealed in the portrayal of the character of Maya Dey with a Western educational background. Of course, she is precipitated into a conflict between patriotism and love of Western ideas of progress, but is made deliberately by the creative writer to stay put just on the line of demarcation between two differing spheres of cultural traditions. With such a curious stance she appears to be distressed by a question, 'Was it possible that after thousands and thousands of years in which a pathetically contented people had lived
without the remotest idea of national life, that in a few short
decades this uneducated mass of ignorant brain could have
gripped that idea so firmly, that without it life was unbear­
able? Nevertheless, The Law of the Threshold is a great
work of art in which the novelist has meted out a masterly
treatment to a theme collected from an exotic environment of
human activity.

King Errant (1912) is a fictionized biography
like Meredith’s The Tragic Comedians (1880). It seeks to
restore in brief Babur’s life — history based on his memoir,
and at the same time introduces some fictitious elements like
the crystal bowl and the details of Babur’s subsequent marriage
to Mahum. A Prince of Dreamers (1908), Mistress of Men (1917)
and The Builder (1928) constitute a trilogy of Steel’s histori­
cal novels of on the Moghul court. They seek to recreate par­
tly the history of India of the sixteenth and the seventeenth
centuries during the reign of the great Moghul Emperors, and
at the same time incorporate such fictitious characters as
Atma Devi involved in the diamond episode in A Prince of Dreamers and the strangler in Mistress of Men. In each of these
novels more or less the same theme of conspiracy on the ques­
tion of succession has been treated. It is the oft-repeated
theme in the novels on the Moghul court including those of
Myers. In A Prince of Dreamers Mrs. Steel reproduces Akbar,
ranked as one of the world-greats like Shakespeare, Raphael,
Drake, Galileo, Michelangelo and Cervantes. Akbar as a dreamer with an extraordinary aloofness from his surroundings impresses Steel profoundly. And his greatness lies in that aloofness.

Mrs. Steel chooses as her period in Akbar's life that time of bliss before the abandonment of the City of Victory, Fatehpur Sikri, built to commemorate the birth of Salim. Prince Salim's conspiracy against his father, deepened through the diamond episode that runs parallel to the main plot, is, among other factors, behind Akbar's subsequent decision to abandon Fatehpur Sikri, and this means the giving up of many of his cherished dreams. In *Mistress of Men* F.A.Steel reproduces Nurjahan who overwhelmed Jehangir with her strong power and personality.

With never a whisper against her, 'she was an Eastern Helen, yet chastity incarnate'; with the ruling motive to make Jehangir, whom she never loved, the slave of her will, to be Queen not only of Women but of Men also, and gifted with statesmanship favouring Akbar's policy of tolerance, Nurjahan, that paragon of beauty, ensnared Jehangir into a weak affectionate creature more like a female than a male. Shahjahan is reproduced in *The Builder* as a great patron of art and architecture. The plot of the novel is wrought round the question of succession amongst his sons who are involved in a conspiracy. Aurangzebe, the crooked 'white snake' never wavered for a moment in his life to kill Dara and usurp the throne from his father.

12 F.A.Steel, *The Builder*, p.206
Conflict between Dara and Aurangzebe, between progressive Western culture and orthodox faith, between Christianity and Islam pervades the novel, and makes the story a moving and exciting experience. However, F.A. Steel in her trilogy of historical novels on the Moghul court seeks to recapture the spirit of history. While dealing with the Moghuls, especially the Moghul Emperors, Mrs. Steel feels flushed up, and appears to bring her literary spirit into full play. The British, fond of pomp and splendour so pronounced in the Moghul court, perhaps find in the Mughal image of India an analogy of their own image of the land, and deal with the imperial court of the great Moghuls to betray India as a land of proverbial conspiracy and intrigue. The Moghul characters in these novels are generally treated with sympathy, and stand exuberant and outspoken, opposed, barring Akbar, to the traditional Indian values.

Flora Annie Steel is, indeed, a major novelist writing on India. Her novels cannot be trifled away as bad stuff. Despite her predilection for the British values and the Raj she exhibits in her novels dealing with India an amazing grasp over her materials, a striking power of characterization, a sound sense of plot-construction, and occasional command over succinct but scintillating prose. In a word, Flora Annie Steel deserves a prominent place in the history of British fiction.

F.W. Bain is a rare phenomenon in the history of British fiction. In his thirteen works of fiction dealing with
India he achieves a harmonious blending of modernism and archaism, history and myth, past and present. All these works of fiction are imbued with the spirit of Hinduism. In them Bain succeeds in restoring a vision of ancient India with her great cultural heritage. He collects tit-bits, materials for his stories from varied sources of Hindoo lore, but gives them a modern shape. So unique is the fusion of form and content, of glowing prose and the Hindoo spirit of antiquity, that one is almost beguiled into believing that the story is written by a Hindoo. Besides, in each case the plot is artfully constructed to produce a unity of impressions. Indeed, Bain maintained a myth by mystifying the reader that his works of fiction are direct translations from the Sanskrit original, but this myth now stands broken and Bain's authorship has been established beyond doubt. Bain's literary fibres are of Hindoo essence, but by means of his rare artistry and skill he has woven them into the well-designed fabric of a work of fiction.

The Digit of the Moon (1899) is a work of fiction dealing with a Hindoo love-story. Itself a story, it enshrines a series of nineteen stories told on behalf of his king by Rasakosha, the court-jester of Suryakanta, the king, to Anangaraga, an exceptionally beautiful Naga woman. Rasakosha's stories bear significance in so far as they constitute the occasion of the meeting of the two, the first dawn, dawning and gradual deepening of love in her daily audience with the king. It is, indeed, a love-story of a high order. For while Rasakosha
speaks, Suryakanta and Anangaraya remain mute struck by the arrow of love till the king boldly approaches the Princess who finally blushes, yields and accepts him as her husband. The canvas becomes larger at the introduction of a few other characters, figuring in Rasakosha's stories, drawn from life. The love-story strikes a note of novelty in the sense that it is not directly narrated, but makes itself deeply felt. Planning and designing of the actual story is a delicate piece of sheer aesthetic beauty garbed in felicitous prose. Bain achieves, indeed, a superb blending of romance and reality in A Dusk of the Moon.

The Descent of the Sun (1903) is a work of fiction dealing with the inverted cycle of the sun—thereby giving a new turn to the old solar myth. The Vedic origin of the myth and Bain's knowledge of the Sankhya Philosophy of Kapila are closely interwoven into the texture of the sunny plot of the work with an amazing power of ingenuous harmony, and this has received an elaborate treatment in chapter three. A Heifer of the Dawn (1904) is Bain's another work of fiction dealing with an enchanting story of love. The creative writer is enamoured of dawn in the East, and chooses it as the proper hour with its cool and soothing effect to change the mind of a king, who, in the work is reluctant to marry a second time, but enticed to do so through the guiles of a pretty 'chedi'. Twelve flowers brought by her at twelve dawns symbolise varied moods of the king from initial aversion, eventual
dawning and gradual deepening of love, punctuated by intervening anger and feverishness born of the 'chedi's' teasing and provoking, till fire-generating and heart-consuming Cupid overpowers him fully with the subsequent arrival of the Queen-to-be on the scene and their final union. *A Heifer of the Dawn* is an artfully constructed work of fiction. As the moon develops into its full-fledged shape in the course of a fortnight, so does love in this story mature into fruition and marriage in a fortnight. Of course, the fourth day is dropped from the schedule of the 'chedi's' visit to the King, and this number exactly corresponds to the thirteen works of fiction written by Bain. The story, therefore, exhibits a marked interweaving of Hindoo ideas and British discipline into a concordant fabric. Bain certainly adds freshness and vigour to the British fictional tradition so pronounced in Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) and Edward Bulwer (1803-1873), who mingle history and romance in some of their novels.

*A Draught of the Blue* (1905) is a work of fiction incorporating the story of Rudralaka, a Rajput king and Alichumbita, his wife. Bain keeps close to the Hindoo tradition of story-writing in many respects. Like the Hindoo writers of old he deals almost exclusively with kings and queens of high lineage, and makes little or no room in his works of fiction for the Indian populace to step in and breathe freely. However, beauty persecuted by snake forms the subject-matter of *An Essence of the Dusk* (1908). It narrates a story of love between Aja and Yashowati. Their love is impeded and harassed by illusions, wiles and guiles.
of Wetala, Vultures and Gridnis. Bain here uses the Reihu legend of the ancient Hindoos with a marvellous power of ingenuity. He metes out to the old Hindoo legend a modern treatment. He adds marrow to the skeletons of the Hindoo idea of old. Bain's Indian fictions savour of a sound sense of form and structure. In *An Incarnation of the Snow* (1908), which is a work of fiction, a Swan tells the story of its former birth, when as a king's son he married the daughter of a sage, but because of another sage's curse he killed his wife, now mourns the disaster of which he himself was the author. Madeswara in the form of a Swan tells Parwati how man resents his evil actions later. In story after story Bain reiterates the old Hindoo idea that a person has to bear the consequences of his deeds in the former birth, and that he is either liberated for ever from the trammels of mortal birth or doomed to a fresh birth in accordance with his performances and doings on earth in this life. Fatalism and determinism, therefore, are superbly blended in Hindoo philosophy of life and existence, which is so much in evidence in Hardy's novels.

In his works of fiction dealing with India Bain projects the image of ancient India. Even though he writes in the twentieth century, he chooses to explore the forgotten riches of a land with a glorious past. His imagination like that of a romanticist loves to linger in the distant enchantment of Indian antiquity. Bain, temperamentally a lover of calm and quiescent quiet, keeps aloof from dabbling politics, ignores the historic visit paid to India in 1905 by the Prince of Wales, and chooses to
steal away on to the top of the Marahatta Fort whence endowed, as it were, with the sixth sense like an old Yogi he listens to the music of the spheres to which Patanjali refers. On his way he comes across the little murmuring brook with swarms of tiny minnows seen clearly through the crystal water, flocks of parrots screaming about the trees, and 'a cool delicious forest glade' like the very road to the bower of a sleeping beauty. Like Emily Bronte, Bain is gifted with the power of glowing prose.

Diplomacy and love have been artfully interwined into a unified experience in *A Mine of Faults* (1909). It is a work of fiction dealing with the story of love between Chand and the daughter of Mitra. Young Chand, averse to marriage, with seeds of misogyny, cleverly introduced by Yogaswara to Mitra's pretty daughter who entralls him with feminine crafts and charms, finally enters wedlock under the overwhelming power of love. It is a treat to observe and enjoy how Bain employs his knowledge of the *Pancha-tantira* and Kalidasa's *Kumara-Sambhava* in the well-designed texture of the present love story, so as to confirm the inference that Bain's Indian stories are not direct translations from the Sanskrit original, but are shaped by him with outlines, and fragments collected from varied spheres of Hindoo wisdom. Bain's mission is to restore in them the Hindoo spirit of old. And it is, indeed, a very tough task for a Christian to do so, especially in creative writing. But Bain succeeds in doing so admirably. As Milton achieves a per-
fect synthesis of the Renaissance and the Reformation in *Samson Agonistes*, so Bain in his Indian fictions excels in harmonising into a single whole the discordant notes of the old and the new, the past and the present. And so superb is the artistic creation that the reader can easily be mystified into believing it to have been composed by a Hindoo. But to the critical and analytical mind Bain's attempt to conceal behind his creative art his identity as a modern Westerner is but futile, for seeking to hide his Christian self in Hinduism is like trying to cover up in muslin garb the curves and contours of a zenana. For despite regard for Hinduism Bain remains a Christian with a balanced and disciplined modern mind, with a sound sense of proportion and form. His overt purpose in this story is to exhibit to the West an instance of a Hindoo love-affair where love and diplomacy are skilfully interwoven into a harmonious whole. Even Yogeswara, the sagacious Prime Minister of Mitra, to whom 'the best way to hear is to overhear, and to see is to peep' admits that even he is but a baby in comparison with this extraordinary woman.

*Bubbles of the Foam* (1912) is a work of fiction dealing with a short love-story, and its title is ambiguous suggesting Love and Moon. Love and the Moon are as fragile as a bubble. For the Moon, like the goddess of love, rose originally from the sea. The story records Bain's knowledge of Kalidasa's *Abhigamana-Sakuntala* which he fully exploits in the story. The key-note of *In the Great God's Hair* (1912) is that
husband is a godd wife's god. The type and model of all devoted wives, the Sati, is Parwati, the wife of Hara (Shiva). The two constitute the symbol of wedded harmony and are regarded as having but a single body, which they share. However, Bain melts into melody, rises to lyrical heights whenever he describes a lovely, young woman, often in the fashion of the Sanskrit writers of old. With exquisite grace of prose, an astonishing sense of brevity, yet with minute details of the female body, Bain draws the portrait of a sleeping beauty in the springtime of her life bathed in moonlight as a veritable feminine embodiment of the passion of love, with a smile still lingering on her face while the breeze reveals the curve of her bosom, that rises and falls gently as she breathes. This picturesque description of a sleeping beauty echoes the lyricism, seductive charm, and voluptuousness with which Keats delineates a similar young woman of exceeding loveliness in 'The Eve of St. Agnes'.

The Ashes of a God (1913) is a work of fiction dealing with the resurrection of dead love. Love's ashes may be called a phoenix, ready to spring back into life. In the language of the Hindus of old - youth is a blunder; manhood a struggle; old age a regret. And regret is nothing but the ashes of dead love, not totally extinct, therefore, since all love is more or less divine, 'the ashes of a god'. Bain possesses the rare gift of expressing his idea in limpid, felicitous prose verging on poetry. The echo of Macbeth's agony over his
blood-stained hand, never to be washed clean even by the accumulated water of all the seas, is audible in Indra's description of Trishodadhi's grave crime, an indelible stain never to be cleansed by the ocean which in turn will be coloured red. Again, when Bain deals with love and renunciation, his spirit seems to soar into the pure serenity of heaven, and he gives them a graceful form in succinct but scintillating prose. One cannot resist the lure of quoting a passage, dealing with pure love and renunciation, written in the inimitable style of Bain: 'For pure love resembles yonder rock, that refuses to be shaken by any wind whatever, and pure renunciation resembles yonder bird, that floats in the inaccessible serenity of heaven far above, not for parade, but simply because it is its very nature to soar into the blue.' This is reminiscent of Emily Bronte's description of love in Wuthering Heights where Catherine with an intensity of feeling announces with a startling frankness that her love for Heathcliff, the wild rustic foundling, resembles the eternal rock beneath. This is poetry breaking into the order of prose, and this is a clear indication that Bain belongs to the Victorian tradition of fiction-writing, although he writes in the twentieth century.

A Syrup of the Bees (1914) tells the story of Makarandika, a Widyadhari, who is punished for having married beneath her caste, a mortal named Arundaya. The outline of the plot-structure is borrowed from the ancient Hindoo idea

13 W.W. Bain, The Ashes of a God, p.112
14 Ibid., p.114
of not marrying beneath one's own caste, and Bain fully exploits his knowledge of the original Hindoo idea to his fictional purpose. In matter the story is ancient, but in arrangement of ideas, in form it is modern. Exercise of artistic discipline and a striking sense of proportion in the construction of the plot characterise Bain's handling of this category of his works of fiction. Interchange of body and soul through the use of magic arts strikes the key-note of *The Livery of Eve* (1917), a work of fiction. Aparajita, a water-nymph, marries Kesava, a handsome teen-aged King, beyond her caste. Can any union be enduring 'between ill-assorted castes'? She lives with him for only a year and leaves behind a daughter. The Hindoo taboo of not marrying beyond one's own caste and the tremulous nature of an elemental sprite are harmoniously combined into a unified plot in this work of fiction. *The Substance of a Dream* (1919) is the thirteenth and the last in Bain's cycle of Indian fictions. It is half a love-story and half a fairy tale. The course of true love, never smooth, is the epitome of this story.

Bain's works of fiction dealing with India are, indeed, great creations in the sphere of British fiction. It is true that he borrows his plot, the main idea behind his story, from surviving sources of Hindoo wisdom, but the shape he lends to it is his own. He collects outlines, tit-bits, fragments, bare materials from varied spheres of Hindoo lore, but gives them a modern dressing and treatment. His Indian fictions are a perfect blending of romance and reality, history and myth,
past and present. The superb grace of prose, the supreme felicity of expression, the arresting style of presenting ideas, and the gripping manner of narration wedded to a well-designed plot-construction make Bain's works of fiction a veritable embodiment of loveliness, like Rosalind's peerless beauty, supposed to be the outcome of a unique synthesis of 'Helen's cheek, Cleopatra's majesty, Atalanta's better part, and sad Lucretia's modesty.

L.H. Myers's *The Near and the Far* (1929), *Prince Jali* (1931), and *Kajish Amar* (1935), constitute a trilogy of historical romances about India during Akbar's reign. The problem of succession forms the central theme of the first three works of fiction of Myers. But in *The Pool of Vishnu* (1940) he handles the theme of marriage of Prince Mohan and Princess Damayanti, and some of the characters in his earlier novels such as Ambissa, Hari Khan, Jali, Daniyal and Akbar re-appear here. He also draws the portrait of a well-meaning Guru enjoying Jali's allegiance and portrays the character of Prince Mohan who represents a strong opposition to Indian feudalism and authoritarianism. On the whole, *The Pool of Vishnu* marks some improvement upon his earlier works of fiction in respect of his attitude towards India and Indian values. The first trilogy of historical fictions lays a special stress on portraying new types of characters while *The Pool of Vishnu* testifies to

to a great artistic skill as it draws portraits of a few convincing characters and presents an artfully designed plot construction. Indeed, *The Pool of Vishnu* is a mature work of art.

Myers makes no attempts in his earlier trilogy to reproduce the Indian scene, but uses India as the setting for his ideas, as a vehicle for his thoughts. Nevertheless, his depiction of India represents the contemporary British image of the land. He mingles history and romance in these works of fictions. They are historical in so far as they weave threads of history into the fabric of fiction. They are partly representative of the intrigues and conspiracies hatched by Prince Salim and Prince Daniyal on the question of succession. Myers goes by skipping over the centuries back to India of the sixteenth century, and claims to have portrayed the character of Akbar with fidelity to historical truth. But other Indian characters are distorted individuals made to represent garbled versions of Indian values. *The Root and the Floor* acquires the dimension of a picaresque novel in respect of a huge gallery of portraits like Rajah Amar, Sita, Gokal, Hari Khan, Akbar, Daniyal, Prince Jali, Mabun Das, Gunevati, Lalica and Ambissa Begum. Myers enlarges the canvas considerably as he shifts, after Akbar's Durbur is over, the scene to the Himalayan foothills, the Frontier Provinces and Kingdoms. All Indian characters in Myers's first three works of fiction are drawn in the flat, for they do not develop as independent human beings;
they are made to behave, speak and act in accordance with the author's attitude to India and Indian values. In British fiction dealing with India non-Christian characters do not often convince the reader as warm and breathing realities, for they are often found to pose beyond doubt as mouthpieces of the British writer airing his views on the modes of life and values in the empire. Almost all Indian characters of Myers, barring a few in The Pool of Vishnu, are satirized and caricatured portraits. A deep vein of irony, sarcasm and satire underlies his method of characterization. He also employs the device of burlesque occasionally to emphasize the triviality of Indian values. But Sita and Jali enjoy the author's sympathy and exhibit unmistakable signs of development of their personality. This marked attitude of creative writer in his trilogy of works of fiction to display the inferiority of Indian values often leads to gross distortion of facts about India, and spoils the fictional quality of his writing. Again, Myers's works of fiction are lacking in architectonic quality, for they fail to develop a well-constructed plot. A succession of pageants and episodes are loosely strung together without being artistically combined into an organized whole. The form of fiction is used by the creative writer to disseminate his own reactions to India and Indian values. He, like Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) whose contemporary he was, used the form of fiction as the vehicle for his ideas. L.H. Myers, therefore, may be reckoned a modern novelist with the hangover of the Victorian fictional tradition still surviving but partly in his earlier works of fiction.
From the novelistic and fictional points of view, therefore, a study of the works of Steel, Bain, and Myers puts the reader into a new and entertaining experience. This category of British fiction embodies almost an infinite variety of images, representing various aspects of Indian life and culture. Such images form exciting themes which have been exploited with marvellous artistic skills to a great effect by these fiction-writers. The changing images represent changing British attitude as revealed in these works to India and Indian values. Flora Annie Steel is perhaps the first major novelist who has explored vast areas of a remote environment of human activity to collect materials for her novels. Besides, portrayal of the co-existence of the Anglo-Indian and the Indian in her fictional world immensely enhances the breadth and sweep of her works, and this enables the creative writer to present a kaleidoscopic view of two differing modes of life and behaviour, two varying spheres of cultural traditions. Myers's novels also acquire such a dimension. Besides, the collection of such novel themes from an alien environment of human activity necessitates the construction of new patterns of plots and events in Steel's novelistic scheme of things while such a collection leads to the portrayal of new types of characters in Myers's trilogy of historical romances about India. But The Pool of Vishnu portrays a few convincing characters and constructs a harmonious plot. Bain, however, is not interested in the Anglo-Indian nor is he curious about the political aspect of Indian
life. But like Steel he, too, devises new types of plots and events based on materials collected from various spheres of Hindoo wisdom. It can, therefore, be safely maintained that thematic novelty and variety matched by the construction of new patterns of plots and events and the portraits of new types of characters attribute to this species of fiction a special character hitherto unexperienced in the mainstream of traditional British fiction. Nevertheless, it is in the fitness of things that Steel, Bain and Myers with his limitations, deserve an important place in the history of British fiction. If Kipling, Forster, Orwell, and Maugham are considered as major writers in the sphere of British fiction about India, one has the right to ask why Steel and Bain are not given the place they deserve as fiction-writers. Steel, as has been shown in this chapter, possesses the sterling qualities of a novelist, and rises to occasional heights of greatness in revealing the depth of the human mind torn between hope and despair, faith and doubt, good and evil. And Bain, without even an iota of doubt, is a gifted fiction-writer with a startling skill of harmonizing history and myth, reality and romance, modernity and antiquity, while Myers, like Aldous Huxley, is a modern fiction-writer trying a novel method and technique. Should they be dismissed as writers of no significance? Perhaps not, and time has come to pay proper attention to them.