The English language was transplanted into India because East India Company, soon after establishing their rule in India, began to feel a communication gap between the British rulers and the natives. In order to solve the communication problem, which was a major hindrance in an alien land, consequently, Charles Grant, one of the directors of East India Company, pleaded for the adoption of the English language in 1792. Later on after a gap of fortythree years, the English language was adopted in 1835 by a brief resolution of the Governor General in council for the promotion of the European literature and Science among the natives of India. India witnessed a beginning of a new era with the announcement of Lord William Bentick to impart the Indians the knowledge of English literature and Science through the medium of English. In the mid nineteenth century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who had initiated social reform programmes and in the process, favoured the English language for spreading the wealth of information and culture available in British publications. Roy, a master of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic languages, felt that all renaissance knowledge was compiled mainly in the European languages.

At first the Indians reacted with suspicion towards the English language, but later on welcomed it with open arms. English language was granted a special place in India. The initial requirement of the Indian writing in English was the English knowing people. Various factors contributed in the creation of
a mass expressing itself in English. One of the major factors was the introduction of the English education in India. Despite suspicion from a section of society that English education was being introduced to create a class of clerks and sycophants who will consequently harm the social and cultural fabric of India, it encouraged the cultivation and mastery of English as a language.

Gradually more and more people came in contact of English language and literature. The nineteenth century intellectuals began to question the orthodox prejudices, dogmas and superstitions that prevailed in India. The impact of Western learning gave a new impetus to Indian renaissance. Indian society underwent a metamorphosis. The revival of Indian classical learning and the introduction and the study of European arts and sciences gave rise to an unprecedented awakening in India. For the first time in India, a middle class of intellectuals began to emerge from the feudal society, giving rise to intense nationalism, during which the Indians struggled to articulate their passionate thoughts and feelings through whatever means were available to them. Writers like Bankimchandra and Saratchandra Chaterjee, caught up in the provincial patriotism, revived the regional languages, others believing that the English rule had come to stay studied and used the language of the rulers, giving rise to a new genre of Indian Writing in English, initially termed as Indo-Anglian literature.

In India the renaissance did not appear in the sense of revival alone. The consciousness of the great Sanskrit heritage, the revival of classical learning -
largely the works of foreign scholars was only one aspect of the new change that appeared on the Indian scene in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The main effort of the Indian renaissance was the effort to create the actual life that existed in the West. Indo-Anglian literature was born out of instinct of imitation. Thus, when the writers started to write; the Western influence was evident. There works were directly or indirectly inspired by the English writers. The educated Indian class attempted to imitate Western techniques and literary forms. Western education that was imparted to the Indians through English in the educational institutions founded all over the country, had also a far reaching influence on these developments. If the progressive steps taken by the missionaries and officials resulted in an overhaul of antiquated education, aims, methods, materials and tools; Western education turned the minds of the Indians inside out. It removed the mental blocks and promoted in them a new integral outlook. The transmission of modern scientific and sociological ideas made the Indians aware of the blessings of materialism and social organizations, of the infinite value of democracy as a way of life and of reason as an instrument of analysis and critical inquiry as the champion of free and independent thinking. The awakened Indian started expressing himself in all Western literary forms; especially in the novel.

The other side of Renaissance has a different version. Among the German Indologists, Max Mueller, in his India: What can it Teach Us?, locating Renaissance in India and Sanskrit literature, states:

I believe that it will be found out that the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries were the age of literary renaissance in India. That Kalidas
and Bharvi were famous that time, we know from the evidence of inscriptions. We know that in the sixth century the fame of Indian Literature had reached Persia, and that the king of Persia, Khosru Noshirvan (reigned 531-579 A.D.), sent his physician, Burzoi, to India, in order to translate the fables of Panchatantra or rather their original, from Sanskrit into *Pahlavi*. The famous ‘Nine Gems’, or ‘the nine classics’, as we should say have been referred in part, to the same age, and I doubt whether we shall be able to assign a much earlier date to anything we possess of Sanskrit literature, excepting always the Vedic and Buddhistic writings.

Going by Max Mueller’s views, the Indian Renaissance was directly related to the Vedic and Buddhist literature. It can be concluded from the views of Max Mueller that the Indian Renaissance took place much before, at least two thousand years before the European, Italian or English Renaissance. Thus Avadhesh Kumar Singh in *Indian Renaissance Literature* remarks:

The significant thing is that Max Mueller was speaking of learning from India in 1882, almost five decades after T.B. Macaulay and his bother-in-law Charles Travelyan had rejected Indian knowledge, leave aside the question of learning from it. (*Indian Renaissance Literature* Preface: Reconsidering Indian Renaissance 22)

Through the efforts of the British and the support of groups of educated Indians, the roots of the English language were firmly fixed on the Indian soil. But the fact that English is a foreign language persisted and initial Indian writers in English did face flak for their efforts in writing in English.

India had a richer potential for the narrative tradition form than the West because of the Indians’ gift for story-telling which goes back to the *Rigveda* and the *Upanishads*. The *Thirty Two Stories of the Throne* relating to the King Vikramaditya and Somadeva’s *Kathasaritsagara* are perhaps the most popular in Sanskrit as well as the regional languages. What is striking is that so much
of contemporary social reality goes into these stories. Thus the modern Indian writer is an heir to a rich cultural past merging into the corridors of time. M. K. Naik, about the modern Indian English writer states:

> He is a tree, with its roots nurtured in the Indian soil and its branches opening out to breathe the winds that blow from a Western sky. (*Mulk Raj Anand* p 9)

The novel of the Indian Writing in English becomes conspicuous in the second half of the nineteenth century. The claimants for the first Indian novel in English are Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) and Lal Behari Dey’s *Govind Samant* (1876). Raj Lakshmi Devi’s *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Toru Dutt’s *Bianca* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahiri’s *Roshinara* (1881) and H. Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand* (1888). Regarding these works, K. R. Srinivasan Iyengar remarks:

> These novels, written in English, have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest. (*Indian Writing in English* 315)

I

Lal Behari Day’s *Govinda Samanta* (1874) is the first important Indian novel to appear in English. The original edition of *Govind Samanta* bore the title *Govinda Samanta, or, the History of a Bengal Raiyat*, while the edition of 1908 published by Macmillaan, London was entitled *Bengal Peasant Life*. The scene of the novel is Burdwan district during 1850-75 and the author in his prefatory note makes direct statement on what the reader should and should not expect in the work. For e.g., he should expect here ‘a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant living in this plain country of Bengal’. (*Govind Samanta*)
Govinda Samanta is a realistic story poignantly told, without any consciously developed form or plot that goes on and on without a pause or break. As the subtitle speaks, it is a story of a Bengali raiyat, Govinda Samanta, the son of Badan Samanta of Kanchanpur, a village in Burdwan. The Samants are a typical joint family of rural Bengal and Badan lives with his mother Alanga, his wife Sundari and his brothers Kalamanik and Gayaram whose wife is Aduri. The novel is a chain of many events and incidents extending from the birth of Govinda Samanta to his death. There are marriages, childbirths, funerals and festivals, all most vividly and colourfully described. One of the most important events in the family history is the sudden death of Gayaram by snakebite, leaving his wife Aduri a widow. She suffers as did all the widows in those days, but her sufferings and the death of Gayaram himself were only part of the scheme of things which the rural society had learnt to live with through the ages and accept passively. Similarly, Malati, the daughter of Badan, suffers under her mother-in-law. Madhawwa, the husband, is almost a fatalist and he rules out the idea of their living away from his mother. He observes:

No, no, separation is impossible. I will speak to mother and you must try and get on with her. It is neither your doing nor mother’s doing, it is written on the forehead. We cannot escape the decree of fate. (Govinda Samanta 20)

The irate mother in her turn protests all at once that she would get a ‘better and more thankful wife’. Govinda Samanta is betrothed to Dhamani. Aduri, the widow, goes on a holy pilgrimage with Alanga and two others. Alanga dies during the pilgrimage and Aduri is now called to join the mendicant order, “wanders about the country in the company of her ‘pious
lover’, Prem Bhakta”. Govinda clashes with the Zamindar of Kanchanpur who is ‘A Bengal Tiger’ when the latter forces his raiyat to make the customary contribution mathot for the wedding of his son. Kalamanik too revolts against the Zamindar. Madhawa revolts against Mr. Murray, the indigo planter, and both of them lose their lives in the encounters that follow. Finally, an epidemic in 1870 claims countless lives, and an attack of this disease leaves Govinda Samanta utterly weak and prostrate. The hero braves trial after trial, but as misfortunes come in terrible succession, he succumbs to ill-health and suffering.

Thus Govinda Samanta is a tale, with a well-developed form. There are description of the food, dress, pastimes, social and religious customs, expressions of endearments, terms of vituperation, etc., and they help us a great deal about institutions, interpersonal relations, attitudes and values relating to that period. Govinda Samanta is full of such pictures and accounts. It tells us about the ‘ghataks’, or matchmakers, the marriages, festivities with their haridra, the chandimandap, the amudhabhojana, the andarmahal, rangmahals, the horrors of Sati, the haats or the weekly markets, the bathing tanks and their pastoral scenes. It is one of the few novels of that period which gives us authentic ethnographical information. It is so rich in its ethnographical description that it takes on the shape of a saga, almost an epic of rural India.

Like The Coverly Papers and Robinson Crusoe, Govind Samanta too marks the birth of the new democratic spirit which compels the writer to turn his attention to the individual life and individual character in relation to their
environment and sets the seal of literary approval on heroes of economic individualism as did the works of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and Daniel Defoe.

The historical importance of Lal Behari Day’s work is from the point of view of the rise of the novel in India exactly similar to that of Defoe and Richardson for it brought into being with equal suddenness and completeness the formal realism of the novel genre in this country. It also marks the transition from romance to realism in Indian creative writing, a transition which was logical consequence of the great socio-economic changes taking place during that period. Besides realism it marks the rise of individualism both in the life and literature of the country as Kalamanik and Govinda Samanta react against the established codes and practices of society and militate against them to the point of martyrdom, typify the rise of individualism and the struggle of man for economic freedom. By depicting the scene of the emergence of the individualist social order as against the traditional economic and social order the author is championing the cause of the heroes of economic individualism.

The concluding pages of the novel suggest the readers of the dark days to come, of the calamitous famine which ruins, degrades and crushes to death spirited men like Govinda Samanta. The fate of Govinda Samanta was the fate of every Bengali raiyat or of every Indian raiyat and the novel fills us with the awareness of the sad lot of the Indian raiyat and of the predicament of man in a world surrounded by inimical forces. Its design is that of a poignant human tale.
which pictures the helplessness of the individual against an established order as well as the greatness of the human spirit which battles against evil.

The language of the novel is in harmony with the ‘plain unvarnished tale of a plain peasant living in this plain country of Bengal’. It is not that the author is unaware of the Bengali peasants speaking English better than that spoken by most of the uneducated English peasants. In the very first chapter the author suggests regarding the usage of words:

…The usage of English words two or three feet long is now the reigning fashion in Calcutta. Young Bengal is now a literary Bombastes Furioso; and Bengalese is Johnsonese run mad. But thinkers may require, as old Sam Johnson said, big words, but we plain country folk, talking of fields, of paddy, of the plough and the harrow have no sublime thoughts, and do not therefore require sublime words. If gentle reader, you have a taste for highly wrought, highly seasoned language, for gorgeous smiles…I advise you to go elsewhere and not to come to this country confectionery. (Lal Behari Day 2)

Expressing his helplessness in the matter the author states:

If I had translated their talk into the Somersetshire or the Yorkshire dialect, I should have turned them into English and not Bengali peasants. (Govinda Samanta 89)

The environment depicted is essentially Indian and the author of the first work of Indian fiction was keenly sensitive to the issues of the condition of the raiyat raised in the work. Govinda Samanta is a good beginning for the Indian novel in English as the writer deliberately attempts to make the readers believe that what they are reading is a true account and not a fictitious one and thus bringing the work close to life.
Though Govinda Samanta may not satisfy many of the demands of the novel in the strict sense of the term, its claims to the title are by no means poor. Apart from the fact that its appearance marked the birth of a new type of narrative prose fiction in India, it also adopted with studious preciseness the manner and tone of actual biography.

The emergence of women writers during this period is of great significance in the sense that it marks the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian woman. Writers such as Toru Dutt, Mrs Ghosal, Sorabji Cornelia and Krupabai Sathanathan fulfil the task of the emancipation of the Indian woman from the tyranny of the ages and from the age old cruel customs.

II

Toru Dutt earned critical attention as a significant writer. Besides being an eminent poet Toru Dutt (1856-1877) has two novels to her credit with *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* in French and *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) in English published posthumously.

*Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden*, a romance consisting of eight chapters, is believed to be a self-portrayal and was written during the years 1875-76 when Toru fell ill and was on her death bed and death proving to have triumphed over life. Thus the marvelous piece of work remained incomplete.

Bianca, the central figure of the work is the young and the only surviving daughter of a Spanish gentleman, who has settled in an English village. Her elder sister, Inez has just died. Bianca and her father, the sole
mourners, return home and the sensitive young maid feels all too sharply the contrast between her own sheltered surroundings and the cold damp ground in which her sister is buried. A year after her Inez’s death, Mr. Imgram the fiancé of the dead sister offers to marry Bianca, but she just refuses the proposal on the ground of having sisterly affection for him. Lord Moore is deeply in love with her and she is rather coolly received by the widowed mother when she visits his place as she dreads the prospect of her son marrying her. But Moore himself visits Bianca’s home and while they are in the garden he kisses her. The author narrating the feelings of Bianca avers:

A strange feeling of unutterable bliss mingled with pain came upon her; “Oh, if he could kiss me again!”…she buried her face in her hands and wept. Was it for joy or for sorrow? She felt as if she had committed a great sin. It seemed all so strange to her…She sighed and rose; “I must tell father”. (The Bengal Magazine, 290)

Thus the extract depicts Bianca as a very immature and childish young girl who clings to her father half in love and half in fear and considers it her sacred duty to keep nothing from him. While it makes for a sensitive and delicate portrayal of character, it has been written in a language which has no suggestion of anything Indian or un-English and tends itself beautifully to the gentle humour and pathos inherent in the situation.

Taking the plot further, there arrives a letter from Lord Moore making an offer of marriage to Bianca and the young lady promptly turns down the offer of marriage just to please her father. Not only do we see the same childish character but also the inherent contradiction in the action and desire. Besides we also see how the very shock of sending a letter to Lord Moore rejecting his
proposal proves too much for the tender and delicate young maid. She takes ill and goes into a fit of delirium and Lord Moore himself rides for a doctor. Bianca recovers from her illness and the lovers plight their troth to each other. The next chapter reveals the parting between the lovers when Lord Moore departs for the Crimean War. With this the story comes to an unconcluding end.

The incompleteness and fragmentary nature of the novel is a serious handicap in forming any precise opinion regarding it. From the available portion it can only be concluded that Bianca going into a sudden fit of delirium and recovering all too suddenly is rather unrealistic, typical of the Victorian novelists. Regarding the style and language of the writer, K.S. Ramamurti avers:

One looks in vain in all the Indo-English novels which were written during the years that followed a description so real and clothed in English so natural and felicitous as to sound almost un-Indian. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 71)

Toru Dutt’s sensibility, her attitude to feminine beauty and grace, though apparently English, is essentially Indian. Though the setting of the novel is an English village with Spanish characters, the novel reveals a quality of mind that is essentially Indian. The English language lends itself to a sensibility in the hands of a young writer who was by no means a conscious experimenter with her medium.

Both Bianca and Le Journal are self-portrayals of a particular kind. Both Marguerite in the French novel and Bianca in the English novel are some sort of dream projections of the writer herself. K.R.S. Iyengar remarks:
Marguerite, the French maiden and Bianca, the Spanish maiden, are but abstractions; Toru, their creator is the only reality. (Indian Writing in English 58)

One comes across several similarities in the novel such as the attachment between father and daughter in Bianca as well as in Le Journal, the death of Inez being an echo of the death of her own dear sister Aru and the portrayal of the characters of the two heroines – all indicative of the novel being purely autobiographical. The feelings and attitudes reflect not only Toru’s individual characteristic but that of an Indian woman in general too. Alfonso Karkala points out:

Bianca feels it her duty to regard her dead sister’s fiancé with affection rather than with love; her father fears a possible charge of husband hunting…” (Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century 78)

These attribute help build up the image of an Indian woman in the reader’s mind rather than of English or a Spanish woman. Emphasizing the essential Indianness of Toru’s literary and aesthetic personality, James Darmesteter observes:

The daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose writer in French; who at the age of eighteen made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions and died at the age of twenty, in the full bloom of her talent, and the eve of the awakening of her genius presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel. (Life and Letters of Toru Dutt 1)

This novel marks a turning point in the development of Indian fiction by giving it a subjective and inward direction. It marks a transition from an objective social and public orientation of the old world to the subjective
individualist and private orientation of life and literature of the years that followed. Evaluating her contribution *The Saturday Review* in England wrote:

> Had George Sand or George Eliot died at the age of twenty one, they would certainly not have left behind them any proof of application or of originality superior to those bequeathed to us by Toru Dutt; and we discover little of merely ephemeral precocity in the attainments of this singular girl. (H. Das, *Life* 323)

Toru Dutt can be put in the category of the writers of unfulfilled renown like Thomas Gray and John Keats. The Indian novel in English in the pioneering hands of Toru Dutt revealed possibilities.

**III**

Krupabai Sathianathan (1862-1894) had chosen medical field as her career but had to give it up midway because of her failing health. It was after her death that her two stories were published in the form of books under the titles of *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895). Both these novels tell us only the story of her life in its different phases except that the names are fictional.

*Saguna* is an autobiographical novel in which a rebellious young girl, in a family recently converted to Christianity, tries to come to terms with change. More poignant is the situation of her mother Radha, an orthodox Hindu child-bride, who must reconcile herself to her Christian identity. Further, the pioneering nineteenth-century classic is an insightful psychological study of two generations of women, as well as an invaluable social document. Despite its serious concerns, it remains a charming, vibrantly descriptive novel.

The story is of the earlier years of her life in Bombay and gives a vivid picture of her own home which had originally been a Brahmin home, for her
parents were Brahmins who were later converted to Christianity. The novel reflects the deep impact conversion had on Krupabai and her own sensitive reactions to the changes which conversion had brought on the character and the atmosphere of the household. The novel also provides a great deal of information on the Christian community in Gujarat and Maharashtra of the nineteenth century.

_Kamala_ is the story of the author’s later life, written mostly from sick bed. It focuses more about the story of her inner life, about the sorrows, conflicts and tribulations which afflicted her. The faithfulness of Krupabai’s narrative and the sincerity of her purpose become vividly clear in the story of Kamala, the heroine. The death of Kamala’s child is so directly felt that one would know almost without being told that, the pen which described Kamala’s sorrow had been dipped in a mother’s tears.

Samuel Sathianathan, her husband clarifies that _Kamala_ was written in the midst of ill-health and sorrow. He observes:

> The longing for expression was so strong in her that she had thought out some of the chapters whilst in the hospital at Madras, notably the one in which Rukma’s husband died of cholera. (Sketches of Indian Christians 43)

_Saguna_ does not contain a specific plot. The novel rather begins with the childhood of the protagonist’s mother, Radha and the hardships faced in her life, her marriage to Harichandra, Harichandra’s conversion from Brahminism to Christianity, and their latter life in the Christianity fold. All these incidents are presented in more like a documentary form rather than a novel.
The characters presented are for serving the purpose of the incidents and do not develop as round characters and keep changing with the incidents. Thus the characters of Radha and Saguna find maximum canvas and yet remain flat upto the conclusion of the novel. There are a couple of minor characters like Lakshmi, Bhasker and others who do not have any significant contribution to the work except of assisting the protagonist or her mother in distress. An incident after incident follows and the characters react to the situation they find themselves in till a new incident is presented. This sequence continues till the very end of the novel. The incidents and the characters too do not connect each other in any logical sequence like a plot.

In fact both Saguna and Kamala are more autobiographical than fictional. Thus K.S. Ramamurti observes:

They are stories of the author’s own life told in a simple and straightforward way without being cast into the framework of a plot and without being dressed up with incidents and characters born of the imagination. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 78)

These novels are a reflection of the freshness, originality, imagination and shrewd understanding of life and analysis of human nature. Her extraordinary sensibility is evident in the following extract from Kamala. In a style typical of the novelist, she delineates:

Yes! It is only on the sick bed we realize fully the bright side of human nature, for nothing is so very effective in removing the dress of human nature as sickness and sorrow. It may only be a word that a person is able to utter with great effort and pain, but it shows the working of the whole mind, points to the depths from which it is uttered. Those that are near forget that they are in this world, they are with the dear one on the borderland of glory, tasting of the heavenly bliss and sharing its immortal joys. (Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life 34)
The tragedy of writers like Toru and Krupabai was that they died before they had really begun their careers, or had a chance to give full proof of their abilities. Both these writers wrote from their sick beds and yet gave promise of what they might have achieved if they had lived full lives. Their poetic prose, their description of nature, their attempt to create characters, and above all, the desperate struggle of their earnest spirits to express themselves shall remain like bright beacons among the dull, timid, uncreative Indo-English fiction that was written during the century.

III

Shevanthi Bai Nikambe’s *Ratnabai* (1895) is with an objective of strengthening her cause and spreading awareness regarding the rights of the weaker sex. A social worker, she dedicated herself to the betterment of the weaker sex against the tyranny and exploitation prevalent in the society during her time.

A slender volume, *Ratnabai* deals with the issue of importance of female literacy. A young girl Ratnabai who is married when she is only nine, lives with her lawyer father when her husband is away in England for higher education. The father decides to send the girl to school but the latter’s in-laws oppose the idea tooth and nail. They are shocked and outraged by the very idea of a married girl going to school. However, he succeeds in steering clear all opposition and puts Ratnabai in school but the girl suffers much under her husband’s relatives who keep on teasing her and making life miserable for her. At the end of five years, when Ratnabai is in her sixteenth year, her husband
returns from England and finds his wife a woman quite different from the one he expected to find. With all the advantages that a good education has conferred on her, she is now his equal and match and their married life begins on a cheerful and happy note. The novel concludes with the author’s own optimism foreseeing a bright future for the country in the hope that all girls whether married, unmarried or widowed should be well educated.

*Ratnabai* is more a propaganda story than pure fiction, but its appearance was significant since it voiced and espoused the cause of women’s education and of the emancipation of the Indian woman.

The growth of women’s education and the emancipation of the Indian woman through reformist movements were in themselves significant social phenomena which favoured the rise of the Indian novel in English and they were also the symptoms of the emergence of the individualistic social order which was indispensable to the growth and the development of the novel as a form of literary expression. Regarding the change of the Indian novel in English observed from Toru Dutt to Krupabai Sathianathan, Meena Belliappa observes:

Both *Ratnabai* and the novels of Mrs. Sathianathan, while reflecting the birth of the new order and the writers’ awareness of the slow unfolding of a new life of the women of the country have also in them a distinct reformist motivation and partly justify the view that the Indian novel in English emerging from the pleasant dilettantism of young Toru Dutt gradually acquired a reformistic basis. (*Indian Women Writers of Fiction in English* 80)

The theme of almost all the novels of the early women writers was the Indian woman, the new woman as the writers saw her emerge. Though the works of these early women writers in Indian Writing in English is not keeping
in tow with the novel form to its contemporary English writing in the West as they lack in plot, characterization and approach but what unites all of these is the theme of the contemporary Indian woman, the new woman who emerged from the dynamic social milieu.

IV

Though the contribution of Swarnakumari Ghosal (1855-1932) is not immense, whatever she produced bears on it the stamp of good writing in English. She has three novels to her credit. They are *The Fatal Garland*, (1910), *An Unfinished Song* (1913), and *An Indian Love Story* (1910).

*The Fatal Garland* is a historical romance set against the background of the fifteenth century Bengal. Its theme is the rivalry in love between two beautiful and spirited young girls, Shakti Moti and Nirupama. Even as very young girls they are in love with the Prince, and once while playing in the garden a garland which the Prince throws in jest falls around the neck of Shakti Moti leaving Nirupama jealous and frustrated. The incident which leaves Nirupama in tears and grief keeps the flame of love blazing in Shakti’s heart for years. But destiny makes Nirupama and not Shakti the wife of Ganesh Dev who when he meets the latter at a fair some years later, thinks that she is already another’s wife which she really is not. Shakti Moti is too spirited and jealous to accept the reality of the situation when she learns to her shock that Nirupama is already his wife. She swears revenge. Later Shakti Moti becomes the cause of rivalry between Prince Gai-ud-din and his father Sultan Badsha. Both father and son seek her love, but even when the father is slain and Gai-ud-
din becomes the Sultan, Shakti Moti asks for time from the Prince in the hope that she might still win over Ganesh Dev. But when she finds Ganesh Dev too much of a true Hindu husband to accept the love of another woman, she marries the Sultan. She lives with the Sultan for five years and bears a daughter by him whom she names Gul Bahar. In the conflict that ensues between the Sultan and his nephew Sahe-ud-din, Ganesh Dev supports the latter and this gives an opportunity to Shakti to have her revenge on Ganesh Dev. Ultimately she sacrifices her own life to save that of Ganesh. In the fullness of time Jadav Dev son of Ganesh and Nirupama marries Gul Bahar after becoming a Mussalman and Shakti’s curse is fulfilled. The young man becomes Jelal-ud-din, the famous Sultan of Bengal.

*The Fatal Garland* can be appropriately termed as historical romance rather than a historical novel. It is short and slender, and its dimensions do not warrant a full development of character. Though the characters are slightly drawn, they are powerful and consistent. The character of Shakti Moti certainly leaves an impression, particularly the picture we get of her as a wounded and angered woman who, crushing the faded wreath and striking her chest with clenched fist, vows revenge.

Meena Belliappa too points out the accents of a modern woman observed in the character of Shakti Moti in her argument with the Sanyasin on the question of love, duty and marriage. Yet pointing out again she avers:

...the possibilities of portraying the new type of woman are not fully exploited. (Indian Women Writers of Fiction in English 100)
Taking a realistic approach of the characterization it should also be agreed that in a story set against a medieval background with its emphasis more on fate than on character any attempt to make Shakti Moti more ‘modern’ in outlook and character should have been inappropriate.

Swarnakumari Ghosal’s next work *An Unfinished Song* (1913) raises several important issues relating to love, man-woman relationship, marriage, construction of female identity, the impact of West, the East West encounter and nationalism.

Similar to Toru Dutt’s *Bianca* and the novels of Krupabai Sathiananthan, *An Unfinished Song* (1913) has an autobiographical touch. It is narrated in first person and the narrator is Moni who is a girl of eight or nine when the story begins. Her name is Mrinalini but they call her Moni. As a very sensitive and spirited young girl, she has felt the slow unconscious blossoming of love in her heart. Love for the father is the greatest and most dominant, but she also felt it in respect of Chotu, a young cousin who is a childhood companion and playmate. Her childhood love for Chotu is a love begotten by a song sung to her by him and this song remains in her heart through the years keeping alive the flame of her first love and lending continuity and meaning to all her feelings and emotions. The song though simple in itself, is meaningful and significant. Moni is haunted by the melody of the lines of the song that go as such:

“Alas, we met when moon and stars had faded
Springtime had fled and flowers withered by,
Garland in hand through the dark night waited…”

(An Unfinished Song 214)

Moni’s waiting for someone to complete the unfinished song is symbolic of love waiting for its fulfillment. The entire theme of the novel is Moni waiting for the resolution of the mystery. Thus in the very beginning the novelist delineates:

Ten years have passed since then. I have known the fiery possessions of youth. Mighty joys and sorrows, ambitions and aspirations have come and gone, yet lingers the memory of the love of my early life, when such happiness was mine as I have never known since because it was unmixed with any sorrow. But life has ever been a vast riddle to me. (An Unfinished Song 27)

It is this unconscious yearning for love which makes her heart go out for Rammohan Roy. She loves his songs but not the man himself. Once she hears him sing at dinner and when the song is over, she feels that something is left out-that the song is unfinished. She is charmed but satisfied. With the passing of time, however, there is a slow change in her heart and she is no longer annoyed by suggestions of love coming from Mr. Roy. His song has the power to flood her heart with the childhood memories, the memories of Chotu singing the same song. The song of her childhood friend casually sung by Mr. Roy captures her fancy and becomes loosely connected emotional symbol connecting the past with the present and leading to a realization of the ideal she has been yearning for. The song makes her realize all at once the power of love.

It is not only to Moni but also to Mr. Roy that love has become real and understandable and he makes his proposal on an evening when Moni is
gathering flowers in a blossomy garden bathed in an after shower freshness. Love opens out in Moni’s heart. But her joy is short-lived. The arrival of Dr. Chowdry brings with it the shocking disclosure of Roy’s shady past. The shock proves too much for Moni, though her sisters take it lightly. With her midsummer night’s dream vanished, Moni’s mind is made up once and for all. Chagrined and frustrated by this unexpected development, Roy accuses her of deceit practiced at his expense, while Moni herself becomes utterly broken-hearted. Thus if it is love waiting for its fulfillment as the underlying theme of the novel, then the arrival of Dr. Chowdry marks what appears to be reversal of the process of fulfillment, for it is he who brings shocking information about Mr. Roy’s past.

But the doctor himself becomes the instrument of revival and regeneration as the tender sympathy and concern shown by him makes an impression on Moni and the vase of flowers he puts by her side rouses tender nostalgic feelings in her. The flowers themselves seem to be associated in a queer way with tender memories of Chotu, memories which perpetually feed the deep springs of love in her and she is now in a mood to ‘forget and forgive’ and decides to marry Roy. But her inability to reply to the letter she receives from Roy leads to a further widening of the rift. Her inability to reply to Roy’s letter is not really due to a difference to write in English as it might appear but due to a much deeper reason. Many educated and accomplished young women have suffered from a complex of this kind is borne out by the behaviour of the
woman characters of many Indian novels which appeared in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The break with Roy does not, however, prove the end of Moni’s journey in quest of true love. It is just a turning which opens her eyes and helps her see new vistas of fulfillment. She feels more and more drawn to the doctor who has made an impression on her by the tender concern and sympathy he has shown her during her illness. Moni’s quest for true love suffers yet another rude shock when she learns that the doctor is engaged to her own sister. Expressing her agony the novelist delineates:

I thought I had loved the other, but oh, how far short had been that feeling of what controlled me. He had fascinated me with a song, had brought me the pain of past memories. What knew I then of this complete transformation of body and soul? That emotion had been the outcome of a strong sympathy, a deep-rooted faith in love I had thought to be genuine, but when it had been unable to stand the test, the faith that had gone with it, and which I had mistaken for love, had died out. Now even though the feeling I had for this man brought me no happiness, nay, worse, carried me to the very verge of despair itself, yet I had no desire to get away from it, it became on the contrary, more firmly rooted in my being with every fleeting moment. (An Unfinished Song 157-58)

The disillusioned young girl now seeks peace and solace for her tormented soul in the company of her father. She commits herself entirely to her father’s care, feels so secure, peaceful. But once again there is a thunderbolt. Chotu the boy of her childhood dreams is proposed to her but she reacts to the proposal in a

strange way. Expressing her feelings the novelist delineates:
I felt like one struck by lightning. I remembered a time when being married to Chotu was the one vision of my youthful life, but now! (*An Unfinished Song* 160)

At a time when her father is being blamed by everyone for allowing his nineteen year old daughter to remain unmarried, Moni writes to him pleading to be allowed to remain a maid. The mysteries of Moni’s love, rather the mystery of woman’s love, remains a mystery still. The resolution of the mystery as well as the fulfillment of the quest for true love is brought about when Moni’s father returns home one day bringing with him a doctor who is proposed for her. All of a sudden, Moni finds herself seated at the piano before she knows it she begins to play the song. Now the song is completed. She hears a new voice completing it. This song was sung by Chotu, by Rammohan Roy and now by Dr. Binoy Krishna, the man who is proposed to her, who completes the song. The mystery of the person who finished the song for her remains unsolved. It is revealed only in the last chapter ‘Conclusion’ which is not without a trail of romantic sensations. Describing the romantic setting of the night, the novelist delineates:

It floated like a mellow silver orb in the deep blue ocean of ether. The fragrant Sepolican fell around us like a train of meteorites, and the air was filled with beauty and fragrance. The autumn air was mellow and soft, and it flowed into our being and all was love and beauty. (*An Unfinished Song* 216)

The romantic setting in which the veils of disguise and mistaken identity are drawn, has almost a Shakespearean touch in it, reminding us, as it does, of the beautiful night scene in *The Merchant of Venice* when the pairs of young lovers meet, revealing their true identities to one another.
Now Chotu explains why he did not reveal his identity but at the same
time accuses Moni of having failed to recognize him. Presenting the discussion
between them the novelist observes:

“...you do not love Chotu, the friend of your childhood, you love the
new man, the doctor.”
“And you do not love me, you love the companion of your
childhood.”
I thought at one time that individuality disappeared in love, and that
love was self-abnegation, but now I find that as light and shade are
both required for a landscape, so altercations and demands are also
adjuncts of love, and in this way love is kept ever young.
At any rate in our lives love is full of challenge. “You do not love me”
say mockingly, “You love the companion of your childhood.”
“You do not love me” is the inevitable reply, “You love the man you
met at your sister’s house.”
I love, I admit, but the question remains, whom?” (An Unfinished
Song 218-19)

Thus, even with the revelation of identities the mystery of Moni’s love
seems to remain a mystery still, for she cannot say which Chotu she really
loves – the Chotu of her childhood days or the Chotu who has come back to her
as Dr. Binoy Krishna. What is true of Moni’s love is perhaps true of every
woman’s love and love itself is always an unfinished song, a song without a
beginning and without an end. It begins somewhere, comes floating in the
winds of life, and pierces the heart with hopes and fears, with ecstasy and
agony.

An Unfinished Song may be characterized as a lyrical novel which has
some of the features of the ‘Stream of Consciousness’ school. The symbolism
of the song, the song of Chotu lingering in Moni’s memory and consciousness
awaiting its completion, dominates the whole novel in a way similar to that in
which the symbolism of the lighthouse dominates Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*.

The novel *An Unfinished Song* is an open ended novel. It begins with the beginning of love and ends with the regeneration. The novel ends not with a denouement worked out by a sudden recognition or revelation of identity, but by a slow clearing up of all doubts and mysteries.

The women novelists in the Indo-English literary scene during the quarter century following the publication of *Govinda Samanta* were writers of great promise. The unprecedented emergence of the women writing in English during this period was significant in itself, marking as it did, the birth of a new era which held out for the Indian woman opportunities of a dynamic participation in the social life of the country. A common feature inevitably observed in the writing of these writers of this period is that their theme is invariably the Indian woman, the new woman as the writer saw her emerge in the fast changing social milieu. A striking feature of the novels of these writers is that they are, by and large, like personal memoirs and autobiographical sketches with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience.

The women writers who wrote during the three decades of the publication of *Govinda Samanta* made a significant contribution to the development of the Indian English novel. The subsequent writers mark a definite change in the genesis of the novel as a genre as they attempted to portray life as they saw it through sketches, romances and pseudo-fictional
works. Among these writers Behramji Malabari and Nagesh Vishwanath pai deserve mention.

**VI**

Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) was a Parsi born in Gujarat and acquired the title of ‘Malabari’ as his family traded in sandalwood and spices from the Malabar coast. Though verse was the medium for Malabari’s satires to begin with, he changed over to prose when he took to journalism. He was in fact more successful as a satirist in prose than in verse, and even as his verse satires bear a close resemblance to those of the eighteenth century poets, his satirical essays remind us of the essays of Addison, Steele and Goldsmith. Regarding the resemblance of his writings with the journalistic writings, K. S. Ramamurti avers:

> The resemblance becomes particularly significant when we take into account the fact that he was also like Addison and Goldsmith, a pioneer of journalism in India and was perhaps one of the very first to publish the ‘periodical essay’ in English in India... He was in fact one of India's leading journalists to portray life as he saw it and to draw satirical pictures of the contemporary social scene such as would open the eyes of the world to its own faults and follies. *(Rise of the Indian Novel in English 114)*

He was also a pioneer of the journal and the periodical essay in India, he sought to portray life as he saw it in the style of a neutral observer, he made an equally effective use of irony and humour in his satires and above all, he presented his essays in a fictional garb. The importance of his essays can be judged from the fact that when his essays were collected and published in volumes entitled *Gujarat and Gujaratis* (1882) and *The Indian Eye on English Life* they turned out to “pseudo-fictional works as valuable and interesting as
The Coverley Papers and The Citizen of the World.” (Rise of the Indian Novel In English 116) These pseudo-fictional works were forerunners of the Indian novel in English in the nineteenth century in the same way as the works of Addison and Goldsmith were the forerunners of the English novel in the Eighteenth century.

This is, in fact, yet another factor which strengthens the view that all the literary conditions that operated in eighteenth century England and favoured the rise of the novel were not different from those which operated in nineteenth century India and favoured the emergence of the novel as a literary form in English as well as in all the Indian languages.

His Gujarat and Gujaratis is a collection of twenty-six sketches which had originally appeared in the Bombay Review periodically. These sketches make for a satirical picture of the social scene in Gujarat in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The ‘Introduction’ contains an autobiographical note, besides a brief statement of the authors aim and purpose in writing these sketches which he calls “sketches from real life.” (Gujarat and Gujaratis)

Not only does he present vivid pictures of the towns visited in Gujarat but the sketches relate to the various communities such as the Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and the Boras. Besides he presents a very lively picture and interesting pen-portraits of social types, such as the barbers, the money-lender and the lawyer, and also descriptions of certain social institutions like marriages and festivals, domestic scenes and scenes from law courts. He is ruthless in exposing the hollowness and hypocrisy of the Hindu religious heads.
The following extract serves as a suitable illustration in exposing the unscrupulous and selfish religious heads of the day:

The Vaishnav Maharaj of the Day is a spurious character: for though he may claim to be the lineal descendent and visible incarnation of the protecting deity, he is susceptible perhaps more than ordinary mortals to pain, pleasure, love, hatred and other emotions. Pinch him and he will roar; tickle him and he will grin; gratify his desire, and he will worship you; baulk him of it, and he will put you out of caste! He is a born ‘Lord’ of ancestors and the Lord knows who, and at a very tender age he lords it over a seraglio of intellectual ladies whose husbands are men of highly liberal marital sentiment. It is a wonder to many how the Maharaj lives in such a princely style. It is thus: The Maharaj has a first rate taxing imagination…for homage by sight Rs 30; for homage by touch Rs 30; for honour of washing the Maharaj’s toes Rs 35; …for the bliss of occupying the same room with the Madan Murti (Image of Cupid) Rs 50 to Rs 500…The Maharaj is a very pious man, a week before he dies, he goes to where the rest of us do not that is to Gaulok (Paradise). (Gujarat and Gujaratis134-36)

His account of the ‘native medicos’ and ‘the Parsi bone doctor’ shows the true comic spirit at work:

It is the Hakimji’s creed that Allah cures fastest those who pay handsomest. His system of medicine is called Unani or the Grecian. His doses are not so drastic nor so nauseating as of the Hindu Vaid… He sometimes cures by breath, touch or speech. Sometimes he even gives the patient little pieces of paper scribbled upon in mysterious hieroglyphics to be washed in a glass of water and drunk. (Gujarat and the Gujaratis 263-65)

Behramji’s descriptions of places, people and queer characters make them come into life in all their crudity, glamour and horror. Sometimes his descriptions are monstrously course and indecorous as in his portrayal of the Marwari and the Hajam (barber).

His Gujarat and Gujaratis is replete with delineations which are not only types like the Marwari or the Hajam but also individuals like Shett Jamal Gota. His interview with Colonel Buttercup makes an interesting reading. The
Shett appears before the Colonel with a bottle of liquor which he places at the feet of the latter, stating:

“Namdar Sirkar Saheb, it is our custom to lay before such feet as yours (Buttercup had left one of his feet on the field of Assaye) the first fruit of the season. Hence the trouble, Lord Saheb, for which give pardon, General Saheb.” Buttercup who neither relished the allusion to his absent foot nor the bottle in the presence of the strict Jalap (Collector) affected to be thunderstruck. (Gujarat and Gujaratis 277)

These accounts and descriptions, inspired by a genuine concern for a better order even while expressing the ills of a decadent society, make them meaningful and purposeful. These satires have in them not only the irony and humour of Addison and Goldsmith but also the same seriousness and moral purpose. Though Malabari states in his ‘Introduction’ that his aim is in presenting these sketches is to give an account of the inner life of the Gujaratis, his real subject is India and his real concern for the passing away of the virtues of Indian character. He regrets, indeed, the fact that India’s glorious past is fading but welcomes the positive and powerful influences promised by the introduction of western education and the impact of western culture. Sirdar Jogendrar Singh points out:

He was against impatient idealism. He was convinced that the only hope of future progress lies in the slow but sure assimilation of new ideas, requiring unbroken peace, and that the foundation of national life must be laid in the homes of the people. He was not deceived by the first dawn of a renaissance which has dazzled so many honest workers. (Rambles with a Pilgrim Reformer)

Malabari, the author of Gujarat and Gujaratis, was the first and foremost, a social reformer, a ‘pilgrim reformer’ as he has called himself. His first concern as a reformer is for the widow in Indian society. No one has dwelt on the tragedy as well as the tragic-comedy of the lot of the widows in India as
he has in the essays he published in *Indian Spectator* in 1884. Depicting concern for the moral and social instability on the condition of the widows in India he, avers:

…that whereas, the virgin hopes to marry someday, the widow has no hope. The result is that the virgin conducts herself well because it is open to her to obtain a husband some day. But the widow in her desperation, is apt to go wrong, disregarding her finer instincts because she knows she has no chance of remarriage. (*The Life and Life Work of Behramji M. Malabari*, 32)

These passages illustrate the moral earnestness of the writer, his sincerity which seems inseparable from the gift of humour and an unmistakable strain of comic faculty combining with sound moral intentions.

In *The Indian Eye on English Life*, Malabari speaks in the guise of a pilgrim observer rather than that of a pilgrim reformer. Similar to Goldsmith’s Chinaman he sets forth to record his impressions of the English people, their institutions, customs and manners in the style of a neutral observer. His writing about the English, not withstanding the queerness of a typically Indian point of view, contain realism, irony and humour.

The work begins with an interesting account of the writer’s journey from Bombay to London followed by his first impression of the London crowd. His reaction to the crowds of women seen in London is essentially Indian. He observes, “After all a women’s place is at home rather than in the street.” (*The Indian Eye on English Life* 28)

Describing the various social types such as the Postman, the London cab-driver, shop-boys, shop-girls and the “Dear old Bobby”, he states:

What a contrast he is to the stupid, peevish, insolent Patawala in India…If I were a girl, I would prefer a London policeman for my
knight to any Bond Street merchant, whatever ladies may say to that. *(The Indian Eye on English Life)*

The *Indian Eye on English Life* has with its fictional interest numerous anecdotes, incidents and personal experiences narrated with vividness, irony, humour and pathos.

The social criticism and characterization in *Gujarat and Gujaratis* and *The Indian Eye on English Life* anticipated the emergence of the modern Indian novel in English. To say the least, this combined the elements most vital to good fiction, namely realism, satire, irony and humour, not to speak of qualities like sympathy, understanding and a liberal and human approach to problems informed by a respect for basic human values and the dignity of man as a man.

Malabari’s place in the history of Indian novels in English is, as that of a forerunner comparable to the place which the writers of the Periodical Essays in eighteenth century England have in the history of the English novel. His writings have in them not only the satire, irony and humour and the moral purpose of the *Coverley Papers* and the *Chinese Letters* before they found their place in the English novel and the immortal creations of Addison and Steele such as *Sir Roger, Beau Tibbs* and the *Man in Black* were the forerunners of the characters who appeared in the novels of later times. In a similar way, the social criticism and the characterization of *Gujarat and Gujaratis* and *The Indian Eye on English Life* may very well be said to have anticipated the emergence of the modern Indian novel in English.

It is difficult to assess the nature and magnitude of the influence Malabari had on the Indian writers of fiction in English both in his own time
and on posterity, but it cannot be denied that his prose writings anticipated much that was to follow in the succeeding decades, particularly the fictional and satirical works of writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh and Nirad Chaudhari. It would thus not be an exaggeration to say that Malabari set the pace for the kind of English writing in India which combined the elements most vital to good fiction, namely realism, satire, irony and humour.

VII

A contemporary of Malabari, Nagesh Vishwanath Pai (1860-1920), is basically remembered for his works, *Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore* (1894) and *The Angel of Misfortune* (1904). The latter is a narrative poem while the former is a pseudo-fictional work.

Chakmakpore is a fictitious creation of the author though the town as it is pictured could be any town in India. In fact, Chakmakpore is a forerunner of the fictitious towns which provide the setting for the novels of R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Nagarajan and Bhabahni Bhattacharya. These novelists owe their success and popularity in no mean a measure to the settings they have created for their novels and to their ability to take the reader into the charming worlds of their own, be it Malgudi, Kedaram, Kanthapura or Sona Mitti. Each of these little worlds has a personality, an individuality all its own and yet it may be any town anywhere in India and emphasize the essential unity which marks the Indian ethos. The significance of Nagesh Pai’s *Sketches* lies in their being the first to place characters in a setting which is at once local and pan-Indian, and
an attempt to make character, action and destiny bound up in a subtle way with
the character and spirit of the locale.

The ‘sketches’ of Nagesh Pai are pen-portraits of characters drawn from
the different levels of social life in Chakmakpore. They are interesting
characters, both types and individuals, and show a very good variety and range
of selection. They are realistic portrayals of social types who may be found
anywhere in India such as the Beggar, the Street Performer, the Sharp
Moneylender, the Coolie and the Street Preacher. Some of them however are
peculiar to the place and the setting like the street Vaid, the Pedagogue, the
Mithaiwala and the Parsee Girl. Sketches include a few animals and birds too,
which are part of the life of Chakmakpore, such as the Pariah Dog, the Crow,
the Moorghee and the Cat. There are also a few characters who are too
individualistic to be identified with this or that part of India, though one feels
that one has met them too often in Indian towns and villages, the Irritable
Sahib, the Zealous reformer, the Hindu Nowker and the Pani-Bhat. Even the
dog and the cat in Chakmakpore seem to have a certain measure of
individuality and unlike Malabari who refers to entire community of pariah
dogs as a social menace, Pai describes them with some sympathy and
understanding. To Pai the horse, the dog and the crow are not just members of
a species but individuals which have a place in the ethos of Chakmakpore and
have distinct personalities of their own. Regarding the Moorghee, the domestic
hen, the author observes:

Does an animal predestined for the table know it? I suppose not. If it
does, its stoicism is wonderful, for you will never by any chance find it
melancholy so long as its immediate wants are attended to. (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 159)

In a similar vein describing the Ghatee-Tat (jutka pony) the author avers:

The pucka-born Ghatee-Tat whose fibre has not been released by a dash of Arabian blood is a very hardy creature. He is not much to look at perhaps...Yet it would be unsafe to infer weakness from this, for the endurance of the plucky animal is phenomenal. In a long race against time, patience, under the most favourable conditions of diet and stabling few animals can hold their own against him...Now some may admire the graceful Arabian, others might give the palm to the splendid race horse of England, but for me the poor whimsical, dimunitive, patient enduring Ghatee pony possesses a peculiar interest, which I do not feel for any other species of the equine race. (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 168-73)

Among the human portrayal, describing the Parsee Girl, the author remarks:

She is unmistakably pretty and stylish, this fair flower of Iran, this fair worshopper of the sun. She has a good eye for the colour. Her saree in silk is far and away the loveliest thing out on silks... (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 159)

The author is sorry that this girl “in the first blush of youth” and “in the full glory of her charms” is condemned to conceal the “greatest” of her charms under a veil. He is sorrier still that ‘eligible young men’ do not accept these pretty girls, ‘these fair flowers of Iran’ such as they are. The author states:

They (eligible young men) are not insensible to the charms of the fair maidens. Quite the contrary; but they show no eager haste to take them for better or worse unless accompanied with something more substantial and less liable to withering influence of time than mere beauty. (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 21)

The mother-in-law is again an interesting portrayal. Conscious as he is of his writings for the western reader, Pai points out how the mother-in-law in India is a contrast of her counterpart in the West. He writes:
The Hindu fears no woman. His own lawful partner may, if she is inclined to intimate Mrs. Caudle, give him a bad half-hour now and again, and generally submit to this with the easy good humour and exemplary patience of the husband of that lady. But, as to allowing the maternal parent of his better half a meddle with his affairs, he would never hear of such a thing…The woes of his Aryan brother from the West, therefore, find no sympathetic echo in his heart…To the lucky Hindoo, the mother-in-law is the most amiable being in the world. She rarely ventures to open her lips in his presence. (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 107-108)

But Pai is deft to clarify that the term mother-in-law has a different connotation with reference to the unfortunate young wife in India who has to submit herself to the cruel tyranny of her husband’s mother as soon as she enters the wedded state.

The writer also throws light on the problem of begging and mendicancy. Commenting on the existence of real poverty and suffering in India side by side with the most unblushing mendicancy, Pai remarks:

Nay, in the fullness of his heart he might even give a handful of rice from his own scanty store to a poorer wretch, whom starvation has forced to solicit help even from this charitable pauper. (Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore 144)

Pai’s Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore, like Malabari’s Gujarat and Gujaratis, is a forerunner of the Indian novel in English in the sense that it is one of the earliest attempts ever made by Indian writers to produce good readable stuff in English. The sketches have in them many of the elements and features which have given the Indian novel in English its own individual quality, such as lively humour, gentle irony, keen social sense and a sound moral purposefulness. The work also provides an interesting study of man as an individual and as a social animal whom we see in relation to the environment in
which he is placed. All the characters portrayed in these sketches belong to the little world of Chakmakpore and is nothing but India in a microcosm.

By creating the little world of Chakmakpore and peopling it with a variety of characters, by making the place and the people belong to one another inseparably in a regional sense and yet remain pan-Indian in character, Nagesh Pai has anticipated the fictional creation of writers like Narayan, Raja Rao and Nagarajun, namely Malgudi, Kanthapura and Kedaram.

The ‘Sketches’ of Malabari and Nagesh Vishwanath Pai, mark a distinct stage in the evolution of the Indian novel in English. They mark the rise of individualism in Indian fiction in English and can be said to signify the triumph of realism over romance. But most of the other fictional works in English which appeared during the quarter century that followed the publication of Govinda Samanta seem to have retained the characteristics of the tales of old and show a marked predilection for romance rather than for realism.

VIII

Chakravarti Khetrapal’s Sarala and Hingana (1895), an illustration of romance, is a piece of prose fiction comprising two different tales, namely Sarala and Hingana. In the first tale, Sarala is the young girl-wife of Hem Chandra who is a poor dependent of his uncle. Inspired by a strange dream the young man starts on a pilgrimage to Pareshnath Hill where he hopes to get the clue to a treasure trove. Hem’s virtuousness and strength of character are put to test when Indumati, one of the lady inmates of the ashram makes violent protestations of her love for him. The ‘all knowing’ Siddhapurusha is pleased
by his honesty and purity and blesses him and sends him home with the
treasure trove. All ends well. Indumati appears again at the end and she begs
permission to pass the rest of her life in the temple which he visits daily. K.S.
Ramamurti considers it to be a work of “…poor specimen of prose fiction
which tells us a tale too naïve for adult reading.” (Rise of the Indian Novel in
English 129)

_Hingana_ is another romance, an account of romantic lass, Hingana of
the Gonds race who falls in love with Kumar without knowing that he is Prince
Kumar Birkeshwar. This is again a poor specimen of prose fiction and it can
interest the reader only by some of the vivid descriptions of the pujas and
festivals it contains. Even with such descriptions the tales hardly throw any
light on the real Bengal life they claim to portray.

The language too is, rather poor and un-English and there are many
instances of bad English such as “sceneries” and “it was passed 4 p.m.”. But
one cannot discredit the writer for flashes of figurative phrases such as, “She
(Sarala) looked to him as beautiful as any lotus in that pond.” (Sarala and
Hingana: Tales Descriptive of Indian Life 2)

Summing up the contribution of the novelist it can be said that Sarala
and Hingana is one of those poor romantic tales which lend support to the view
that Indian prose fiction appeared first in tales of romance and adventure before
it developed into the novel built on a foundation of realism though this is not
altogether true. The appearance of such romances in English marked, however,
a stage of transition from native verse romance to realistic prose fiction in all
the Indian languages, including English.

IX

T. Ramkrishna Pillai, the next writer combined the sketches and
romances in English during the first few years of the twentieth century, made
his contribution through works such as Early Reminiscences (1907), Life in an
Indian Village (1891), Padmini: an Indian Romance (1903) and The Dive for
Death: an Indian Romance.

Saluva, the minister of Venkataraya, the ruler of South India in the novel
Padmini: An Indian Romance usurps the throne of Chandargiri. The king and
his family are put to cruel death, but his second son Srirangaraya is whisked
away to safety in a bundle of clothes by the kings trusted washerman. Saluva is
madly in love with Padmini, a simple innocent but beautiful village maid who,
however, is, stern and consistent in her refusal to accept his offer. Padmini falls
in love with Chenappa, the obscure village boy, impressed by his acts of daring
heroism. When Chenappa defeats a wrestler of great renown in public wrestling
match Padmini throws to him the pearl necklace given to her by Saluva. Both
Chenappa and Padmini flee independently to escape the wrath of Saluva and
after a long period of mutual yearning and pining meet each other, when both
are in disguise. In the meanwhile, Chenappa becomes the head of the village
which later shapes into the capital of a kingdom, Chinglepet. Ultimately it is
discovered that Chenappa is none other than Sririangaraya, the rightful heir to
the throne of Chandragiri and when Saluva flees, he is restored to the throne.
He gives to the British a plot of land to building Fort St. George. Though the British offer to call it Sririangarayapatanam, the king prefers his former name and wants to be named Channapatnam, which later becomes Chennai.

*Padmini* is full of legends, incredibilities such as dreaming and astrological predictions and with comprehensive accounts of Hindu customs and traditions. There are many observations made by the author on Hindu character. The author states:

The apprentice for learning the work, has to perform various duties to his master in the way of attending to his daily wants, one of which is to have ready always a sufficient quantity of a leaf called the *betel* and a nut called *areca*, prepared in a particular manner, and hand them over to chew after meals. These are invariably and extensively used by the Hindus. (*Padmini, an Indian Romance* 112)

Such observations are both naïve and misleading and show poverty of imagination as well as of English expression. The long passage of betel chewing is not necessary at all. A mere reference to it would have sufficed and to a western reader an explanation like this would be of little help.

In Dorothy Spencer’s annotated *Bibliography of Indian fiction in English*, *Padmini* has been referred to as ‘an historical novel, primarily a love story of the seventeenth century, following the fall of the Vijayanagar empire’. According to Dr. K.R.S. Iyengar, the author has attempted to portray “the historical events leading to the great battle of Talikote, which brought to an abrupt end the history of the never to be forgotten Vijayanagar Empire.” (*Indian Contribution to English Literature* 173) Bhupal Singh describes it as a work which gathers romantic facts into a story relating to the defeat of the
Hindus at Talikota in 1565, leading to the disruption of the Vijaynagar Empire. It is therefore a romantic tale with a sprinkling of historical events.

X

*The Dive for Death: an Indian Romance*, is a romance that centres round Devamani, the beautiful daughter of the chieftain of Vellipalayam. The emerald shining in her forehead is pecked away by a trained bird sent by Samban (son of Maran) who is later on challenged by Vijayan, the youth who loves Devmani truly. In the trial of strength that ensues, Vijayan and Samban fight at the edge of a precipice and Vijayan falls into the abyss throwing his beloved into great woe. But years later he reappears as the orphan youth of Madhanpur and the reunion of the lovers takes place.

This is again a story full of legends, inset stories, dreams, astronomical predictions and oracles of frenzied women during festivals like the festival of blood and fire. All read like a fairy tale for children and there is little of plot, theme or characterization, consequently making it difficult to be considered as novel in a strict sense.

XI

Like the sketches and romances of T. Ramkrishna Pillai, Bal Krishna contributed to Indian Writing in English through his single work *The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story* (1910).

The plot of *The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story* depicts a typical romantic tale of Kusuma, the daughter of Janak, who falls in love with the young and handsome Mohan whom she meets by the side of a lake in the
beautiful plains of Rajagiri in the twilight glow of romantic evening. The young man and the young woman look at each other and part without exchanging a word. They speak no language but the language of the eyes. It has been to them an ‘instant of eternity’ and they part, pierced to the very depth of their souls by the mysterious but invincible arrows of Cupid. The novelist narrates:

Your (Mohan’s) letter has sunk deep into my (Kusuma’s) heart. It is as clear as crystal and as true as truth itself. You are actually repeating my own experiences, for my soul has been always with yours. (The Love of Kususma: An Eastern Love Story 19)

Mohan and Kusuma love each other to the point of sickness, though they do not meet each other. In fact they just miss meeting each other when Mohan invites Kususma’s father to dinner not actually knowing who he is but having a vague intuitive apprehension of the fact. He believes what he likes to believe and he is right.

Then comes in the villain, Bansi, Kusuma’s cousin who has been cherishing a desire to marry his beautiful cousin and who is now annoyed by the intervention of a rival. He tries to scare away his rival but all his threats and intimidations only strengthen the love of Mohan and Kusuma through letters and secret meetings. Then Bansi contrives to get the consent of Kusuma’s parents to marry her and makes them hurry through a formal horoscope ceremony. News of this shocks Kusuma who takes ill.

The erring parents do not persist in their error. Realizing their folly, they break their contract with Bansi and send the young lovers to a place of safety across the Rajputana desert. They are waylaid and taken captive by Bansi who
hold’s Mohan’s life to ransom. The young girl who has shown remarkable courage and fortitude as well as constancy in love in the face of many dangers all along, winces at the ultimatum thrown by the treacherous Bansi. The timely arrival of the parents of both on the scene averts the tragedy of Kusuma yielding to Bansi’s threats and the novel ends with Mohan taking his beloved Kusuma in his protecting, possessive embrace. Bhupal Singh observes:

The author of the novel has in his anxiety to please the West developed his theme in a manner alien to the spirit of Hindu life; This ‘Eastern Love Story’ is a mass of incidents and characters. He indulges in sermons and homilies in the midst of his story which possesses neither any originality in thought nor beauty of expression. (A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction 308)

This novel strikes us as an “Incongruous mixture of realism and romance”, one which takes us into a world which seems to be lost between the past and the present, the real and the unreal.

Another interesting feature of this work is the contradictory views found regarding its language. The foreward by Victoria Cross is full of praise for the ‘good English’ used by the novelist while K.S. Ramamurti denounces the same. K.S. Ramamurti avers:

What is much more intriguing in Victoria Cross’s foreword is that it is full of praise for the ‘good English’ in which the novel has been written while it really abounds in passages such as the ones quoted below which can hardly justify such a claim:
He consulted with some of his best friends.
After such heart-rending sorrow, Mohan and Kusuma entered into the ocean of happiness.
Therefore such a soul only remembers the circumstances of its death, which is left impressed on it at the time of death and which alone shows apparition by drawing the thin matters from the atmosphere. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 137)
It is quite unfortunate that contemporary British reviewer’s should have praised Bal Krishna’s English and equally unfortunate that many latter day critics should have judged all the earlier writers of Indian fiction in English on the basis of works like *The Love of Kusuma*. The writers contributing through their sketches and romances made many mediocre and unsuccessful experiments to the activity of novel writing.

**XII**

Taraknath Ganguli’s novel *Swarnalata* (1903) was originally written in Begnali and later translated into English. There are two English versions of the novel, one by Bidhubhushan Mukerjee and another by Edward Thompson. The title of the Edward Thompson’s English version of the novel is *The Brothers* and the story centres round two brothers Sasibhusan and Bidhubhusan, sons of Chandresekhar Chattopadayaya, a Brahmin living in a village not far from Krishnanagar. The brothers who are almost models of brotherly love and devotion are separated by the vily tricks played by Pramada, the wife of Sasibhusan, the elder of the two brothers. Sarala, the good natured and loving wife of Bidhu, the younger brother, faces the bitter consequences of the separation with remarkable courage and fortitude particularly after her husband goes to the city leaving her and her child, Gopal. Even the money which Bidhu sends his wife does not reach her, for every money order is received by the unscrupulous Gadadar, brother of Pramada who, while pretending to receive it on behalf of Sarala, keeps it for himself. Sarala and Gopal suffer the bitterest
pangs of poverty and want. Life becomes a perpetual misery to the virtuous young lady and her child. But mother and son share their woes and find their peace and solace in the strength of love which binds them, ever hoping, ever expecting the return of Sasibhusan. Delineating their plight and pathos the novelist remarks:

   How wonderful is the power of love! Gopal did not in the least know why Sarala was crying, but when he saw his mother crying his eyes filled with tears. Sarala at the sight of his weeping face forgot all her troubles and came out carrying him and began to walk about. Gopal raised his head on her shoulder and was quiet. She then tried to make him speak; and in the efforts to make him laugh she laughed herself. (Swarnalata: A Glimpse into the Indian Inner Home 17)

There is yet another soul who shares the woes of Sarala and Gopal, and that is Syama, the poor orphan who helps them in a hundred ways. She even saves them from dangers and troubles by her timely warnings and daring actions. Syama is almost an idealized portrait, and yet she is amazingly real and human as is borne out by passages. The novelist observes:

   Syama had this special gift, that she could manage to overhear anything that was anywhere said. She used to go everywhere so soundlessly that no one ever detected her… (Swarnalata: A Glimpse into the Indian Inner Home17)

Bidhubhusan who has left his home, wife and child in search of employment finds an interesting companion, Nilkamal, who shares all his hardships and sufferings. The adventurous experiences which befall these two men have in them an element of picturesqueness and they account for much of the irony and the humour in the novel. The companions are separated from each other for a while and poor Nilkamal is in distress but a stroke of good luck brings them together again. Bidhu has now embarked on a new career, having
found a wealthy patron who recognizes his musical and histrionic talents and when Nilkamal joins him again he asks the latter to play the role of Hanuman in one of his performances of The Ramayana. Nilkamal is none too happy to appear in the role of Hanuman, the monkey-god, and his unhappiness is so great that he goes to the extent of declaring to the audiences that he is no Hanuman but only Nilkamaml. The novelist narrates:

“Sir, they have dressed me up as Hanuman by force!” The audience laughed with delight. Nilkamal shouted again, “Don’t your honours believe what I say? I can swear it. I am not Hanuman. My name is Nilkamal, my home is at Ramanagar, they have dressed me up as Hanuman by force.” The laughter grew more uproarious yet. Nilkamal collapsed in shame. “Son Hanuman!” Rama called. “Who’s your Hanuman? If you go calling me Hanuman, Hanuman, you’ll have trouble!” (Swarnalata: A Glimpse into the Indian Inner Home 116)

Nilkamal reminds us of Shakespeare’s, Bottom, though when Bottom declares his intention to assure the audience that he is no real lion but only Bottom, the weaver, he is not naïve or foolish like Nilkamal. He speaks not only from an unbounded confidence in his ability to play all roles but also in his anxiety to reassure the gentle ladies that he is no lion.

Nilkamal’s plight almost takes a turn for the tragic, for the “Son Hanuman” joke spreads, and the poor man is hunted and jeered by urchins and street boys wherever he goes.

When Bidhu returns home at last as a prosperous gentleman he is greeted with many surprises and new developments both in his own home and in his elder brother’s. Sasi his elder brother, is now on the verge of bankruptcy and his wife Pramada, who with her mother has been responsible for all his pecuniary troubles, betrays him by bolting away with all the jewels and cash
left in the house. In his own home Bidhu finds his beloved Sarala bedridden and almost dying. The novel ends on a note of reunion and reconciliation.

This may be considered a good novel from the point of view of both plot and characterization. It has in it many other elements which go to make a good novel such as realism, irony, humour and pathos.

*Swarnalata* ushered in a new age in the history of Bengali novel. At a time when novels of Bankimchandra were busy traversing the path of colourful history and cloudy romance, Swarnalalta took the readers to down to earth reality. Taraknath Ganguly is a close observer of men and manners, and he has a faculty, which seems to be exclusively his, for working up ordinary material into a highly effective picture.

Another contemporary writer, Rajam Iyer contributed only one novel in English and that too he did not live to complete. It was published as a serial in Prabudha Bharata during the years 1896-98 and it was also printed in his book *Rambles in Vedanta*. It was published as a novel under the title *True Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri* by George Allen and Unwin, London.

**XIII**

The hero, Vasudeva Sastri, of the work *True Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri*, is a Vedantin who practices the highest kind of stoicism and disinterestedness even while remaining in the fetters of worldly, domestic life. It is an idealized portrait. The novelist avers:

...a middle-aged man of fair complexion and well proportioned limbs, his face had a calmness and serenity in it, a sweetness and luxuriant cheerfulness like that of a full blown lotus flower which an ancient rishi might have envied...The glory of those eyes, if I may say so, lay not in occasional lighting like flashes, but in their constant and
continued revelation of the ocean of goodness, love and calmness that dwelt within...He seemed to depend for his happiness on nothing known outside and he was never known to be excited wither by pleasure or by pain and much less get angry. (True Greatness of Vausdeva Sastri: A Collection of his contribution to Prabudha Bharata 627-28)

Vasudeva Sastri takes all the blows of misfortune with the serenity of a saint. He stands the supreme test of his strength of mind and character when temptations come to him in the shape of Janaki, the dancing girl of Srirangam. He seems to have been destined to convert both Janaki and Srinivasan, the wayward young prodigal and that seems to be the reason why the experience of finding himself in the bed chamber of the dancing girl befalls him all of a sudden. Every experience which befalls him and every action of his seems to fit into a pattern divinely ordained and this is typical of the average Indian concept of life. The personality of Vasudeva Sastri is that of a true Vedantin, a blend of the mystical and the rational, of the passionate and the serene.

The idea of destiny is the loom on which the novel under discussion has been woven, not so much to preach fatalism or complex philosophy of any kind as to show that everything in the world, every experience has a purpose and meaning and has a place in the scheme of things. In fact, the character of Srinivasan, the misguided son-in-law is intended to be a warning against blind or implicit faith in destiny or fate. Srinivasan who lets his amateurish preoccupation with Vedanta run away with him in contrast to the true vedantin that Vasudev Sastri is. When frustrated by the death of a promising youth like Krishna, he becomes angry, angry with nature, with God, with fate and what else. Thus K.S. Ramamurti remarks:
His Vedanta is a self-deception, being a superficial understanding of the mysteries of life. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 153)

Janaki, the dancing girl, is again another instrument of destiny. She comes as a temptation first but ultimately proves a touchstone for both the Vedantins. She becomes too, an agent of that destiny which makes the true vedantin conquer the one who is not, and her agency brings about the regeneration of the agent herself.

There are many other memorable portrayals like Rukmani, the much confounded wife of the vedantin and Lakshmi, an idealized version of her class, a choric commentary on all that happens and does not happen in the world around her. The average lady of the house in a South Indian Brahmin household is a passive but effective presence, more of a chorus than a character, and the only novelist who has attempted to picture her in this light is Rajam Iyer. Throwing light on the character of Vasudeva Sastri, K.S. Ramamurti remarks:

Our conception of the character and role of Vasudeva Sastri, the protagonist depends much on our understanding of the Indian conception of the role of an individual in the world into which he is cast. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 154)

Expressing similar views on Hinduism M.E. Derrett states:

...individual fulfillment will be achieved through harmony with all things, not through our response in knowing but in being... Each individual is able to fulfill his dharma by fulfilling his particular role in this life and in this way he hopes to rise in his next birth. (The Modern Indian Novel in English 45)

The passivity of the characters in Indian fiction can be justified only by the worldview prevalent in the Indian society itself. They wait not always
for succour and reward promised in this life but hope for them in another birth
though sometimes the rebirth or regeneration comes even in this life itself. It is
not only individuals but even whole societies and communities which wait,
wait on and on endlessly, for to wait is to be very Indian. To understand this is
to understand the Indian worldview which continues to be at the root of all its
literature including what it produces in English.

With these considerations in mind Rajam Iyer’s *True Greatness of
Vasudeva Sastri* convinces the readers that the apparent shortcomings in the
novel are not the shortcomings at all and they are characteristics which have
remained in the writings of the writer. Yet it does have the limitations that are
evident in the novel of any fiction in its embryonic stage.

The work is over elaborate; there are too many dreams, too many long
speeches, too many direct addresses and explanations to the reader. There is too
much of poetry and philosophy, too. The language of Rajam Iyer is
characteristically oriental and Indian and conveys the same Indian modes of
thought and life through a medium he finds most natural and flexible for his
purpose.

Rajam Iyer’s *True Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri* can go down in the
history of Indian English fiction as an authentic work, as a forerunner of the
South Indian fiction in English in the sense that it anticipates much that it is
praised in the novles of Narayan, Nagarajan and Raja Rao and as a piece of
fiction writing which illustrates whatever is and should be peculiarly Indian
about the English novels produced in India.
XIV

Madhaviah wrote five novels in English *Satyananda* (1909), *Clarinda* (1915), *Thillai Govindan, Muthuminakshi* and *Lieut. Col. Panju Satyananda* (1909) comes first in the chronological order. *Clarinda* is a historical novel in the sense that it narrates the story of Clarinda who was a historical figure.

*Clarinda* written in English is set in the mid-eigtheenth century. The story is based on a historical figure, a real Clarinda, the widow of a Maratha Brahmin. It tells us the powerful and exciting story of a woman who beginning as a coy, soft-natured young girl, rises to the stature of a great heroine. The theme, therefore, is more personal than historical. Dorothy Spencer delineates:

She was the widow of a Maharatta Brahmin who had been in the service of the ruler of Tanjore and (she) later became the concubine of an English officer who instructed her in Christian doctrine, and after his death she was baptized at Palamcottah where she later built the first Christian Church in that part of the country. (*Indian Fiction in English: An annotated Bibliography*)

Clarinda is the grand-daughter of Pundit Rao, the Dewan of the Maharaja of Tanjore through his only son Murari Rao, the general, who, when the novel begins, has led an army to crush the Maravas. Pundit Rao, who has the Maharaja completely under his thumb, having unlawfully helped him to the throne, is a virtual dictator in the king’s court. At the opening of the novel, we find him swelling with pride and haughtiness on receipt of the news that his son Murari has inflicted a crushing blow to the Maravas, but all his haughty self-importance is shattered to pieces with the arrival of the tragic news that Murari Rao, trapped by the superior skill and strategy of the Maravas, has been hacked to pieces. His cup of misery is full when is informed that Murari’s wife who
has just borne a daughter (Clavirunda Bai) has died of shock. The old Dewan breaks down beyond consolation and retires into the forest after putting his orphaned grandchild under the care of the old havildar Ragoji.

The child grows under the loving care of Ragoji. In the meanwhile, Pundit Rao, now a sanyasi in the forest, is met by an Englishman who gives him all the news about Pratap Singh’s court and tells him how Pratap Singh feels the absence of the old Dewan. Pundit Rao returns to Tanjore and meets his grandchild, now a vivacious young girl who delights the old man with her lively arguments.

With the retreat of the French and Pratap Singh’s victory, the king finds more time to turn his attention to matters domestic. He has a deep and tender concern for Clavirunda Bai and is anxious to see that she is happily married. Madhava, the nephew of Dewan Ramanna Pandit and son of Amatya is proposed to her, but the wily schemer that he is, the dewan rejects the proposal on astrological grounds and ends up by offering to marry the girl herself. Pundit Rao is in a predicament. In the meanwhile, Lyttleton, who is now a close friend of the old man, happens to meet Clavirunda Bai. They are brought together through a small incident when the beautiful young girl is bitten by a snake and the Englishman renders her first aid. The young girl and the Englishman are drawn to each other but before their attraction and attachment blooms into love; old Pundit Rao dies all of a sudden. Clavirunda Bai is now completely at the mercy of the old Dewan that she is hastened into marrying him. It is from this point that the novel warms up with life and realism.
When Clavirunda Bai enters the household of the Dewan she is just a child-wife and she finds herself surrounded by many hostile forces. The household is dominated by the clever and the scheming Kamala Bai, the widowed sister-in-law of the Dewan who has a powerful hold on the old man. Then there is Ganga Bai, the daughter of the Dewan, and Madhava, son of Amatya who still burns with passion for Clavirunda. The scheming and treacherous Kamala Bai deliberately fans the flame of passion in Madhava and tries to bring them together, her real motive being to expose the innocent and the virtuous young girl to charges of marital infidelity. An attempt is also made to get all her own Sridhana transferred to Amatya’s son who is to be adopted by the Dewan. In the meanwhile, Madhava’s return after a long interval of absence from home causes a new awakening of love in the heart of Clavirunda, for the hot and passionate kisses which Madhava had once forced on her against her will catching her unawares in the dark corridor leading out of the old Dewan’s sick room, had affected her in a way which she herself had not realized in her immediate reaction of anger and grief. But the unworthy Madhava seeks her only for gratification of his lustful desires, while his father is scheming to get all her property. The novelist observes:

Thus it came about that while the thoughtless son sought to pollute and dishonour the poor girl’s body and soul for his own pleasure, his heartless father plotted to destroy them for his own profit. (Clarinda: A Historical Novel 147)

With the passing away of the Dewan, Amatya assumes full authority all at once and Kamala’s retribution begins. A gruesome attempt is made to make Clavirunda a true sati and she is saved in the very last minute by the timely and
heroic intervention of Lyttleton. She lives under the protection of Lyttleton staying in an outhouse with Saradha, her trusted maid. Her subsequent interview with Madhava brings with it a terrible shock and disillusionment; for Madhava makes the unshamed proposal that she can live as his mistress and not as his wife. Clavirunda’s argument with Madhava shows her up not as a typical orthodox Hindu woman but as a bold, rational, progressive-minded modern woman. The revulsion that results from Madhava’s unashamed proposal makes her decide to hitch her destiny to that of Lyttleton himself who has by now all but converted her to the Christian way of thinking.

Clavirunda marries Lyttleton but she is kept ignorant of the invalidity of the marriage, for Lyttleton has hidden from her the fact that he is already married and that he has been expecting the news of his release from the bonds of an earlier marriage which had turned out to be an unhappy one. Though he hides this with the best of intentions it leaves a scar on Clavirunda’s feelings. Bishop Schwartz, the German Bishop before whom they appear, condemn both and they separate but only to unite. Their married life is anything but happy. Frustrated by Clavirunda’s persistent refusal to receive and entertain some of his friend’s, or playing a good hostess, Lyttleton takes to drinking. He falls ill and is laid up with a severe attack of gout. But during his illness Clavirunda attends on him with such loving care and tenderness, and a devotion characteristic of a Hindu wife that she rises very high in the esteem of Lyttleton and all his friends.
Clavirunda is left alone in the world after Lyttleton’s death. She adopts Gopal, Saradha’s son and later both she and Gopal are baptized by Bishop Schwartz. Her last days are spent with Christians and people of ‘lower castes’. Clavirunda is deeply concerned about the absence of a Protestant church building and supplies the ‘desideratum’ at her own cost. The church is consecrated by Bishop Schwartz in 1785. Her last years are spent in selfless service and acts of noble and great philanthropy.

*Clarinda* has a continuity of the central theme, the theme of a young woman’s ordeals and tribulations and her heroic battle against evil and hostile forces. The plot of the novel develops step by step. It begins with the helplessness of beauty, innocence and virtue in a world of scheming courtiers and the blossoming of the love of Clarinda which is destined to suffer the rudest shocks of betrayal and disillusionment. The love theme does not end with Clarinda’s betrayal by Amatya but develops in yet another direction when the deep seated regard and affection which Clavirunda had once entertained for Lyttleton comes to surface; putting forth new shoots and blossoms of love that has matured with experience. Regarding the maturity of depicting the falling in love for the second time of the heroine in the novel, K.S. Ramamurti avers:

The love theme has been developed with a naturalness which is rare in much Indian writing, for there is no falling in love at first sight and love blooms only when fed and nourished by circumstances. Once again the experience of love is followed by the experience of disillusionment though this time the disillusionment is brought about not by rude shock of betrayal but by a slow and painful realization of mutual incompatibilities and of a mutual failure to ‘understand’ each other. *(Rise of the Indian Novel in English* 163)
The character of Clarinda, the female protagonist has been admirably drawn. It has a steady growth and development. Clarinda suffers and suffers endlessly and in this suffering the character grows. No attempt has been made to idealize her. She is more realistic, worldlier and more ‘modern’ a woman than is met within most novels in Indian languages even today; the evolution of her character is very natural. She is symbol of the new woman, the woman emancipating herself from the tyranny and cruelty of the ages of asserting her individuality, and moral and spiritual independence against the established order.

The novel depicts the contemporary life of its time, especially the court intrigues, treaties and conquests. It also portrays the domestic life of the Maharatta Brahmins which can be constituted as ethnographic realism in the novel.

The style of the novel is quite natural and graceful. Madhaviah’s English has none of the defects or deficiencies of the writers of the tales and romances of the period. He wields a powerful pen and his English, for the most part, does not appear to be strained. An important aspect of the language made use of by the novelist is that it depicts fidelity befitting the native speaker of English and even to those for whom English is not a native language. In all the dialogues involving Indian speakers he has struck the kind of delicate balance between colloquialism and correct English speech but the kind of English which his English characters speak is like that of an Englishman. The novelist makes Lyttleton, an Englishman, speak as such:
“You know I am not a coward to take fright at a mob like that, and probably you know that I shoot fairly straight. Besides, - Orderly!” cried out Lyttleton in a loud tone...

“I am not a Lally,” said Lyttleton calmly, “but when a helpless girl is being murdered in cold blood, I don’t look to the sanctity of the offenders. You may send in your mob, Amatya and I shall soon pacify them myself. (Clarinda: A Historical Novel 170-71)

The informal tone of the English of Lyttleton is in contrast to the speeches of the characters in most Indian novels in English which are rather artificial and flat.

It is really significant that Madhaviah has shown a clear awareness of the difference between two distinct sensibilities, the Indian and the English, which seek two different modes and tones of speech. This awareness is clearly reflected in the contrast we find between the speeches of Amatya and Patteri on the one hand and Lyttleton on the other, and it is an awareness of this kind which is at the root of all the experimentation with the medium which we find in the novels of the best writers of Indian fiction in English.

The speeches of Clavirunda have a dignity and force which arise from an inherent nobility and strength of character. The taunting replies she gives to Kamalabai and her impassioned answer to Amatya’s mean and unashamed proposal that she could be his mistress and not his wife illustrate the point. The novelist delineates:

“Never,” she said bitterly and emphatically. “Your father sought to kill my body for the sake of my caste, and you now seek to kill my body and soul together for your own sensual pleasure, and also perhaps for the same reason, to judge by his instruction to you.” (Clarinda: A Historical Novel 194)

The imagined story of this unusual woman, who gradually takes control of her life, gives Madhaviah the opportunity to work out some of his favourite
themes: women’s education, the issue of sutee and widow-remarriage and the encounter between the Hinduism and Christianity. The cross-cultural, inter-religious relationship which is at the heart of the novel is unusual and of profound interest.

Keeping the development of the novel form in mind, *Clarinda* can be termed as a novel that contributes to the same. Judged by its plot and setting, its characterization, its dialogue and description, *Clarinda* can stand the test of good novel in English. Its merits and excellences measured against its faults claim for it the title of a worthy forerunner of the Indian novel in English.

**XV**

*Thillai Govindan* (1916), the next work of the writer, professes to be the memoirs of a South Indian Brahmin brought up in a village and given a university education, who finally, after a career as a government servant, reaffirms his faith in Indian values, valuable for its vignettes of village life, and its information on Brahmin attitudes and values.

Its theme is the middle-class Brahmin life in South India with its trials and tribulations at the material, moral, intellectual and spiritual planes. The moral and spiritual crisis which the male protagonist, Thillai Govindan, passes through were faced by most educated middle class Brahmins of that generation represented by the author himself.

The novel also narrates an interesting story, a story full of incident, action, suspense, pathos, irony and humour in its own unpretentious manner. It abounds in character of great variety and colour. Most of them are recognizable
types and yet have remarkable individual qualities. The characterization has a fine blend of humour, irony and pathos. Seshy, the ugly old widow, granddame Naumy, Thillai Sambasiva Dheekshithar, Vedambal, the stepmother of Govindan, Sundaraam Iyer, the school-master with “his short breath and shorter temper”, the “septuagenarian” with his invincible “ferula”, Uncle Mahadevan, the members of the local bodies and temple trusts, the lovely and innocent childwife of Govindan all make their brief appearance but compel attention. They are not only recognizable types but recognizable symbols of all that is good and bad in the small society they represent, of the agony and the ecstasy of the life which they are destined to live. Thillai Govindan, the protagonist himself symbolizes the assertion of the individual soul stirring to outgrow and overlap the boundaries of custom and tradition.

The last few chapters make tedious reading, particularly Chapter xvi which “records his political tenets.” In a novel which is short in itself, the last few chapters with their long reflections and recordings of the protagonist’s excursions into political and philosophical thought are disproportionately long.

The novel also becomes memorable as it abounds in passages that are remarkable for their irony and humour. In one such passage depicting the irony and humour, the novelist describes:

Promised no hope of recovery by the village physician and himself feeling none, my grandfather (the grandfather of Thillai Govindan, the narrator-protagonist) expressed a strong desire to go through the ceremony of Apath Sansayaam (becoming an ascetic at the last hour when death has become a certainty) or in the other words giving up the world when it has entirely given you up, and you are forced to quit it. (Thillai Govindan 23)
In another such passage portraying similar humour and irony, the novelist states:

Presently he (the schoolmaster) sat up again with the ferula in hand, the action of taking up the cane with the dawn of wakefulness having by long habit become involuntary now, and called out “Govinda”. I first thought he was repeating the name of the god Vishnu, but he looked at me and called again, and so I left my place and stood before him. (Thillai Govindan 34)

These are some of the illustrations that one comes across in the novels of Madhaviah and portray how the writers found in the English language an excellent medium for their comic sensibilities to operate upon.

Equally humorous and ironical is the incident depicted in the novel of the parliament of the village elders discussing the practice of ‘Kothandam’ (one of the various forms of cruel punishment administered to erring pupils by the village schoolmasters, the punishment of having the offender hung upside down). The novelist comments:

Another member spoke of the foolishness of sparing the rod with children and heroically boasted that he has suffered the punishment of Kothandam thrice during his school days. “And to no purpose,” muttered another and those around him laughed. (Thillai Govindan 44)

There are also in the novel a number of passages which reflect the powerful impact made by the English education and the study of western literature on the educated middle classes of the period. The narrator-protagonist describes, for instance, his initiation into the study of the Western literature and the joy which the experience brought him. He notes:

It was all like a new and beautiful country suddenly thrown open to my (the narrator’s) view and my spirit, which in the American’s language, had “broken the fetters” delighted to roam over it at its own free will, undisturbed and untrammeled by any scruples. Tyndal, Huxley and Spencer also claimed my time and attention; but this was
later on, and the brilliant Ingersoll was my god at this period. There were my Vedas and Shastras; and for “pure literature” I read the novels of Reynold’s with their exciting illustrations and became familiar with crime and vice. (Thillai Govindan 64)

There are several references to many great writers and intellectuals such as Tennyson, Shelley, Dr. Annie Besant, Draper, Ingersoll and others. Thus the novel reflects the influence of the English writers of the West and consequently on the Indian Writing in English.

The work also contains passages portraying the wit of the novelist. In one such passage the novelist states:

Lawyers are men that hire out their words and anger. The man who in the language of the world ‘gives and takes’, who longs to please everyone, and hesitates to call a spade a spade because it might hurt the spade’s feelings – in short the society man, with his oily tongue and propitiating smile pays a heavy penalty indeed for his popularity. (Thillai Govindan 122)

In the final analysis, however one is inclined to say that Thillai Govindan has many ingredients of a good novel, that it has the stuff of good fiction in spite of its pseudo-fictional trappings.

XVI

The novelist in the very introduction of the text Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian (1934) mentions the fact of the date of publication of the novel. He clarifies that though it was written way back in 1915 it could be published only as late as 1934. The delay in its appearance in book form was caused by the legal complications brought about by the differences of opinions between the publisher and the printer. The following extract from contemporary review of this book makes interesting reading. It states:
What is wanted is not mere imitation novels of the western type but real original production of the indigenous variety, with Indian characters faithfully drawn and fully developed and with original pots scientifically and artistically constructed and bearing reference to the Indian society as it ought to be. We have before us now a book of this description by one who may not be unfamiliar to our readers, Mr. Madhaviah. A striking feature of the book to us is the extraordinary extent to which it has succeeded in being true to life.

(Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p. ii.)

In a similar opinion of The Indian Review quoted by the publisher on p. ii, comments:

The language is pure and simple with a pleasant idiomatic flow showing literary perfection. The hero’s chaste life and scrupulous adherence to ideals and subsequent sacrifice are of absorbing interest.

(Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p. ii.)

Lieut. Panju, while presenting a good and exciting story, pictures South Indian middle class life both at domestic and official levels. K.S. Ramamurti remarks:

It is a piece of good social criticism which exposes the ills of a social order which British bureaucracy had brought about and yet shows how individual goodness and nobility, whether among the Britishers or among the natives, could always rise above those ills and assert their might and power.

(Rise of the Indian Novel in English p. 173)

The novel is in two parts- two “books” of about a hundred pages each. The first book tells us about the rise and the fall of Ramnath Dikshithar, the father of Panju, the protagonist while the second part tells us the story of Panju himself. Ramantha Dikshithar, the Head Accountant of the Tinnore Collector’s office is the son of Panchanatha Dikshithar, a great scholar who helped Regent Amar Singh to the throne of Tanjore by a daring piece of chicanery. Ramanatha Dikshithar is born to the great scholar through a young girl whom he marries in his sixtieth year as his third wife. After the death of his renowned
father, Ramanatha Dikshithar is brought up by Nondipatti, the clever and worldly wise mother-in-law of Panchanatha Dikshithar. This wily character who has “a hearty contempt for all priestly Brahmans” removes the boy to Tanjore and puts him in the English school there braving criticism and opposition from the orthodox sections of her community. The boy, however, “does not make much headway in English and shows instead a passion for music and a strong partiality for musicians and nautch girls.”

Eventually he manages to score through the U.C.S Examination and enters the service of the government under a collector, who is the patron of his father-in-law, then a Tahsildar. The following extract depicts the rise of the career of Ramanatha Dikshithar. It also throws light on the rise of the most English-educated young men in government jobs in those days. The passage reads as:

His knowledge of English was poor, but he was a good accountant, and what was more, he became an adept in the art of pleasing his official superiors. While his father-in-law instructed him in the whims and the ways of the Europeans and in the art of pleasing them, retailing for his edification his own and varied experiences, Nondipatti took care that he stood well in the graces of his immediate native superiors. Naturally gifted with a tall handsome person and prepossessing appearance which his dandiacal ways and dress set off to advantage, with pleasing manners, and with the powerful help of ancestral wealth, Ramanatha Dikshithar advanced rapidly in his official career, and in the course of a dozen years became the head-accountant of a collectorate. But for two complaints of having extorted bribes in the name of his official master and patron, he knew he would have been made a Tahsildar by the former collector before he left the district. In refusing his request, the collector had mentioned his poor knowledge of the English language as the chief reason; but Ramanatha Dikshithar knew that it was not the only reason, and determined to be more circumspect in obtaining bribes and perquisites for himself or for his superiors who were glad to profit by his help but did not like to hear it talked about or made the subject of official complaint. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p.10-11)
Ramanatha Dikshithar, thanks to the efforts of Nondipatti and his own, does rise to the position of Tahsildar. Nondipatti lives long enough to hear the good news and her only regret at the time of death is that he is not yet the father of a son. He has been blessed with two daughters but not with a male issue the absence of which is, in orthodox Hindu view, a definite handicap both materially and spiritually. So the dying old lady “conjures him with her last breath to marry another girl forthwith and beget a child to perpetuate his name and family.” She always advises his wife Komalam not to stand in the way if he should choose to take another wife for he is left without family ties he would lose himself completely in his growing immoral habits.

Ramanatha Dikshithar is indeed one who leads an immoral life. His weakness for nautch girls and dancing girls is almost proverbial and he has no scruples about receiving bribes both in cash and in kind which help him to live a gay bohemian life. He has a friend, Dandi Narayan Rao, a man from the north whose life seems to be shrouded in mystery and who is an accomplice in Dikshithar’s amorous adventures.

The announcement of a grand darbar to be held at Tinnore on the occasion of “the assumption of the title of the Empress of India by Queen Victoria” proves a turning point in Dikshithar’s career. He uses all his power and influence to raise large sums of money through forced donations and gets up a very grand show, marked by floral decorations, fireworks and a sort of beauty parade by about five hundred nautch girls. Everything seems to be
going well and in his favour and both the collector and his wife appear to be greatly impresses and pleased. The novelist delineates:

“This is beautiful, simply beautiful, I have never seen any-thing like it!” exclaimed the collector’s wife, where did you get all these flowers and who erected this canopy?”


“Pandarams, did you say? What do you mean?”

“Pandarams, mother,” explained the Tehsildar, “Temple servants; *sudras*; make garlands, gods and goddesses.”

The ‘mother’ was not enlightened and gave it up. (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p.49)

The collector too is pleased to observe:

“You have done A-1 today, Tahsildar,” said he “and I am very pleased. It has all gone off splendidly.” (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p.49)

But the remarks which the collector makes before he leaves do not seem to bode well for the Tehsildar. The novelist states:

“Are there really so many dancing-girls in Tinnore, Tahsildar?...Where did you get them all?” (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p.49)

The Tahsildar felt most pleased by the remark and he replied with evident pride and pleasure:

This district, no temple, no dancing girl this night; all come here: honour great Queen Empress. Your honour’s durbar. I know all. I got all. (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p.49)

The last statement proves a fatal one, and the collector gives him a bit of his mind. Reproaching him, he states:

I have heard of your amorous peccadillos before, but I didn’t know you were quite such a bad lot, Tahsildar. (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p.50)

Though Ramanatha Dikshithar is not slow to take the hint from what the collector has spoken, he is not wise. When the odds are against him so badly as to warrant a forced premature retirement, he plays fast and loose with his
official power and position to “make as much hay possible while the sun shines.” He does not know how he is hastening his own doom. In the meanwhile, he discusses with his wife Komalam the question of his taking another wife. Komalam’s predicament is that of thousands of young ladies of her generation and she submits herself to her lot in sheer helplessness trying to make the best out of her situation, though she does not hesitate to show her husband all the contempt she has for his immoral ways. The novelist states:

“I feel certain that no child will be born out of my loins hereafter,” replied she sadly, “and you may adopt my sister’s second son. What guarantee is there that a child will be born if you marry another wife?”

“All astrologers have unanimously declared that I shall have two wives and at least four children; can astrology be false?”

“You have not two but thousand, or is it two million wives, and who knows how many children by them?” She said bitterly. “But what care I hereafter? If wed you will, I shall not stand in the way. Only, after all that I have suffered, let me not have to bow and be subject to some strange upstart girl in the house. Wed my cousin’s daughter, Lakshmi. She is good girl and handsome enough. She will be a sister to me, and I think I shall not feel it so much if it is she.”

(Panju: A Modern Indian p-53)

Remarkable feature about the characterization of Komalam is that the novelist has portrayed her in a more realistic manner than that of women in similar situations. Komalam has not been depicted as the ideal Hindu wife who is willing to please her husband at all costs but as one who, even if she is too weak and helpless to prevent her husband from taking another wife, does not hesitate to call a spade a spade. She typifies the new spirit which makes the Indian woman see her husband as he really is and not as a God to be adored or worshipped. It is interesting to note that the author makes Komalam speak a language which, in contrast to the long involved sentences spoken by many other characters in the novel, has a simplicity and sharpness which are
disarming, reflecting as it does the speaker’s clarity of thinking and
determination to face things as they really are without giving away any
sentimental nonsense whatever.

Lakshmi, the new bride who arrives in the household, is just a child.
The novelist describing her writes:

Though hardly thirteen she is full-grown and full-blown, and her figure
is perfect; only her face still betrays the child; …the eyes indeed are
perfectly beautiful, large as the fawn’s at love-time, but there is love
play in them, and their expression is one of utter innocence and faith,
of the wonder and joy of childhood…No, she is not strictly beautiful
according to the accepted canons, but there is a nameless charm in her
face…and she looks such a pretty picture of innocence, purity and faith
that it is a pleasure to behold her and watch her as she gracefully
moves among the jasmine bushes in the small garden…softly
humming to herself a favourite tune. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian
p-59)

In contrast to the tenderness and the pathos in the description of
Lakshmi is the fact that this innocent girl has been married to an immoral
debauch in his late fifties.

Ramanantha Dikshithar is meanwhile faced with an additional
responsibility. His friend Dandi Narayan Rao who had left for the north had
entrusted his wife and “the child in her womb” to his care. He had also taken a
promise that in case anything happens to him during his travels, he should look
after them. Narayan Rao’s premonitions seem to have been well-founded and
there is no news of him at all even after a year of his departure. In the
meanwhile, cholera which rages in the town and claims the lives of hundreds
does not spare the household of Narayan Rao and Puttoo, his dumb servant, is
the first fatal victim and Mrs. Narayan Rao is the next. The dying lady, who
sends for Dikshitar, reveals to him that certain startling truths about herself and her husband. Dikshitar is astounded to hear that his Narayan Rao was none other than Nana Saheb, the man who rebelled against the government during the Mutiny. He had been in disguise and now the lady has a ‘vision’ informing her of his death at the hands of her own revengeful Rajput brothers. Before the lady breathes her last, she takes a promise from Dikshitar that he will look after her child Balaji and that he will conceal from the child the truth about his father. She leaves all her property too in his charge to be used for the upbringing of the child.

The purpose for which Dikshitar has taken a second wife is fulfilled at last. Lakshmi gives birth to a male child, but the birth of the child takes place at a most unhappy hour when Ramnatha Dikshitar has been arrested and imprisoned on very grave charges of bribery and misuse of official power and position. To add to his distress, the bank in which he has kept most of his savings as well as the amount realized by the sale of Narayan Rao’s properties crashes, leaving him almost penniless. Dark days follow and after months of travail and suffering Dikshathar get himself acquitted in the High Court at Madras. The family returns to Madhyarjunam and poor Dikshitar feels that he if had served the government honestly he might have saved more in the end. The author cryptically observes:

I claim to know human nature deeper than to believe that the example of the Tahsildar would benefit any corrupt official who might chance to read this story. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-178)
Panju, the darling child of Diksathar grows into a remarkable precocious young boy. He is the one source of joy and comfort to everyone at home, but his intelligence and precociousness are often a source of embarrassment to the elders as for instance, when puzzled by the sight of the temple chariot being drawn by elephants and numerous men he asks his mother,

Why do they drag the car? Why cannot God make the car go by His power? (*Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian* p-179)

The young child is deeply disturbed and puzzled when he happens to witness the gruesome sight of an old mendicant woman being accidentally caught under the wheels of the temple chariot and crushed to death. He cannot understand how and why the all-powerful God cannot make the old lady whole again and the answers made by the elders to his searching questions, far from satisfying him leave him with the conviction that elders can never be trusted. It is this impression made on the tender mind of the child which lasts and determines his views and attitudes in later life and makes him grow into free-thinking, rational young man holding views which are dangerously heterodox. Thus Panju typifies the rise of both rationalism and individualism in the Indian ethos. Panju the child reveals, the Panju of the later years in the making.

The focus of interest in Book II is Panju, the growing young boy. Panju makes a great impression at school, while Balaji who is now under the same roof proves a truant. Nevertheless the two are good friends in spite of Balaji being treated as a sort of outcast in the Brahmin household. Balaji takes up the post of a gymnastic instructor in Badras and the friends part with heavy hearts.
Poor Panju does not know that Balaji has left only in deference to the wishes of his own father who has a lurking fear that Balaji’s company may harm the interests of his son. The novelist delineates:

Young as he was, there was a particular vein of nobleness in his character which his father… was almost afraid of; whenever therefore he stopped to do anything quite above board, he instinctively kept it secret from his son if possible.  
(Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-103)

In fact Ramnatha Dikshithar had kept both Panju and Balaji completely in the dark as regards the latter’s legitimate share of five thousand rupees lost in the bank crash. Poor Balaji is also equally ignorant of the fact that he is the son of no less a personage than the great Nana Saheb. The irony of the fact is reflected in the conversation he has with his friend Panju when the latter recalls what his professor said about Nana Saheb while lecturing on the great Indian Mutiny. The novelist avers:

…In describing him, he said that Nana Saheb’s eyes were set on his face in a very peculiar manner. You (Balaji) know that your eyes are set very peculiarly on your face, and curiously enough, I was reminded of it more than once at the time.”
“Nana Saheb was a Mussalman, I presume,” remarked Balaji.
“No,” replied Panju, “he was a Brahman and the adopted son of the last Peshwa.  
(Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-105-06)

Panju suffers a rude shock when Komalam who has been more than a mother to him passes away. This interferes with his studies at a critical period and he passes his First-in-Arts Examination only in Second Class. His father who is already sore over his having refused to receive and don the amulets given by him and is also displeased with his son spending more time on ‘all sorts of big books’ other than his text-books is now in a rage. The reserve father and the son grow almost into a cleavage. But the cleavage widens into a
chasm when Ramanatha Dikshithar refuses to send Balaji the sum of five hundred rupees when the latter is in a poor financial condition and makes a telegraphic request for the amount.

Panju passes his B.A. degree examination in the first class and desires to join the Medical College at Badras while his father wants him to do law. In the meanwhile, Dikshithar has other troubles. Kanju, his second daughter, through his first wife, is ill-treated by her husband, who is professor, all because she wouldn’t bring from her father the two thousand rupees he needs. Kamu, the first daughter is expected home for confinement. At the same time offers pour in from “big places” proposing eligible brides and rich dowries to Panju. Dikshithar suffers the worst shock of his life when, after receiving even part of the dowry in advance, his son, now a medical student, refuses to marry. He gives a very vague hint to his mother that he will be glad to marry one of those beautiful Christian girls in his class.

At college Panju is quite a success and is liked by all his professors except Capt. Trumps, nicknamed Guys, with whom he comes into open clash. When Panju is in the second year Ramanatha Dikshithar passes away and the family comprising Panju, his widowed mother and his sister Kunju moves to Badras. Panju refuses in principle to purchase his sister’s happiness by paying her professor husband the sum demanded by him. At the same time he pays in full the money his father owed Balaji. Kunju is “a sprightly girl, neither very handsome nor ugly-looking, and somewhat passionate by nature” and Panju who has a very soft corner for his unfortunate sister treats her with great
tenderness and consideration. He educates her by engaging a lady teacher and his friend Balaji, now a frequent visitor, also helps her in her studies.

Balaji and Kunju who have grown together like brother and sister are very free in each other’s company, but deep down in Balaji’s heart there glows a passion which is more than a brother’s affection. He is emotionally disturbed and falls into frequent fits of gloom and tries to overcome his moodiness through drinking. One day his passion betrays itself in the most unexpected way when Kunju comes upon a sentence in the English Reader, “In India people generally marry young and even little boys and girls are often wedded to each other.” Describing further the novelist avers:

You are old enough, but a bachelor yet. Why don’t you marry Balaji? My mother says you should have married years ago,” said Kunju. “I will marry you if you will let me,” replied Balaji almost unconsciously. “What, what is this you are saying?” said Kunju, more puzzled than angry or alarmed. “We can run away somewhere together,” said he and then he suddenly caught hold of her and strained her to his bosom. The next moment he was gone. Lakshmi was then in the kitchen… and somehow Kunju though at first greatly frightened and in tears, did not then tell her mother or brother of it.

(Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-151)

What Kunju’s reaction is left vague by the author. There is, however, no suggestion that the girl has resented Balaji’s words and action with the kind of feelings of moral revulsion with which a married Hindu girl is normally expected to shudder even at the very thought of such situations. The scene reaffirms the author’s belief in the emergence of the Indian woman as an individualistic entity and as one who is on the verge of seeking liberation from the tyranny and injustice of the ages. Both Clarinda and Kunju represent the
birth of the new spirit which permits no illusions of any type to women who are grievously wronged by their spouses.

Balaji never returns and all search for him is in vain. Only two years after the incident when all hopes of his return have been given up does Kunju tell her mother of the incident. Panju, however receives a letter from his friend in which he writes of his having proved unworthy of all the kindness shown to him by Panju and his people and that he has enlisted as a sepoy.

The tenth chapter of the novel gives a very interesting account of the various ‘influences’ which shape Panju’s intellectual and moral stature, particularly of the influences of Dr. Ling and Dr. Barham who take very kindly to budding young doctor and rouse his moral and social consciousness in a manner that would make him an ideal ‘healer’ imbued with a true missionary zeal. Panju faces yet another trial in his life which involves not only his heart but also his conscience and truthfulness to his own inner self. He is deeply in love with Miss Grace, the daughter of a Christian missionary and the young lovers are determined to cast their lots with each other. Panju, though a son of an orthodox Brahmin is ready to break the barriers of religion and caste, the Rev. Devamirtham, Grace’s father, would not permit the union unless Panju is willing to embrace the Christian faith. This puts the young man in a serious moral dilemma, for he cannot reconcile himself to orthodox Christianity. He is sorely disappointed that while he is ready to incur serious parental displeasure and face social ostracism all for the sake of the damsel of his heart, the girl herself is not prepared to compromise on her parental or religious loyalties. He
becomes heartbroken but does sell his soul for the sake of love though “his soul hungers after Grace night and day”. The comment made by Kunju when she hears of the matter is quite noteworthy. She avers:

> What happiness is there for many of us who are wedded in the orthodox Hindu fashion, in our own caste and religion? If my brother really loves a girl, I don’t see why he should not marry her and be happy rather than marry…some other girl whom he does not care for, and then lead a dog-and-cat existence with her for the rest of her life. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-165)

The comment is but a re-affirmation of the author’s conviction that the Indian woman should break open the shackles of the age old superstition and religious tyranny and follow the promptings of her own inner self.

Panju outlives the shock of his disappointment in respect of the lady of his heart by taking a full plunge into his duties as Assistant to the District Medical Officer of Tinnore. He earns his name and popularity as a Medical Officer within a very short period but bad luck follows in the shape of Captain Trumps “Guys” who is appointed as his boss. “Guys” finds the presence of an honest and upright assistant like Panju a hindrance to his own act of irregularity and abuse of power and position for personal benefit. He tries to report against him making much of his harmless participation in some meetings and conferences and Panju resigns his post. His soul is restless because of his deep desire to work for the upliftment and regeneration of his mother country. Eventually he joins war service much to the distress of his dear mother whom he tries to convince and console through a long and spirited address justifying his decision. His chief argument for Indians fighting for the British in the Belgian war is stated as:
Once admitting Indian to fight side by side with her own sons and shed their own blood on Belgian soil for Belgium’s rights, England cannot deny them the same rights for a day longer. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p-198)

Panju goes to the war front destined never to return. When he is in a Belgian farmstead near the line of fighting, rendering first-aid to the wounded, he is helped in his duties by the matronly mistress of the farmstead and her only daughter, a plain looking girl of eighteen, who are bravely clinging to their ancestral home. It is here that Panju is destined to meet his dear old Balaji but under heart-rendering circumstances. Balaji, the sepy who has fought most gallantly, is brought in a dying condition and before the friends exchange even a few words Balaji dies. When Panju hears that his friend has saved a whole regiment that day at the cost of his life, he murmurs to himself “Then he has more than atoned for his father’s offence.”

Similar to Clarinda, the protagonist grows from childhood to mature adulthood and we find him growing and developing in a most natural way. Rather all the characters in the novel carve out their own destiny. All the thoughts and actions issue from the character and the story is nothing but what comes out of those thoughts and actions.

The law of causality prevails through out the novel. This is what rules out all possibility of manipulation and makes it a story of ‘growth’ and it is really significant that a novel coming so early in the chronology has in it the virtues of a good novel.

The growth of the novel can be judged from the fact that the characterization is uninfluenced by conventional ideas of good and evil. The
characters are too individualistic to be contained by the boundaries of conventional codes of social or moral behaviour. The male and the female characters seek a complete release from the past and carve out their own individual destinies. K. Kailasapathy remarks:

…his characters break away from their wonted social settings and tread new paths and that it is this acute social consciousness of the author which makes him see men and women as they are involved in and influenced by the great tides of social change and re-orientation. (Tamil Naval Iltakiyam p.128)

If Ramanatha Dikshithar and Komalam represent the older generation which has long since lost its faith in many old moral, religious and social values, Panju, the protagonist, and Kunju, his sister, represent the rising younger generation which has emboldened itself to assert its individuality and independence against the lingering evils of the past. The difference between the two generations is that the older generation believes in keeping up appearances, whereas the younger generation believes in forthright rejection of false values and conventions. For instance, Ramanantha Dikshithar has no real piety left in him and wants to put up a show when the occasion demands. The novelist delineates:

He had long ago ceased to be punctilious about his ablutions, but in the presence of so many Brahmins, he gave his forehead and body extra coating of holy ashes and performed the prayer with ostentatious piety…Ramanatha Dikshithar celebrated his grandmother’s funeral obsequies with great éclat and with more of lavish expenditure and outward display than sincere piety. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p 60-1)

But the younger generation has no patience with such false outward shows, lacking substance and sincerity. This is reflected in the cynical contempt with which Panju refers to the ‘greatness’ of the Hon’ble Mr.
Sahasranamaier who condescends to offer his daughter to him. The novelist narrates:

“I have heard of him too, mother,” replied Panju. “He is the gentleman who performed his father’s shraddham at the hill station, and because there were no crows there, paid Rs. 4 to a Hillman to catch and bring two crows from the plains, and take them back and set them free on the plains again, after they had represented the names of his ancestors and eaten of the rice offered to them. (Lieut. Panju: A Modern Indian p 166)

It is the falseness and emptiness of orthodox Hindu customs and conventions, observed more in form than in spirit, which really makes Panju turn a free-thinking rationalist prone to reject all these beliefs as false and meaningless. The brief Balaji-Kunju episode is yet another reaction to the evils of casteism and exploitation of the woman.

All the characters of the work represent the age of transition in which men and women were caught between two worlds. The difference between the two generations is that the older generation believes in keeping up appearances, whereas the younger generation believes in forthright rejection of false values and conventions.

The novel does have its own set of defects. Structurally it has no balance and proportion. Despite its very small dimensions it lacks closeness and concentration, and tends to be diffused and tenuous. It is too conscious of the reader to whom it makes frequent addresses. There are in fact too many long descriptions, addresses and letters and entries from private diaries.

The diaries present the Indian social situation not as the author sees it but as the characters see it and feel it. Entries from the diary of Panju, private talks and arguments are only various devices employed by the novelist to bring
home to us the intellectual and moral stature of his hero which may be an
unconscious projection of the writer’s own intellectual and moral personality.

_Lieut. Panju_ has in it what may be called the highest common factor of
all novels, namely a good story. It does not have a well-constructed plot but
tells us a good and interesting story which is the result of growth rather than
manipulation. All that the author has done is to create the characters and let
them grow and develop as they do in real life.

Besides the plot, character and the social and moral purpose of the writer
that blend together with the least tampering of the unity of impression, the
greater merit of the novel lies in the fact that it broke through many age-old
barriers in Indian thinking which were stumbling blocks to a realistic portrayal
of life, and showed for the first time in Indian fiction in English, a bold
preoccupation with sharp characterization, instead of with mere incident or
adventure or with fate, destiny and forces outside and beyond the control of
man. Thus _Lieut. Panju_ is remarkable for its significant contribution to the
Indian novel in English at a crucial stage of its emergence.

**XVII**

There exists writing in this period in which the writers are Indian and the
subject is Indo-British relationship or what can be termed as colonial
counter. Some of the writers of English fiction in India have taken up this
colonial encounter as their theme in which the scene of social and cultural
confrontations between the Englishmen and the natives is depicted. S.M. Mitra
and Sarat Kumar Ghosh belong to this category of writers of the colonial encounter.

S. M. Mitra’s *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest; An Anglo-Indian Romance* (1909) is as the title suggests, a romance in which the British are among the major characters. There are British characters in most of the other Indo-Anglian novels of this period, particularly in the novels of Madhaviah, but their roles are only secondary and they remain in the background of events. But in Hindupore they are among the principal characters. The aim of this novel is to explain India and Indians to the British and to plead for their better understanding and sympathy between the two nationalities.

‘Hindupore’ gives his (S.M. Mitra’s) readers ‘a peep behind the Indian unrest’. The novel is interesting as giving an Indian view on the subject. The author brings out Lord Tara to India and takes him to Hindupore enabling him to see things for himself. Lord Tara falls in love with Princess Kamala, a ‘perfection of womanhood’ and marries her. The novel seems to have been written for propaganda purposes. The rulers are described as callously indifferent to the most cherished feelings of the people. They do not know the people around them. They trust unscrupulous Eurasian inspectors more than princes of ancient blood. The government itself creates unrest and then it appoints commissions to inquire into its causes. According to the novelist it is officials like Eurasian Hunt, heads of Departments like Col. Ironside who told a Raja to his face ‘that after shaking hands with a Hindu he always had a hot
bath’ and non-officials like Toddy who embitter relations between Indians and Englishman.

The characters, though lightly drawn, do come to life in the pages of the novel and they are realistic portrayals too full of life and verve to be brushed aside as ‘not living men and women’. The so-called monotony of the novel is broken by flashes of irony and humour which even if they are not a refined kind, tempt the reader to laugh heartily.

The following passage throws light on the style of the novelist:

Hunt was an honest fellow: he admitted having kissed Dukhia; he assured the colonel it was an innocent kiss. The colonel smacked his lips, remembering how a Lepacha girl had given him a kiss at Darjeeling 25 years ago. (Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p-44)

In another similarly suggestive passage, the novelist delineates:

Even a servant’s veranda kiss in India is a much more serious affair than a Hyde Park kiss...In the month of May, the advent of a white baby with black hair in the servant’s quarters of Col. Gilchrist’s bungalow reached the ears of Mrs. Gilchrist. (Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p-44)

It is interesting to note here that unlike the British writers who saw and pictured Indians only as Indians and not as men, as individuals, the Indian writers of ‘Anglo-Indian’ novels saw them and pictured them as human-beings first and as Englishmen or Eurasians only later.

The comic irony inherent in situations involving the English in India is brought out in a number of places in Hindupore. For instance, Col. Ironside of the Intelligence Department faces a serious problem at the birth of his seventh child.
No woman is ready to nurse poor little Miss Ironside:

There were no English nurses in the place, so the doctor decided that the baby must be fed on asses’ milk—they (asses) would not object to nourish Miss Ironside. (*Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance* p-203)

This is a situation which is near tragic for a powerful English Colonel but he is made to look comic and ridiculous by the suggestion that only asses would not object to ‘nourish’ his child. The humour is stretched too far when Sarju Prasad, the subedar is asked to fetch an ass for the purpose providing ass’s milk for the child. The subedar brings in a jack ass where a jenny is required and he finds himself on the horns of a dilemma when he is reprimanded by his master, for the colonel tells him, “I wanted not an ass like me, but a lady-ass like my wife.” (*Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance* 207)

It is strange that an Englishman should speak like this but perhaps he found no other way in which he could explain it to his Indian subordinate. But the colonel ends up confounding the subedar to such an extent that the latter ultimately runs away giving up his job finding himself unequal to the task of finding a ‘lady-ass’ like the colonel’s wife.

In a similar vein the chapter “Secret Police Reports”, while full of tiring details is memorable for its humour. A ‘native spy’ by the name of Hashmat Khan, who has to send weekly reports on his work, finds nothing to ‘report’ in particular
and hence produces a fake report built on bazzar gossip. The report reads as:

Confidential  
From Hashmat Khan…(Detective Chief Constable)  
“…According to Tartar Law, he (king of Tiakistan) must add to his harem on every birthday – there must be one for every year of the age of the king.

In his travels in India he fell in love with the wife of the judge of Bundlewara (as your majesty knows, a very stout lady with ruddy cheeks) considered a great beauty from the Tartar point of view. He offered the judge four lakh rupees, but he demands six lakh for his wife. The Tartar prince was willing to pay the sum; but Masud Alka, the chief of his harem is hopeful of securing a stouter lady for half the money. Besides, the judge’s wife when dyspeptic squints, which is bad omen. I shall report further development of this important intrigue which may shake the foundation of the Indian Empire.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,”

(Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p. 207)

The comic reason of fabricating such a report by the Indian official too is provided. The novelist states:

If he (a native spy living on 5 shillings a month) did not send in a fair “weekly report,” he would be dismissed. So he had to fall back upon bazaar gossip. Oriental imagination was often of great value to satisfy strict disciplinarians like Colonel Ironside. (Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p.204-05)

These passages daringly satirize the unpleasant side of the British imperialistic machinery and its impact on India, illustrate the author’s gift for blending irony and humour to produce effects which are grossly comic. Thus both the Indian as well as the British characters provide amusement to us and are presented in their best as well as the worst forms.

The language of the novelist is simple and it finds its expression in words of adoration which reveal the depth and sincerity of Lord Tara’s love and passion for Kamala. The novelist delineates:
She is to him, “the perfection of womanly grace and charm, one to be adored as the worship of our God, in her innocent purity and sweetness”…My father and mother would love her dearly but her people would be my people too, and I would not ask her entirely to give up her beautiful country for me. (Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p. 58)

As these words are coming from an Englishman, is an illustration of the author’s ability to see and picture an Englishman as a noble-minded human being rather as a specimen of race conscious ruling class.

Celitia Scott, who sails to India in the same ship “Nur-Jehan” in which Lord Tara travels, has been full of romantic emotions about India. She has been entertaining some romantic sentiments in respect of Lord Tara too, but she seems to appreciate the Lord’s deep love for Kamala. Her visit causes a lot of sensation in the palace but unlike most other Englishwomen Celitia develops a tender intimacy with Kamala and learns to love the members of the royal family. The subject of this novel is Lord Tara’s love for Kamala, an Englishman’s love for an Indian princess and it is a love affair which runs smooth without serious obstacles or impediments. Hence the dimensions of the novel are rather simple and modest, and do not warrant sensational events or incidents.

The principal achievement of Hindupore lies in its realism, a realism which borders most often on the gross and the vulgar but appeals to us by its essential irony and humour. Jamunabai (‘a stately beauty of fifty’), consults an astrologer on the prospects of her finding a lover. The unblushing consultation makes even the hard-boiled professional fortune-teller blush:

But he was a businessman. In business sentiment does not pay. Any definite answer in the affirmative or in the negative meant the end in
business. In a long case, the brilliant advocate gets “refreshers. It is the same with an astrologer of reputation. (Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest, An Anglo-Indian Romance p. 259)

If the test of a good novel is its realism and its closeness to life, Hindupore’s claim to that title cannot be poor. The realism of Hindupore is one which is set off by fine touches of romance here and there, as for the instance in the scenes of youthful love-making between Tara and kamala. What we find in this novel is, therefore a happy mixture of the gross and the delicate, of the comic and the serious, and of romance and realism.

Besides an important novel depicting the socio-political conditions of the contemporary India the work is also significant from the point of East-West encounter. Critically acclaiming these works of East–West encounter, K.S. Ramamurti observes:

Novels with intrinsic value of their own, they are concerned with intrinsic merits of their own, they are concerned with Indo-British social and cultural relationships broadening into a study of East-West encounters…They show a deeper understanding of and greater sympathy for English men and women than the novels by British writers could show for India and Indians. (Rise of the Indian Novel in English 198)

The novelist can be credited for laying the foundation of presenting realism in the Indian Writing in English. The realism that was later to be taken to new heights in the writings of Mulkraj Anand and later by Khuswant Singh. His is not the social realism of Mulkraj Anand. The realism of Hindupore has in it a touch of grossness and it is down to earth and ruthless in its graphic description of human behaviour. But Mitra’s realism is different from the kind of ‘social realism’ or ‘progressive realism’ which arises from the motif of social reform or social regeneration which runs through the novels of Anand. It
is a realism which just tears open the curtain on certain human situations in a ruthless manner without any serious intention of social criticism and brings the reader face to face with the situations themselves.

XVIII

Sarat Kumar Ghosh’s *The Prince of Destiny* (1909) was perhaps the first Indian novel to deal with the East-West confrontation. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book *The Twice Born Fiction* refers to this novel as ‘a variety of historical fiction’. Tracing the development of this trend in Indo-Anglian writing to a shift of interest from the public to the private sphere, Meenakshi Mukherjee comments:

This private search often constituted a quest for a satisfactory attitude towards the West, and for a realistic image of the East that would at the same time be emotionally valid. This search has taken varied and complex forms. At its lowest, it has often descended into sentimental chauvinism and neurotic rejection, at its highest it has attempted a reintegration of personality, a revaluation of all values. (*The Twice Born Fiction*, p. 79)

Prince Barath who is the protagonist in *The Prince of Destiny* is the Rajput ruler of a princely state in the last years of the nineteenth century. Having absorbed the best of the both the East and the West, he rejects his ‘destiny’ to lead a revolution against the British, and adopts the life of a holy man in order to preach the doctrine of peace. This is a novel which is highly romantic with a number of main characters who are British and according to the publishers’ preface it reveals the Indian view of the causes of the present unrest, and Britain’s unseen peril in India. The setting for this novel is, therefore the nineteenth century socio-cultural scene which has been rendered rather
romantic and unreal by the introduction of characters who wear the names and garbs of historical personages.

Prince Barath, the hero, shows right from his childhood strange ways of absorption into the world of thought and speculation. His first experience of the outer world, of pain and suffering and of its soul-stirring effects on his being, reminds us of the story of Siddhartha turning Buddha. Barath’s eyes are opened by the sight of a sightless leper. His guru Vishwamitra, who believes that the Prince has come into the world as the successor of Lord Krishna, having been informed of the secret in a vision, is struck by the precociousness of the child. The young prince gets his first experience of ‘pain’ in hunting when he happens to wound a peacock. In the pain of the bird is revealed to him the pain of the world. The novelist describes:

He saw the vision of the world’s pain in the eyes of the peacock he had wounded, and thus found his destiny. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna*, p. 108)

The experience leaves him with the conviction that he is set on a mission of pain. He believes that someone must suffer for the sake of the world even if it be a bird, and recalls the words of Valmiki, “Henceforth thy shoka (pain) shall be my sloka.”

Barath’s remorse is doubled when he meets Suvona, the young girl whose peacock he has wounded. The sight of that lovely child stroking the peacock’s neck and of the bird spreading out its tail in the sun and walking away to the flower-beds moves the guilty prince. This brief encounter is not without its effect on the youthful passion of the prince and the young maid.
Love is awakened in their hearts, and there rises in the heart of Suvona the deeper urge to give herself to someone, to sacrifice herself and all, while in Barath the urge to protect something weaker asserts itself more than an urge to possess the object of his love. This brief episode, while it is a romance of youthful innocence and love, is also an interesting study in the complex interactions of love and pain. It makes the reader think and wonder if it is protectiveness or possessiveness which is the basis of true love.

Barath goes to England for higher education. Both he and his friend Madhava feel the need to look to the West where reasoning is dialectic unlike the intuitive method of reasoning obtaining in the East. The parting words of Barath’s father are very significant. He remarks:

Aye, but it is the good that is in England that I fear most; the evil could never touch thee. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna*, p. 110)

This is followed by a touching scene of separation from Suvona who is full of anxiety and concern for Barath. She kisses him farewell, and seeks consolation of the darkness and silence of the night like a wounded gazelle.

Barath is little aware of the destiny that awaits him in England. His destiny seems to be in the hands of loving souls who have been waiting for his arrival there. They are Colonel Wingate and Lady Ellen, his thirty-eight year old niece, who had held Barath as a child in her arms. Lady Ellen’s dreams of being a wife and a mother were shattered when her fiancé, a foster son of Wingate was killed in the Plymouth train disaster and ever since the fateful event she has found her solace and comfort only in waiting for Barath. When Barath rushes to her with the words, “Mother mine – your son has come to
you,” the mother’s instinct in Ellen which was crushed in the wreck of Plymouth leaps into life, having never been awakened by any voice till now. To awaken the mother in her seems to be the first manifestation of Barath’s destiny in England.

Barath meets a number of other persons who exercise great influence on him. Among them are Lord Menlor, the liberal-minded brother of Ellen and Francis Thompson, the poet. He discusses with these men and Wingate great questions relating to *Karma* and reincarnation. He hears the candid view expressed by Menlor, “England was made by foreigners” and links it with his own dim perception of Fate making him the instrument of England’s destiny in India, may be the Europe’s mission in Asia. A whole chapter is devoted to Barath’s chance encounter with Francis Thompson, the poet, and the entire account though purely imaginative hardly seems so. But the most important of Barath’s encounters is the one with Nora.

Nora is Lady Ellen’s niece and Barath sees her beautiful image first in a picture. Later on he meets her in person and falls in love with her. Even their first meeting has about it an idyllic charm and romantic tenderness. The novelist delineates:

“I – I am – so happy to know you!”, he stammered. “Of course, you are”, she said reassuringly, “So let’s be friends at once.” She looked full at him. “What beautiful deep blue eyes you have!” he exclaimed quite inconsequently, “And yet your hair is dark.” “My eyes are violet, not blue,” she said with pout, and then blushed deep. “I am half Irish,” she hastened to explain, “My grandmother was Irish. But please don’t discuss me. I must gather flower’s for Aunt Ellen.” *(The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna*, p. 108)
The brief love scene has nothing in it which can be called unnatural either by Indian or English standard. It interests us particularly as a meeting of youthful East and youthful West attended by a most natural blending of two totally different sensibilities, and leaves us with the feeling that youth alone can blend like this, breaking through all cultural and anthropological and epistemological consciousness. The strength and purity of Barath and Nora’s love for each other leaves us with a feeling that the real hope for the East and the West coming together lies only in the younger generation with its comparative freshness and purity.

Instances of cultural barriers do crop up but they are not an obstacle in the union of their hearts. Nora sees no special significance in her act of throwing a garland around Barath’s neck in playful innocence while Barath sees a world of significance in the act and wonders whether he is a new Adam or Krishna, or both. Several other such incidents are experienced by Barath during his stay in England and every one of them brings him nearer to the people of that country both emotionally and intellectually.

A striking feature of the descriptions is that wherever there is a meeting of persons occasioning a brief exchange of words, we find that the spirit and feel of the English spoken word is admirably recaptured. When Francis Thompson meets, for instance, a boy of six in Kensington Gardens, he introduces him to Col. Wingate:

“This is my god-child, he lives across the road. Francis, this is Col. Wingate.” The boy stretched out his hand like a man, saying, “Delighted to meet you colonel. I know you by reputation, although I was in nursery when you called on father and mother; but now I can go to the drawing room.” Barath stoops down and kisses the child plump
on the cheek and the latter protests with a pout. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna*, p. 250)

The language and the style are rather striking and have nothing ‘Indian’ about it and have a characteristic English flavour.

Barath depicts intense curiosity to understand England. This curiosity is strongly depicted in the words where he observes:

> One should be born outside England to know her objectively and subsequently become an Englishman. After that objective vision he will love her still. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna* p. 253)

The words spoken by Col. Wingate in his last moments are a powerful expression of an Englishman’s apprehension of the destiny of England in India. He states:

> I see England’s peril in India. Barath, Barath promise me in the hour of England’s peril you will judge her generously? Generously for the intention, if you cannot for the deed? For the sake of your own belief in your possible former birth in England? Remember your words when you felt that wave of memory in your early days in England – that you had seen the self image things before the lilac and the laburnum, perchance in a former birth!... I die in the faith of Christ! Knowing of Krishna and Buddha I die in the faith of Christ. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishnap* 287-88)

The last utterance of Wingate is a happy contrast to Kipling’s belief that East is East and West is West, and two can never be one. This is a message of reaffirmation of one’s own faith through the knowledge of other faiths.

When Barath leaves England he is not shaking the dust of England off his feet nor does he throb with the joy of home-coming. It is with a heart full of pain and grief that he bids farewell to his ‘second home’. He carries with him a little of English soil and also a portrait of Nora in her presentation dress. The
portrait has been presented to him by Ellen on condition that it should be opened only after leaving England.

Barath’s homecoming is eagerly awaited by Suvona whose high-spirited declaration of her love for the prince convinces even Vasistha, the high priest, that she is the real one carved out by destiny for Barath. The prince is on the throne very soon. He has resumed his life where he left it off before he went to England, but the arrival of Lord Melnor awakens the memories of his English life, of Kensington and Boscombe. Lord Melnor becomes his counselor and this provokes the jealousy of Vasistha. Vishwamitra, Barath’s real guru, tries to save the palace from an imminent crisis by counselling patience and love.

Advising Vasistha to love even the Englishmen he observes:

Brother, thou didst teach me once the beginning of wisdom and of all things. Read to us again the beginning of all things. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna* p.409)

Vasistha brings out the book and reads anew the words as he had read them twenty-five years ago: the building up of the earth, the birth of Krishna, and the promise of the New Krishna. Thus finding enlightenment, Vasistha states:

Yea, the child shall fulfill his mission. Let us now prepare him for his confirmation in his mission. (*The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna* p. 409)

A number of mystic and symbolic rituals and ceremonies are arranged by Vasistha to initiate the Prince into the secret mysteries of Brahmanism. In one of the rituals so arranged, Barath is asked to unveil the image of his bride arranged by Vasistha and when he does it, both the Prince and Vasistha stare –
Barath at the face and Vasistha at the strange garland in its hands. Thanks to the part Kamona and Madawa have had in it, the image has the face of Suvona and carries the garland of Nora in its hands. The act of unveiling is described as the Prince’s mystic nuptial and the Prince’s apostrophe to the image make the whole scene mystifying and unreal. The novelist delineates:

My unknown bride, who art thou? Reveal thyself to me! I am weary of waiting! Five long years…Reveal thyself to me that I may practice love.” He kisses the feet of the golden image. (The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna, p. 429)

In these passages the novel gets lost in a cloud of mysticism and symbolism, and though, the symbolism itself is not without its relevance to the theme of the novel. It is even possible to interpret the words of the Prince, addressed to the image, as an echo of his painful search for an earthly image of love. He sought it first in Suvona and then in Nora. His search seems to have led him to the realization that love transcends human limitations and that one has to wait endlessly if one seeks its fulfillment through early image of it. The reader wonders if the Prince is on the point of arriving at this truth through intuitive reasoning …

There is sudden swing to reality when the political crisis deepens as a result of Barath’s refusal to attend the Durbar. The unexpected arrival of Nora complicates the situation further. Barath’s behaviour assumes new patterns which draw the jealous attention of Vasistha who plots against the life of Nora. Barath renounced Nora long ago, and turned wholly eastern but now comes the crisis of his destiny. Under Melnor’s influence Barath tries to save Dalini from satee but Vasistha speaks: “No, neither Delhi nor Dalini” and warns Barath
against interposing between Dalini and her martyrdom. In situations like this
Barath finds himself in a great moral and spiritual dilemma, torn between two
sets of values, totally opposite to each other – the Western and the Eastern
symbolized by Melnor and Nora who herself has turned half eastern and has
learnt to appreciate and accept many eastern values and ideals. Her own
motive are far from flesh and blood and she actually works for the “awakening
of the East”. Hence, it is that she is tempted to weave one more tie with the
East. She wants to do it not for her own sake but for England’s sake. She is not
disturbed in the least when an astrologer, who reads her palm, declares that it is
unique and suggests the life of a living martyr, satee. She who condemns satee
is herself on the point of becoming a victim of it and is least worried about it,
too.

Prince Barath under the influence of Vasistha, fancies himself as the
New Krishna and this is his grand temptation. But disillusionment follows very
soon and the spell breaks. He calls the high priest and his men all foul tempters.
He rushes to the curtains, to the corridors, into the palace crying, “Nora, Nora –
you are my destiny.” The novelist delineates:

Nora, do you hear me? East and West are but one. Then fulfil your
mission: together let us unite East and West…Together let us discover
a newer world – the world of East and West wedded together in peace
and love. Come, beloved, together let us be immortal. (The Prince of
Destiny, The New Krishna p. 439)

These are, but, mere words and Prince Barath is still helpless against the
forces which are hostile to Nora, hostile to the British. Despairing of finding a
solution to the great crisis in the court precipitated by Vasistha, Barath attempts
self-immolation which is averted by the timely intervention of Suvona. Unlike Ramaswamy, Barath is saved not by a guru but by an act of renunciation issuing from pure love, the love of Nora. Making a grand gesture of love and renunciation Nora appears more eastern than western. Suvona herself is so deeply touched by the gesture of sacrifice made by her English rival that she rushes to Nora and kisses her again saying:

Let the future decide the future; in this life be my sister. Return to me in the years to come with thy children and children’s children and dwell with me till death. Yes, my sister, thy love has conquered. Henceforth, I too am thy country’s friend: When the peril comes to England on her Eastern shore, a million of our sons will hasten to her rescue. I shall labour to that end...Nora struggled inwardly, silently. Turning suddenly she put her arms round Suvona. Held in each other’s embrace they stood a moment, pouring out their hearts to each other. Then with bowed head Nora turned to depart. (The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna p. 620)

It is Nora’s love which brings about the crisis in the novel and it is her love again which acts as the taveeze or amulet which resolves the crises. Vasisitha’s plans to ruin the British by helping the Mutiny of 1857 are thwarted by the reconciliation brought about by Nora’s gesture of renunciation and the ruler of Barathpur, like the ruler of Gwalior, sides with the East India Company. The revolution of Barathpur fails because of Barath’s love for England and Nora’s love for India. Melnor resigns and returns home a sadder and wiser man. His destiny lies in the new role he is to play as a member of the House of Commons and a mission he has to fulfill which is the salvation of both England and India.

Kamona is married to Madawa and Vasistha dies in the temple. Vishwamitra lives with his perpetual message of gentleness and love. He lives,
but lives waiting for the end of his worldly life. Regarding the Barath and Suvona union, the novelist delineates:

And that final lesson was that, even as the essence of love was the union of souls, the manifestation of love in the supermost degree of renunciation. Resigned renunciation. (The Prince of Destiny, The New Krishna p. 623)

Barath now goes out of the palace, into the world. The world waited for the new Krishna now waits for the New Buddha. Shanti!

The ending of the novel is not satisfying or convincing. The long address to the reader in the concluding chapter detracts from the dignity of the work and makes it artistically unimpressive. It leaves the reader with the feeling that if S.K. Ghosh had employed a different narrative technique it would have been easier for him to make the ending more forceful and acceptable. Notwithstanding some of the defects and shortcomings, the novel does remain one of the best novels on the the East-West encounter and the contemporary reviewers had not failed to realize that S. K. Ghosh’s treatment of the theme of East-West conflict had been more realistic and truthful than that of the Anglo-Indian writers. One of the reviews reads as:

He (S.K. Ghosh) is able to see the West thro’ Eastern spectacles, and what is of most importance, he is able to view the East thro’ the concave glasses of the West…He protests kindly, but nevertheless firmly, that the English view of India and the Indians has been largely moulded by the immature writings of brilliant author (Rudyard Kipling)…This book is not a mere treatise. On the contrary, the story is one of peculiar power, often thrilling to a degree and its dramatic situation and its intensely passionate emotions serve to bring into stronger light and fuller perspective the deep and laudable motive with which it was written. (The Liverpool Post and Mercury)

The novel has received equal praise from Indian critics. Dr. Iyengar avers:
It is for all its purpose, a good story with a fair blend of action, characterization and scenic description. (*Indian Constitution to English Literature*, p. 174)

Praising it in even stronger terms Bhupal Singh observes:

This is obviously a novel with a purpose...The human interest of the story has not been sacrificed to the main purpose of the book. Vasistha is well drawn and so is Barath. The scene entitled ‘The madness of Kamona’, depicting the abandonment of a passion-tossed girl, is a remarkable piece of art. For the vivid glimpse of Francis Thompson that the book gives, and as an Indian’s sympathetic reading of the unhappy life of a famous English poet, the book will always remain valuable. In style and subject matter, and in the variety of its scene and vividness of its description, the book is above the ordinary. (*A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* p. 306)

By and large, Anglo-Indian fiction suggests that ‘Englishmen have a very poor, even contemptuous opinion of Indian character’ and little patience with their ‘Aryan friend’.

This is exactly where the Indian writers of English fiction differ from them, for we find in S.K. Ghosh’s *The Prince of Destiny* as well as in the novels of Madhaviah a genuine understanding of the English character and an earnest attempt to bring the East and West together not through artificial situations but through the one principle which can always bring any two individuals or races together – the principal of pure love, love that transcends all barriers of time and space. Thus, *The Prince of Destiny* throws valuable hints on the possibilities of reconciliation between the Indian and Western ways of thinking.

**XIV**

A few historical romances and novels with a historical background find their presence in this age too. One such illustration is Sardar Jogender Singh’s
Nur Jehan: The Romance of an Indian Queen (1909). It is an important contribution to Indian-English historical fiction. The historical novel ends with the marriage of Nur Jehan to Jahangir and attempts to depict the courtly life of Akbar. The novel begins with the birth of Nur Jehan to Ghias Beg and his wife traveling on foot to India. The parents name the beautiful child as Mihr-ul-Nissa (“Sun among Women”). Ghias Beg who gains entry into the court of Akbar rises to the position of the Lord High Treasurer. Fifteen years pass and Mihr-ul-Nissa is now a beautiful young girl. Then follows the story of Prince Salim’s love for Mihr-ul-Nissa. The cunning king sends away his son to war and in his absence Salim’s beloved is married to Ali Kuli Beg, the brave Persian warrior. Salim is furious but helpless. On the death of Akbar, Salim succeeds to the throne and tries every means of winning back his beloved from Ali Kuli, who however is too brave a soldier to be cowed down by the intimidation of Salim. But Ali Kuli is killed at last in a duel into which he is drawn by Qutb-ub-din – the true friend of Emperor Jahangir – who acts on behalf of the emperor out of his love and concern for the latter. The very same night, after Ali Kuli’s funeral, approaches Mihr-ul-Nissa but the latter spurns him and hates him. She is condemned to live in the palace as a maid on a meagre income. Time passes and brings its own change of seasons and days, and change of heart too. Lovers unite Jahangir marries Mihr-ul-Nissa. The last two chapters are beautifully written and they transport the reader into world of idyllic charms, tender pathos and tragic dignity.
The story moves ahead with a rapidity that well becomes the swift movement of events in court and palace during the regime of Akbar and Jahangir. This is a romance based on history and the focus is on romance itself and not on history. What is really admirable in the novel is that the romance has been presented without the least injury to historical facts.

The real theme of the novel is Jahangir’s love for the incomparable Persian beauty and its influence on his life and character. The story of Prince Salim’s love for Mihr-ul-Nissa as presented in the novel is historically true except that the Jahangir of history did not surrender all his power’s to Nur Jehan and was content to remain a lover and love’s slave rather than rule over earthly kingdoms as suggested in the novel. Nur Jehan’s influence on the life and character of Emperor Jahangir has been accepted by all historians. R.C. Majumdar avers:

In May 1611, Jahangir married Nur Jehan, originally known as Mihr-ul-Nissa, who considerably influenced his career and reign. Modern researchers have discarded the many romantic legends about Mihr-ul-Nissa’s birth and early life and have proved the reliability of the brief account of Mutamid Khan, the author of Iqbal-Nama-i-Jehangiri. Sher-afghan (Ali Kuli Beg) was in his turn hacked to pieces by the followers of Qutb-ud din ar Burdwan and Mihr-ul-Nissa was taken to the court with her young daughter. After four years, Mihr-ul-Nissa’s charming ‘appearance caught the king’s far-seeing eye and so captivated him’ that he married her, and made her his chief queen. The emperor who styled himself Mire-ud-din, conferred on his new consort the title of Nur Mahal (Light of the Palace) which was soon changed to Nur Jehan (Life of the World). It is sometimes said that this infatuation for her cost Sher-afghan his life. The truth of this opinion has recently been questioned. But the cause of Mihr-ul-Nissa being brought to the court, and not to her father, who held an important post in the Empire, has not been explained. (An Advanced History of India pp. 465-66)

Jogender Singh’s novel makes little departure from the account given and from the facts accepted by all historians and yet his handling of the
historical material is as original and imaginative as it can be expected to be in a
good historical novel.

Historical novels leave little scope for character development. Similarly
the scope and dimension of the novel do not call for a three-dimensional
development of any of the characters in the sense in which characters are
developed in other kind of novels. There is in the characters of both Jahangir
and Nur Jehan a consistency which is not only in keeping with historical truth
but also explains that historical truth. They may not be very ‘living’ but they
are true and convincing portrayals

Thus Jahangir is consistent in his passionate determination to possess
Mihr-ul-Nissa and no power on earth can contain his passion. He cannot rest
until he possesses the priceless gem of his dreams. Mihr-ul-Nissa’s own love
for the prince is no less ardent, but she accepts Kuli Ali Beg as her husband
because she is forced to believe that the Prince himself has failed to show any
interest in preventing the marriage. She remains in the dark of the shrewd game
played by the emperor Akbar. The scene in which she meets Jahangir on the
very night of her being widowed reveals the characters of both admirably well.
The novelist delineates:

There stood Mihr-ul-Nissa before him flushed with anger and yet how
beautiful. She had no doubt changed. The innocent light of budding
womanhood, which two years before hung like a glory round her
beautiful face was now no more; it had been replaced by a dignity of
expression and stateliness of form which no words can describe.
Jahangir stood spell bound his eyes riveted on her beautiful face.
Mihr-ul-Nissa was the first to speak. ‘Sir,’ she said in a calm and
dignified tone, “will your majesty express to me your pleasure?”
“My pleasure?” repeated Jehangir vaguely approaching her with slow
and faltering steps. “I see you at last after long ages of waiting.”
“Your majesty perhaps is aware that I have just lost my husband.”
“Husband!” murmured Jahangir dreamily, “do not tell me of him. It is cruel of you to remind me of him at this moment.”

“Why should I not speak of my husband?” asked Mihr-ul-Nissa angrily. “He who was my very own, the memory of him is dear to me. I shall cherish it all my life, we women are not fickle and faithless as men.”

Again speaks Mihr-ul-Nissa:

“There was a time when I waited for you, counting every moment and expecting you, but you forgot my very existence, and the nobleman who became my husband tolerated my love for you and forgave me all. He won my heart by his pure selfish love and I became his and shall always remain his. Why are you giving me unnecessary pain?” (Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen pp. 246-47)

These lines throw light on the character of Mehr-ul-Nissa. There is no quarrel between Jahangir and her, nor is there any open reference to the fact that the former was the cause of Sher Afghan’s death. The tragic intensity is conveyed to the reader by the silence and the measured words of Mihr-ul-Nissa who shows a majestic restraint even in giving expression to her pain and suffering. Jahangir loves Mihr-ul-Nissa to the point of being ready to place his whole empire at her feet but she makes a dignified withdrawal spurning the love of the Emperor of Delhi whom she had once passionately loved. Jahangir has to wait for years before there is a change of heart on the part of the lady of his dreams and wait he does. It is only when time and nature heal the wounds of Mihr-ul-Nissa and make her heart melt for Jahangir that the latter’s dreams come true. Her love for prince Salim (now emperor Jahangir) which suffers a rude shock and is crushed almost to death revives and shoots into life like a withered plant that comes back to life revived by the gentle hands of nature.

The novelist avers:

Slowly as hues of life shifted and changed around her, and a new spring burst through newly-budding trees and appeared with its crown of flowers all radiant, glorious and triumphant, Mehr-ul-Nissa found
the veil of sadness melting away as if it had no reality, much though she wished to keep it as a part of her life. Her thoughts became active, her soul seemed rising and longing her life and its sweet pathetic poetry. (Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen p. 249)

Once the change has been wrought, the beautiful Persian begins to wait for love to come back to her and even begins to yearn for the man whose love she spurned not long ago. She looks forward to the grand moment when the offer of love will come back to her almost with the trepidations of a young girl in whose heart love has opened for the first time. Describing this emotion, the novelist narrates:

Mihr-ul-Nissa saw him enter and all her pulses bounded with joy as she wished he could look at her and was conscious of a strange desire to take his love as a gift from life, fighting furiously against her faith to her late husband. (Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen p. 252)

Besides the characters of Jahangir and Nur Jehan there are other characters that are portrayed in an equally interesting manner. The character of Akbar serves as an illustration. The pictures of Akbar in his death bed when he is tortured by apprehensions of his wayward son have a significant impact on the readers. The last days of the emperor have been rendered gloomy specially because he is now a lone soul bereft of the glorious company he enjoyed in the past with great men like Todar Mal, the astute financier, Faizi, the charming Bul-Bul, and the learned Abul Fazl who alone was the light that constantly led the Emperor to Truth. Now he is a solitary pathetic figure in the shadow of death. But the gloom of his last days is relieved at last by the promise of reformation given by Prince Salim, and notwithstanding all his serious
differences with his son, he shows great wisdom and a sense of justice by naming him as his heir.

The early Indian writers of historical fiction as they were, imitated Walter Scott and other writers of the West. If their novels do not attain the stature of those of Scott or Lytton or Tolstoy, they do succeed in recapturing the life and spirit of the times though on a smaller canvas without any distortion of historical facts and with very little injury to the historical reality. The past is revivified as effectively as in Scott or Tolstoy and the historical figures come to life as impressively as in the novels of any good historical novel of the West.

Though the first Indian novel in English, Govinda Samanta, met all the demands of modern realistic prose fiction, most of the novels which appeared in the three decades that followed showed a predilection for romance, dream and poetry, not to speak of adventures and escapades of an incredible sort. The novels of the women novelists were more poetic and lyrical than realistic though they had literary and artistic excellences too. The reassertion of realism in Indian Writing in English is observed to come with the publication of sketches like those of Malabari and Nagesh Vishwanath Pai. As a pioneer of journalism in India, with a writer of sketches with a satirical and reformistic purpose and as a ‘pilgrim reformer’, Malabari pioneered the evolution of the English prose fiction in India in a manner comparable to that in which Addison, Steele and Goldsmith pioneered it in eighteenth century England. Nagesh Vishwananath Pai, on the same lines opened up new dimensions of creativity in
the little town of Chakmakpore, and anticipated Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. Parallel to these realistic sketches romances like *Padmini, The Dive for Death, Sarala and Hingana*, and *The Love of Kusuma* also made their appearance, though these novels made their appearance after 1889.

Though the efforts of the early novelists were genuine, they did contain certain drawbacks. The themes of these novels are basically social. They wrote these novels with the sole aim of exposing the tyrannical social customs or superstitions or the sad economic plight of the peasants, with a view to bring about social or economic reform. Such didactic novels could be made interesting by the introduction of well knit interesting plot or vivid characters. These novels often lacked both these elements. The same theme was repeated again and again with no stylish novelty.

The drawback is evident on the language front as the early Indian English writers were not able to handle a foreign language as a medium of expression. Though most of these writers selected English as a language of their intellectual make-up, their mother tongue often remained the language of their emotional make-up. They failed to communicate their feelings and emotions appropriately, consequently the readers failed to grasp the full meaning of their text.

The two parallel flows of romance and realism reflect the transitional nature of the Indian novel in English. Along with it was the struggle of expressing in English. Thus with compromises in theme and expression, the Indian writer emerged as a novelist writing in English.