CHAPTER – V

CONTEMPORARY PUDUCHERRY WRITINGS IN ENGLISH:
A CRITICAL STUDY

In continuation with an introduction of all contemporary Puducherry writers in English in the previous chapter, this chapter gives a critical appreciation of each of those discussed writer’s contribution to different genres such as short story, novel, poetry and autobiography.

Poetry

Henry Louis Vivian is considered the first poet in the lineage of Indian English Poetry. A significant and torch bearer poet is Nissim Ezekiel and the significant poets of the post-Derozio and pre-Ezekiel times are Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Some of the poets of Ezekiel's time are A K Ramanajun, Dom Moraes, R Parthasarthy, Jayant Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Dr.Krishna Srinivas, Keki N Daruwala, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Vikram Seth, etc.

But academic critics and scholars have been rather interested about studying several current poets like O.P. Bhatnagar, I.K. Sharma, Maha Nand Sharma, Krishna Srinivas, Mani Rao, P.C.K. Prem, Srinivas Rangswami, Dwarkanath H. Kabadi, D.C. Chambial, and scores of others. These poets write with an awareness of their milieu and environment rather than British or American rhetoric or intellectual attitudes like alienation or exile. They share the central core of contemporary realities of Indian life.

Recent Indian English poetry adds to, what O.P. Bhatnagar terms as, a process of collective discovery, affirming its richness, sensitivity and cultural complexity. If we examine the potential of the poetry-making mind in English, applying whatever literary criteria, one should now discover aspects of the essentially assimilative genius of the Indian people, a celebration of the vast chorus of voices that make Indian literature sing. The Poetry
that born out of Puducherry as well contribute to a major extend in echoing the sense of
Indianess with due charm.

As a part of the research on Puducherry Writings in English, this section analysis the
poems in English, written by various writers from Puducherry. The Puducherry Poets
discussed in this section include born natives of Puducherry and settlers who have lived and
have been living for a considerable period of time in Puducherry.

Poetry is an expression of one’s own thought with the sense of imagination and the
subject and concept of the Poetry may differ from poet to poet according to the interest of an
individual. The Poets and Poetess discussed in this chapter have focused their thought on a
broad range of subjects starting from Nature, Love, to spiritualism with deep sense of
commitment. As each of these Poets and Poetess has number of Poems to their credit, only a
few of them have been taken for analysis. Undoubtedly, the chosen Poems of an each
individual would speak for his or her entire collection of Poetry.

“The Open Boat” by Aju Mukhopadhyay is a collection of thirty seven short poems,
published in various national and international journals and magazines. These poems mark
capabilities and skills, observance, social attitude and spiritual aspects of Aju Mukhopadhyay
as an established poet in his own ways. Many poems are descriptive in nature and some of
them have social appeal, while others speak of fleeting time, and a few of them are concerned
with nature and its glory and preserving the nature as gift of the Divine. One can classify
these poems in “The Paper Boat”, in various ways such s social, spiritual, Romantic, (Nature)
and time conscious. They are personal from the poet’s point of view yet they have universal
appeal in terms of perception, social justice, disorder in the society, spiritual volume, man as
a destroyer of nature.

“The Paper Boat”, is the last poem of the volume and is also the title of the collection of
poems, is a symbolic poem which not only reminds of the childhood days but also hints at the
future of enormous possibilities and success. It speaks about the poet’s desire to be adventurous and explore the world through his powerful ability to write. The Poem covers time past and time present and time future. The paper Boat which was set adrift in the childhood of the poet, just reaches his doorstep on a rainy evening. The poet wishes to set out on and goes for more novella adventure. The paper boat becomes the symbol of time in the poem. It travels to the past and reminds him/her of the notorious, adventurous, kiddish and fancied childhood days. When the boat arrives at the poet’s door step, it symbolizes the time present, speaking of the reality and presence of the surroundings and aspirations to set out for the adventurous journey. The poem also reminds of life as a journey which brings forth touristy curves, and sometimes becomes difficult to understand the life itself.

The first poem of the volume is titled as “Morning” where the poet glorifies the blessing of morning and says that the freshness of morning is sweeter than honey. Morning is the creation of the Divine and it cannot be compared with any living thing. The poet says that morning is the new phase of life; he attributes morning as the new beginning freshness of life - A new phase of one’s daily living, an awakening. The simplicity of morning can not be changed, it is resonant, ever growing, blissful and lovely and it never stops being fresh. Morning is forever beginning.

The following poems exclusively highlight the importance of time and the immortality of time “Time’s Sovereignty”, About The Time”, “With the Time”, “Time Flows”, “In the last phase of the Night “, Silent Witnesses of the Bygone Ages”, and “ The Days Have Passed by”, are the poems which invokes the timeliness or the futility of time. Time fleets and there is no control over time. Time is dynamic and it changes everything in the world. The poet philosophizes that every human being is regulated and controlled by time and its nature.

In the poem “Time’s sovereignty”, the poet mentions time as an eternity. Time begins even before the world come into existence. Time surrounds eternity of its importance. Every
moment that passes cannot be brought back and so no one has control or dominance over
time. The next poem “About the Time” portrays more about manner of an individual with
regard to time. The poem appears to have suggested a wrong title as it hardly speaks on time,
while it portrays more of the importance of utterances of exact words in exact places. As
spoken words cannot be mend so also the time once passed cannot be brought back. The
poem teaches the moral of not being angry at a time over minor subject matters and not being
reactive to sublime or very serious issues. Out of emotions once the words are uttered
especially the wrong words then one has to regret over the deeds done in the past, which even
time cannot bring back or give other chance to repeat. The poet says that if one misses the
apt word while talking and uttered thoughtfully then he/she has to regret over it, for not being
apt and exact and time cannot give second chance to improve.

The other poems “With the Time” and “Time flows” are simple and small and portray a
direct and universal aspect of time as ever fleeting human existence has been for always.
Many have seen the ages passing, years fleeting, hours and minutes running but not one has
been able to hold the dynamism of time. No human or living being can hold time and stop its
eternal flow.

The next poem “In the Last Phase of the Night” is about four different phases of the night
where the poet describes the activities that take place in those four phases. In the first phase
all humans are awake and prepare to go to bed, in the second phase the Hadoniot a compels
or the lovers are awake for sensual pleasure, in the third phase of night the thieves appear and
are active in stealing and robbing, while in the fourth phase of night the human mind
becomes active. It is the time before dawn during which human beings start to dream. The
daybreak brings new joy which is beyond comprehension. “Silent Witness of the Bygone
Ages” is a poem about the description of the temples of Vijayanagar dynasty from 1336 to
1565 A.D, the minute observances of the poet reveal his interest in human art and sculpture.
The sculpture and creative hands of human beings have a caged the historic temple with time and eternity. The description of the temple is the reminder of the human greatness and their artistic way captures the attention of every one of this age and the ages to come.

“Matrimandir, Auroville”, is a poem that highlights the activities and greatness of the tower of strength, the globe that is situated at the centre of Auroville village. The poet is puzzled at the charismatic appearance of the globe and its serene impact on the visitors. There is description of the hall where candles are lit, the visitors become so silent amidst the rays of the blessings of the Divine. He says that they look amazed at the brightness of the feet in the hall.

“From Darkness Toward Light” is an appealing poem where the poet talks about the evils that are engulfing the human society. He says that falsehood has spread everywhere and greed is the fashion of the human beings. Attacking the environmental pollution he says that the beauty of nature has been destroyed by handful of people and nature has become helpless spectator of global warming, earth quakes, AIDS and many natural calamities. Religious fundamentalism and besbianism have spread and harmed the human community. The poet wishes human beings to transform their lives from the darkness of evil to the light of the god. He urges them to experience the Divine light and not the greed of the evil world. The poet shows great concern towards human consciousness. He pleads them to have a clear conscience so that evil and good are distinguished and the good should become the ultimate aim of their lives. He does not want human to waste their time on worldly pleasures and things.

“At an Age we are passing Trough”, communism, the system, to the Gallows, and “Age of No-war, Dawn of Peace” are the poems attack the prevailing evils, sins, corruption, injustice and disharmony in the society and hatred in the hearts of religious fundamentalists. These poems are direct attack on the politicians and the system itself. He attacks that people
are easily influenced by the pious speeches of politicians who exploit them with their false promises. The politicians treat rights to misrule. He says that no part, group, policy, on ideology has any value. The poet draws attentions to the harsh realities of the society. Youth flee to foreign to earn more forgetting their own country. Women stand naked in public and human trafficking has become practice of modern time. Man has destroyed eco-system, cut many trees and killed many dumb creatures man cuts off other man’s throat. But the poet is hopeful of the saving of humanity as he believes that a divine ray may rise to save all human, through the messages of God.

“The System” is a poem attacking the evil practice in the society. But the poet is optimistic of receiving it and re ordering it by the people who stand by truth and who would one day establish the truth in the society often. The system is made in order to organize the functionality of the society in a better way, but it fails often when corruption selfishness and ego drive away the responsible humans. Yet the poet says human or best, good or evil, all have right to exist on earth.

“Age of No War, “Dawn of Peace” and “Hope” are poems which again deal with violence and imbalanced behaviour of human beings. In fact the poems grow from attack to optimism. The poet says that violence in thought and feeling, superiority and inferiority complex race and religion divide the human beings and disharmonize the surroundings & spiritual vacuum has blinded humans to see the reality, justice and truth. Poets desire to do embrace nature, he says nature is full of peace and harmony, would ease the tensions of human mind.

“Hope” is a poem speaking about fundamentalism, and accumulation of enormous wealth. The poet says that dictators dominate all sorts of governments. But a feeling is there days are almost over. The hope persists and as the title of the poem rightly suggests that hope of good governance all things to all people still exists, between terrorism and destruction. The
next poem is “Poet” where the poet distinguishes good poets and ordinary poets. A poet is known by his poems, he visualizes & imagines, recreates the imaginary world and recreates the world of utopia, a perfect world.

Aju Mukhopadhyay is also a follower of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. He has written many essays on their lives. In his next poem “In Memoriam” he pays tribute to Sri Aurobindo and Mother, whom he considers as Divine, he says that as the eternal has left for the eternity, the infinite has to plan for all finite things in perpetuity. He considers them the eternal and infinite.

The last poems that have to be discussed are the real choice, Frankeeness and Worship the Body”. The poet personally feels that choice is vital in order to avoid certain unwanted embarrassing situation. The choice is about whom to accept or reject. A choice between giving and not giving to spend or save; to be grateful or ungrateful. In the poem “Frankness” the poet believes the being frank and open is better than being reserved.

Almost all poets like to record in verse their fateful encounter with the Muse, their struggle for pursuing the elusive emotions and finally their nervous apprehension about the literary artifact. Whatever the followers of the reader-response theory may argue the umbilical cord between the writer and his effusions is not fully served. Even if the writer surmounts his worries about the methods of deconstruction he cannot deny to himself about his contribution to and his deep attachment with his work. M.L. Thangappa is one such poet who brings to the fore his intense and passionate creative life. He acknowledges openly that sometimes this artistic ferment can be a happy experience and at other times an agonizing one about the unpredictable ways of the Muse.

‘On the Seashore of Songs’ tells us of the common crowd with their blinkered approach, interested mainly in glittering and ornamental objects. Unable to identify anything superior in quality they stuff their lives and living spaces with such baubles. Nevertheless the
poet knows how to wait for his serendipitous discovery which was born of the ocean’s depths and its hidden creative powers. The frivolous crowd rejects the ocean’s gift for its lack of glamour but to the poet it carries the music of the aquamarine depths – audible only to genuine poets.

Music haunts his soul because his beloved Muse entices him with her ‘Silver Voice’. She remains forever elusive during his waking moments but meets him in the region of dreams. An inhabitant of the higher planes she can glide gracefully downwards but the unfortunate poet can never possess her. When the impact of cold reality cautions him about her unpredictable ways he can only sigh about his lost inspiration and ‘The Loss of Dream Poem’.

Incrustable are the ways of inspiration. It can flow into us anywhere and at any time. ‘On Visiting the Forest at Pitchantikulam’ creates an idyllic picture of the link between love, life and the role of imagination. According to the poet, words which are devoid of love and nature’s boon turn into ‘intellectual jugglery’. To transcend this kind of soulless verbosity, the poet needs to infuse his verse with intense feelings for Nature. It is then only that a ‘sylvan symphony’ is born defying the curse of the external circumstances in the human soul. Unless man is prepared to dispel his ignorance, Nature’s light will not bring him any spiritual benefit.

When seized by a creative frenzy the poet can transmute yellowing and brittle paper into a vehicle for his poetry. Ridiculed for picking up a roadside paper, the poet retaliates by penning a fine poem on it (‘Dust-stained Paper Immortalized’). His reference to a sculptor ‘immortalising / a castaway piece of rock/ with his carving’ reminds us of the famous episode of Michaelangelo fixing his sight on a rejected piece of Carrara marble that measured more than 1.5 meters in length. His vision made him carve the magnificent figure of David.
What is it that makes the poet rejoice so much about his art? It is difficult to analyze this alchemic process but one can observe its effect on poets. It is a profound delight that courses through his heart and elevates his quotidian chores to the level of meaningful experiences. ‘Lapwing’ seems to be an extension of the poet’s personality as it pours its rich music on the still air. Out of respect for its privacy the poet hides himself from view. Unaware of being watched the bird gives a superb performance ‘with full-throated ease’. At the time of parting it bestows upon the poet the rare treasure of happiness.

Delight is the elixir for which the poets longs. Innocence, enthusiasm and the exuberance of youth have given place to somberness in the poets mind. Although he has parted with these gifts he is still blessed with a light ‘in the silence of his soul’ that radiates endless bliss and lightens his burden of life (Unending Joy’).

Just as happiness sustains the poet’s creativity so in the same way beauty, love and truth save the poet from the sordidness around him. He tries to define the essence of beauty in the poem ‘What Is Beauty’ by analysing his repulsion towards ugliness. In India the urban middle and upper classes are so dependent on their domestic help that they cannot imagine clearing away their garbage. The poet satirises their deep-rooted habit of ridiculing liberal-mined white collar professionals who manually clean their immediate surroundings.

Thangappa asserts that his sense of aesthetics drives him towards cleanliness. He laments our callousness about maintaining the dignity of public places. He lashes out at those who think that beauty is of celestial origin and it will shower its feminine graces on mortal seekers in paradise-like valleys. The poet does not spare those artists and poets who think they have complete monopoly over beauty. In the last stanza the poet warns that unless our aesthetic sense is properly nurtured the true spirit of beauty will never manifest itself. A seeker of beauty has a duty towards society for he should not ignore the imprint of ugliness around him. The poet confesses boldly that he is inspired ‘to make anything/ more lovable/
for fellow beings’. To a novice who asks about identifying beauty he responds that a lover of beauty can penetrate through all her ‘humble guises’.

Close on the heels of beauty come love and truth in order to save us from suffocating mundane reality. ‘There Be Blossoms’ is a fine poem that prays for the blossoming of love and truth in man’s soul. Unlike the blossoms of the plant kingdom that fade inexorably, love and truth, once in bloom in the human soul, can never fade. They cure all negative emotions and give man a taste of his deathless nature. The images of healing are finely worked out in this poem and one gets the impression that this is a living experience for the poet and not merely an imaginative construct.

Thangappa can perceive beauty (‘Cactus Blossoms’) even in cactus flowers that are deemed fit only to grow along the hedge at the garden’s boundary. Though denied a place of honour in the garden, these blossoms, piercing through the green thorny exterior of the cacti, flash a pristine white smile alluringly at passers-by. Honey bees that know their value dip into their nectar and this rouses the maternal instinct of the flowers.

A poet who sees a replica of human love and bonding even in neglected cactus blossoms would certainly enlighten us about romantic relationships. ‘The Craving’ reveals his ardour for his beloved and his refusal to accept anything in small measures from her. True love seeks the fullness of a relationship that can reach a harmony which only the heavens known.

The poet may extol the fulfilment of love but he knows that wooing a reluctant or coy mistress was not the travail of Andrew Marvell alone. He coaxes his beloved to respond to his overwhelming love for time is at stake. The poet reminds her of the impermanence of life on earth and he warns her that he can foresee his inevitable journey towards the Timeless (‘Get Me Now’).
‘The Meeting’ is about the power of love that can transform a man known for his vanity and arrogance into an amiable character. He becomes ‘like a rose in a rose-garden’ – distinguished yet lost in a crowd of characters similar to him. The poet can hardly recognise this man’s naked unmasked self for their meeting is very brief. Even during those fleeting moments he catches a glimpse of ‘the light of love’ illuminating his face. He feels as though he has a vision of eternity.

Domesticity often dims the genuine glitter of a love relationship but the poet has escaped such a bitter fate. After half a century of wedded bliss he celebrates their golden jubilee by thanking the Lord and his wife’s virtues. His self-effacement is really amazing because one has to accept that conjugal fulfilment. By weaving in the mythological story of Cana at whose wedding the Lord was present he adds a new dimension to his martial life. The transformation of water – all the crass values of life – into wine or ‘the benediction of Love’ is behind the miracle of a happy marriage (‘A Felicitation’).

Fatherhood is another facet of domestic life. Although Thangappa does not mention about his children specifically, two poems tell us about his deep parental commitment towards youngsters in general. His description of the innate grace of a nine-year-old child in the poem ‘Her Maiden Dance’ reveals his sense of legitimate pride in her. From his perspective she performs better than senior artistes who struggle to follow formulas and tradition.

‘Illusion Must Die’ is an unusual poem about the alertness that parents must possess to rear children according to ideals. Tearing up the photo of one’s living child is ominous but the poet does not hesitate to do so. He refuses to see a dull and distorted image identified with his vivacious child and this prompt him to tear up the photo. This small incident, narrated in the first stanza, leads the poet to wonder about truth and its representation. Merciless about rending mask about our nothingness then we can become one with the ‘Great Nothingness’.
In fact, his constant prayer is to go beyond illusions and to discover the truth. He seeks to be cleansed of all dross (‘Cleanse My Soul’) so that the pure light of love can burn in him. Similarly ‘Transmutation’ illustrates his sense of wonder about the human soul. As long as it is clouded by earthly consciousness and depends on its material surroundings for its sustenance it is only a leaden begging bowl. But the moment the human soul starts pouring out the infinite gifts it is endowed with it becomes ‘a fit container/golden bowl for heaven’s ambrosia’. He indicates that the choice is ours.

The poet is often visualized as the solitary reaper pouring out his ditties in a silent atmosphere but sometimes the vibrant company of kindred souls inspires him to convey his impressions about the life. After his blindness, John Milton, the great epic poet, Confessed that what he missed most was the human face divine. This implies that at the source of our imagination is the human being and all our scholarship is quickened to life by the human presence. Poets are stirred to express themselves in lines of verse due to this dynamic contact with the human soul. Poets tend to be by temperament androgynous and they respond creatively to the infinite variety represented by both the male and the female sensibilities. In the poems collected here P. Raja celebrates this quality of the emotional bond among people.

One cannot deny that P. Raja adopts a traditional approach to the different aspects of womanhood. His appreciation of the female form or his expression of his boundless love for his beloved is always enhanced by his sparkling humour. The poem ’13 Different Ways of Looking at Breasts Not Yet Manhandled’, propped up by 13 small stanzas, is a fine example of the balance between joviality and erotica. Avoiding even the term ‘breasts’ in the main corpus of the poem the poet makes a collage of 13 most unconventional images in such a manner of the Metaphysical School. If he terms the female bosom as ‘good grenadiers’ and ‘sullen officers’ that blocks a man’s passage to her heart he also brings in ample references to luscious fruits and intoxicating wine.
Due to his long exposure to European thought and culture he wished to delve deeper into their social behavior and compare it with the Indian one. In the process he seems to have run into European feminists and sought their views about the mores and trends in their society (‘Tea with Belles’). What could have been a dry-as-sawdust interview fit for newspaper columns becomes stimulating enough to take the shape of a poem. Manipulating the pretext of a discussion over tea and snacks the poet captures adroitly some crucial points about promiscuity and female emancipation in the West and presents them in a mock-serious tone much to his readers’ delight. There could also be an underlying assumption that, in spite of traditional male perspectives on women, the latter is changing and challenging their destiny.

While most poets eulogies about the eyes and the lips for their eloquence Raja focuses straight on the nose. It could be that in some ways he was inspired by the story about Queen Cleopatra’s nose. ‘Theory of Relativity’ is a tongue-in-check comment on the nose stud of a beautiful young woman the poet met. Exaggerating his physiological reactions to her charms he simply wants to know whether her nose embellishes the nose stud or the ornament heightens her beauty.

However attractive a woman may be, it is her nose that has to win the poet’s approbation. In ‘your nose’ the poet’s satisfaction about his beloved’s ‘well-chiselled’ nose reaches out even to the readers. He even attributes a shapely nose stud to the happy mood of the Creator: ‘The Divine Shaper, I know,/ is a moody fellow. / Badly shapes noses / betray His bad moods’/. This organ of breath not only impresses the poet but also the air it draws in for survival.

Though the poet extols the nose over other facial features he is not impervious to the mesmerizing effects of eyes, lips and forehead. ‘At Close Quarters’ reveals the poet’s
admiration of his sweetheart’s beauty. Her proximity to the leaves him tongue-tied and her very presence obliterates the rest of creation for the poet.

The combined elements of sobriety and exuberance are palpable in these two poems, ‘The Woman Behind’ and ‘A journalist’s Life’. Both the poems acknowledge the abiding influence of one woman’s figure in his life. The first poem shows how the arrival of his world and introduced new definitions of space and expansion of spirit. As his inner development takes place he progresses towards self-awareness. Grateful to her for helping him to forge his new identity he assures her that ‘Behind my sure success / you’ll be the woman!’

The same idea is replicated in ‘A Journalist’s Life’. Pursued by the haunting nightmares of deadlines and ever dwindling bank balance the poet clutches at his only savior. Her very presence helps him redefine the pressures of time and work. Due to her benign influence he still retains his sanity.

Although there is perfect harmony between the two lovers they have to take precautions. The proverbial snake can appear in any form to whisper forbidden secrets. This curb on his freedom and spontaneity makes the poet fretful in ‘Paradise Lost’.

Jealousy and ill-will on the part of observers on the periphery give rise to circumstances that torture the poet. Even if motes trouble his eyes he decides to suffer the pain and shed tears. He is apprehensive that if he rubs his eyes he will lose sight of the special woman in his life. Obsessed with image of his beloved ingrained in his eyes he feels he can dispense with the other useless images that jostle before his vision (‘Embedded’).

When the world is too much with him and threatens to snatch away his bliss he retaliates by dreaming of his far way hideout. In this lonely place music and a hedonistic life style will wipe out the sorrows inflicted on them by a green-eyed society. This retreat into sylvan surroundings can be blotted out by death and not by any human powers (‘To Live in High Love’).
Whatever be the poet’s assertions about transcending social hurdles there is always a
carping fear about loss and rejection. His inamorata may fail to defy social conventions and
thus expose their relationship to every ill wind blowing across. Even then the poet’s love for
her does not diminish and he continues to pour out his affection on her. Her departure can
spell the final doom for him and he visualizes the cold icy hands of death gripping him. ‘A
Lonely Man Foresees His Death’ is a somber tale of misery without the saving grace of his
usual sprightly humor.

Balancing this grim poem is the delightful joie de vivre of the poem ‘Sweet Fifty’. If
there is a chill finale to his love in ‘A Lonely Man Foresees His Death’ then there is the
graceful bounty of fifty kisses rejuvenating him on his fiftieth birthday in defiance of death,
loneliness and separation. Hyperboles are displayed to project his exhilaration and this saves
the poem from sinking into maudlin sentimentality. Full of verve and sunshine, it illustrates
that love has a different grammar for its favorite ones.

The poet perceives love and lovers crowd the canvas of life before him (‘On Looking
at a Painting by Seema Devi). An unfinished painting by his friend Dr. Seema Devi inspires
him to address the incomplete face of young man. The wilderness in the background suggests
to the poet that their meeting has to be held in secrecy and probably this is not a socially
sanctioned relationship. The poet associates the lotus the lotus leaf promises to be the site of
their union. The clues provided by the painting excite the poet’s imagination and we have a
fine dramatic monologue. The poet expects the lover’s face to brighten up at the sight of his
beloved and he continues to visualize their amorous rendezvous. The poet then wonders as to
who would help him to see the electrifying experience of their union. Will the much awaited
woman in the painting manifest herself and satisfy the poet’s curiosity or will Dr. Seema
Devi, the Brahma’ of this canvas couple, breathe life into her characters? The poet’s
unfulfilled expectation by itself can be a pretext for narrative exciting the mind to fill in the gaps of the story.

So for the poet has shown us that love is a ‘many-splendored’ emotion (in Han Suyin’s style) but he has done so from a male perspective. Even then one cannot accuse him of slipping into chauvinistic pattern of thinking. One poem ‘Woman Power’ deftly skirts the issues of feminism and shows a perfect blending of the feminine sensibility with the masculine personality. She derives her identity through this man and escapes vegetating in some obscure corner. Referring to Adam’s sacrifice of a rib for the creation of his female counterpart, the lady narrator of the poem extols him for conferring upon her the status of wifehood and motherhood. She adores him for empowering her at every stage of life. Does the lover of his poem finally find her voice and reciprocate his feelings and acknowledge his contribution?

The poet’s vision is not restricted to man-woman relationships alone. His garden stirs him to view Nature in her myriad moods. A group of potted crotons sparks off his imagination and he thinks he sees flowers on them. Amazed at such unusual event he wonders how cartons could grow ‘flowers of different sizes/That challenged the hues of the rainbow’. His curiosity makes him draw closer and the flowers flutter away to different directions (‘Disturbed Flowers’).

Can such a sensitive poet be a perpetrator of cruelty? In the poem ‘Cold Steel’ the poet projects himself as a butcher about hack down a partridge. The bird’s fear and struggle for freedom give shape to the second and the third stanzas. The tyrant exterminates the victim for even the gods are in awe of the former. As the partridge meets its end the poet’s conscience reminds him that his instincts have turned irredeemably violent.

Social violence can be discussed and even monitored but Nature’s violence is swift, unpredictable and devastating. ‘A Balance Lost’ tries to recapture the trauma of the
earthquake that took place in Bhuj on January 26, 2001. His anguish rings out sincerely for those who survived but were deprived of their near and dear ones. The poet exhorts us; ‘Think of the maimed./Think of the bruised./Think of the orphaned. /the destitute and the damned’.

While speaking of the collective tragedy the poet treats his own heartache rather lightly. To a writer his library is sacrosanct and he fights innumerable battles to keep his friend and foes away from it. However, silverfish and worms have invaded and destroyed many occupants of this kingdom of knowledge. As a book after book shows the havoc wrought on them the poet experiences the earth quaking beneath him (‘My Fans’). Reproaching himself for neglecting his books he pens this witty and humorous poem to console other bibliophiles suffering like him.

In world literature, a journey has always symbolized a quest for some goal or ideal which the narrow confines of one’s native place failed to offer. The seeker felt the compelling need to expand his mental horizons in order to absorb exotic influences.

The epic hero was often at the mercy of cruel fate in hostile surroundings and it was his resourcefulness that helped him to ward off evil. The outward journey was also responsible for making him discover his inner spaces. It is as though his destination was not only a location on the map but also a site within himself. This combination of the fulfillment of the dreams of adventurer’s position in his native community. His range of experiences made him the ideal narrator and commentator. The raconteur of tales could not fail his audience for they had placed their faith in him.

In the contemporary world many people, due to the exigencies of their profession, travel widely but rarely do they develop the of sharing their experiences. B.V. Selvaraj, a senior member of the Indian Administrative Service, is a unique exception in this category of people. His ceaseless journeys and postings in various corners of India have helped him to
belong simultaneously to several places and cultures. A polyglot due to his spontaneous response to his linguistic milieu, he has developed a rare sensitivity to the pluralistic nature of our country.

Rural development and disaster management areas in which he is considered a distinguished authority but his knowledge is not limited merely to bookish theories. He reaches out to the actual scene of suffering and disaster and identifies himself with what he witnesses. His poem on cyclone and tsunami bear testimony to this fact. He witnessed the aftermath of a serve cyclone in Yanam (an enclave of Pondicherry), located in the East Coast Godavari district of Andra Pradesh, in November 1996. This tugged at this heartstrings and he wrote a poem with an unusual title ‘How Would You Define a Cyclone?’ He ridicules the mechanical answer of meteorologists who, unaffected by the havoc created by cyclones, promptly offer scientific explanation only when cyclones have swept away thousands of human lives. He expresses his grief about the brutality of the sea and the way it inflicted endless misery on the coastal people. He narrates how the cyclone ravaged people’s last foothold and forced them into a watery grave. The final stanza depicts the poet’s search for ‘the ghost of cyclones’.

B.V. Selvaraj was Relief and Development Commissioner when tsunami struck the Coromandel Coast on December 26, 2004. Since he had the onerous task of rescuing and rehabilitating thousands of victims he had intimate and firsthand experience of their abysmal suffering. He paid homage to the tsunami victims by penning the overflow of his emotions in a poem entitled ‘What’d You Make of a Tsunami?’ In six stanzas he portrays the devastation left behind by the killer giant waves more powerful than any cyclone the Coromandel Coast people have ever known. He describes the sea’s madness as ‘like a devil possessed of unprovoked wrath/Decimating life and living in its warpath’. In the last stanza he tells us
about his pathetic search for human beings among the debris but encounters only ‘ghosts and survivors’.

So powerful was the impact of the tsunami-related devastation on him that after two years he wrote a sequel to the above-mentioned poem. His experience of the collective misery did not obviously allow him to rest in peace and he wrote ‘Remember December 26th’. Although he recollects the calamitous tsunami he also assures us about mankind’s collective determination to fight Nature’s capricious inclemency: ‘the terrifying invasion of Tsunami and its gore/Imprinted indelibly upon the sands of the shore/And the folklore of courage to return and restore’.

The poet has a special reason for remembering ‘O, Car Nicobar’. In the mid-80’s he was a Deputy Commissioner (District Collector) of Nicobar District—geographically the most isolated and the southernmost district of India. This areas too experienced the cataclysmic effect of tsunami but fought back valiantly against Nature’s wrath and began restoration and rehabilitation work with full zest. The poet’s view is the Car Nicobar, unaffected by the fame of the martyrdom gained due to tsunami, continues with its peaceful and slow-paced lifestyle.

For Selvaraj chaos and Nature’s dance of destruction cannot be the final answer to man’s agony. He turns to great prophets and saints and traces out their influence on his world-view. ‘Behold, The Trinity!’ is a poem that extols the contribution that Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ and Gandhiji made to the onward march of human progress. The poet rightly observes that they have liberated themselves from the limitations of symbols and we too should be able to penetrate beyond these to grasp the essence of saintliness.

Selvaraj has three poems exclusively on Mahatma Gandhi written during different phases of life: ‘Bapu Cries Silently’, ‘When Bapu conquered Mohandas’ and ‘Bapu’s Fervent Prayer’. Quite obviously the Gandhian influences he has imbibed have manifested themselves in his art. Selecting one from these three difficult but our choice finally fell on “Bapu Cries
Silently” because it sums up succinctly how Gandhiji’s sacrifice became great rallying force for an enslaved nation. But what has postcolonial India done to his wonderful precepts except manipulating them for its petty advantages? Along with Bapu the poet too sheds tears about the way such a great legacy is trampled upon shamelessly.

The unmistakable tone of despondency that marks ‘Bapu Cries Silently’ gives way to optimism and cheerfulness in his tribute to Dr. Abdul Kalam in the poem ‘Kalam, Accept My Salaam’. The poet asserts that as President Dr. Kalam was the Philosopher – King that Plato had dreamt of and by taking charge of this great democracy he had been able to steer it to new destiny. The poet demonstrates rightly that this single individuals is an embodiment of ‘The billion-plus soul of mysterious Bharat!’

It is not only the great sons of this soil who are responsible for safeguarding the soul of India but also the Himalayas, traditionally upheld as the guardian spirit of India. The poet wonders about the silent inertia of the Himalayas when India is besieged by so many barbaric and corrosive elements. He tries to exhort this sentinel of the motherland to confront the subversive forces menacing the sovereignty of this country.

In an age when mass-scale deforestation leaves many of us indifferent the hacking of a single tree gives rise to powerful emotions in the poet’s heart. Though he says that he hears the sound of weeping from the tree’s grave we feel that it is he who is tearfully mourning man’s brutality.

This sensitivity also takes into account the neglected lives of animals and butterflies. ‘Encounter with Buffaloes’ was written during his first posting in Pondicherry. He draws satirically an obvious parallel between some of his colleagues and these animal in the following lines: ‘Wallowing in files and pushing mud / Is not monopoly / Of these amphibious devils, / With stink-proof noses / Stalking just below the surface / They’ve learnt the art / Of Swimming in ditches’.
‘When God created Dog’ is a tribute to the humble domestic animal which is considered man’s friend. Though God admired his creation of man He prided Himself on giving life to this animal. Why does the poet say that the dog was created for Man’s ... companionship and his constant correction?’ Is there a subtle implication that there was an unequal distribution of virtues between man and the animal? Or does the poet underline that the dog is meant to act as man’s conscience?

‘I Bow Before the Elephant’ is a sincere eulogy of the traits of character that tuskers have. Here too there is an insinuation that elephants have a number of virtues worth rendering memorable in verse. The poet wishes to have a direct link with this majestic animal and he clarifies in the last line: ‘I bow my head under your trunk, for you to tingle!’

Different in tone and spirit is the poem ‘A Meeting with the Mithun’. The Mithun, as the author explains to us, is ‘halfway in make between a yak and a bull’ and can boast of enormous prowess. The poet’s attempt to relate to the Mithun is greeted with sheer indifference because it dreams of its romantic union with its mate. The description of the Mithun’s sensual arousal and the general aura of eroticism are couched in such ambiguous terms that the reader tends to develop serious regards for thus species. The innocent spontaneity of animal lust is seen in contrast with the perversion of human carnal passion. This becomes more pronounced when the poet step steps aside deferentially to let the Mithum continue with its sojourn. The poet’s technique of using the third person singular ‘he’ for the Mithun gradually blurs out major distinctions between animals and human lovers. Love is the great leveler.

‘Dashing yummy yellow’ against ‘spotless grey’ – the visual impact of these words help us to penetrate into the spirit of the poem ‘I saw a Butterfly’. When he was at home on a special holiday he happened to see a butterfly against ‘the gleaming metal / Of his polished rosewood name board’. His description of the butterfly preening itself in front of the
‘gleaming metal’ creates the impression of a young and beautiful woman contriving to enhance her looks in her boudoir. Here also his technique of using third person singular pronoun ‘she’ has paid off well because the image of a young and gorgeous beauty gets superimposed on the butterfly.

The butterfly made one of his holidays memorable but Mondays are an inexorable source of torment. Millions of office-goers all over the world experience what is know as ‘Monday morning blues’ and it is no exception for the poet. He denounces Monday as ‘Octopus-like’, as ‘a formidable enemy’, as ‘sadistic’ and claims that ‘God must’ve hated His own Monday / after a goodly “Operation Creation”. The poet thankfully acknowledges the saving race of Friday and God be thanked for it!

Sandwiched between Monday and Friday the poet is obliged to breathe in the office atmosphere and interact with colleagues who enjoy a strange flexibility not permitted by the body’s anatomical structure. Even then they can perform all kinds of acrobatics to satisfy a creation class of self-seekers. In the last line of this poem the poet quibbles on the word bureaucrat in his inimitable style” ‘In the bureau of rats who’ll bell the cat …. Who cares?’

When the present moment seems to be so oppressive the past beckons him and reminds him of his enduring relationships. ‘Nostalgia’ and ‘The Days That are Gone’ evoke poignant memories of a past that refuses to be erases. ‘Nostalgia’ is dedicated to his childhood friend Prof. Amarjeet Shingh who used to clap the hardest and for the longest time when the boy Selvaraj read out his Hindi poems during school days.

However, the poet refuses to live in the past and looks forward to the future. At the end every year his prayer goes up heavenward. ‘Give Me a Fresh Year’. A new beginning always spells the possibility of progress and inner stability for the poet.

It is those environment activists too visits shopping mails and furtively tuck in junk food. So irresistible is the allurement of this consumerist lifestyle in the 21st century that it
has become extremely difficult to draw a distinction between a luxury and a necessity. The affluent class splurges as though they wish to teach lesser mortals the art of spending as a prerequisite to the art of living. In this world of giddy razzmatazz the unsuccessful would be grateful if he did not tumble down and cause inconvenience to high-speed vehicles. In her poems Rita Nath Keshari tries to unravel the many facets of the present consumerist culture introduced by the era of globalization – upward mobility, a constant denigration of traditional values, the trauma of failure, the definition of sanity, the tyranny of media advertising and the myth of equality.

‘At the Exhibition’ attempts to capture through the story of young urban professional the invisible price one pays for hastening up the ladder of success. A sari exhibition is used as a narrative device to reveal the ruthless ambition of the narrator in the past and his present predicament. As past memories lay siege to the impregnable fortress erected by his warped zeal, a shade of guilt creeps into his heart. His definitions of happiness and moral scruples get blurred. In vain does he search for emotional solace in a social ethos that lays exclusive stress on materialism.

While men internalize the chart of aggressive goals and valorize hyper masculinity in a post-globalization society women professionals too are egged on to set ever-receding career objectives for themselves. Unlike men who can focus wholly on the office front women are expected to break though the glass ceiling and yet be a perfect homemaker ‘The Complete Woman Syndrome’ explores the hollowness of the every concept of a complete and over brimming life for superwomen. Who should decide for the breathlessly panting lady executive what fulfillment is? Should she continue to measure herself against the parameters fixed by her hawk-eyed colleagues and boss? Or should she determine her goals according to her inner needs?
Against the backdrop of highly accomplished men and women we have a clientless lawyer whose wife mockingly calls him ‘a blue collar’. The poem ‘The Blues’ quibbles on the word blue and its various shades and exposes the bleak grey world of a person who has practically no professional achievement. In the process he has become a social pariah.

High stress levels seep into family life and accentuate more the widening gap among different generations. A disillusioned mother is strongly rebuffed by her cocksure teenage daughter in ‘Generation Gap’ who feels her mother’s world-view to be hopelessly outdated. Unable to argue back the mother recollects sentimentally her middle-class struggle and the sanctity of family bonds upheld by her generation. This dramatic monologue in many ways echoes patterns from those written by Robert Browning.

Though competition has opened up more avenues of affluence it has also given rise to greater incidents of mental diseases. ‘Never-Never land’ takes us into confidence, through the technique of first person narration, and tells us that social attitudes towards madness continue to be rigid and cynical. Advancement in the field of technology has not helped man to empathize with those who are less fortunate. The poet tries to create a flexible attitude towards mentally unhinged people by boldly drawing a link between madness and creativity.

Materialistic values shape even emotional relationships and there is a stiff competitive feeling for the suitable girl or boy. The poem ‘Fair and Foul’ attempts in a light-hearted manner to depict the rivalry of two close friends over a woman who is professionally superior. Her looks, wealth and accomplishments would lure anyone who comes to know about these. There is a subtle irony about the way the two men submerge their male ego while pursing a woman who may never respond to their overtures.

The opening up of the Indian economy at the fag end of the 20th century has not uniformly benefited the masses who are obliged to toil. The middle class continues with its habits of scraping and scrounging to keep up its façade of respectability. ‘Young
Realistically’ takes a look at the process of nation-building and also at the seamy aspects of U.S. economy. Isn’t capitalism balancing itself on the foundation of a number of myths?

When economists are busy theorizing about the ramifications of capitalism can we ignore the fate of communism that promised a social revolution that would usher in equality and brotherhood? ‘The Heirloom’ deals with the way Marxist philosophy thrived on promises and people’s dreams. By the end of the 20th century great sweeping changes that took place witnessed the revised position of this communist monolith.

Though social realities engage Keshari’s attention she is also deeply interested in penetrating into the creative process and the unpredictable ways of the Muse. In the poem ‘Imagination’ the poet talks about her fears and hopes that rest on the ‘patchwork quilt of my imagination’. Since imagination is the principle tool operating behind the poet’s vision there is always the lurking fear about its vanishing away. Through a number of images she tries to establish that imagination embellishes not only a poet’s canvas but helps maintain that vital link between the world of mundane reality and other planes of consciousness.

The Muse is seen through a haze of colours and her presence makes the entire edifice of the poet’s life tremble. ‘La Belle Dame’ comes veiled to enthrall the poet but does not explain her strange absence. It is as though she is not accountable to the poet; rather it is the poet who has to hone her skill of waiting patiently. At the end a poem springs to life.

Nevertheless the poet cannot help complaining and demands to know about the truant ways of the Muse in ‘The Elusive Muse’. The whimsical nature of the Muse makes the poet fret but she has to admit that she slowly succumbs to its wiles. The Muse has the power of lightning as well as the mystic aura of darkness. As the poet struggles to understand the significance of inspiration she realizes that she is nothing more than an instrument for transmitting sounds and images onto paper.

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In one situation the poet does get the better of the Muse. In a dramatic monologue ‘To My Disappointed Muse’ she admonishes this elemental presence indispensable for creative work. She reveals the state of near-madness creative people experience while waiting for inspiration. For once the poet is in charge of the situation and seems to relish this fleeting sensation of power. ‘Creativity’ reflects a more sober and pensive mood in which the poet tries to plunge into the secret of inspiration and the creative outbursts that follow. Confessing her failure to under-stand this fervour for self-expression she asks, ‘Can passion thus be charted?’ it is only when one wanders off into uncharted terrain that the spasms of creativity seize him or her.

‘Love Poems’ can be seen as an extension of the above-mentioned poem ‘Creativity’ because love is the source of all original work. The note of cynicism at the beginning of the poem is a reflection of prudish skeptics who wish to crush out the blossoming of this emotion. Their efforts to destroy all the manifestations of love and up by consolidating the kingdom of love.

What is it that creative person does not suffer in order to establish his or her impressions of other worlds of imagination? The paranoia of being abandoned by the creative upsurge and the social alienation born of jealousy and pettiness constantly haunt the sensitive heart. However, there is another impediment in the form of ‘wordsmiths’ who apparently juggle words with consummate ease and ridicule genuine poetry. Neither capable of creative writing nor of healthy criticism, this category of people form s a deep threat to the poet but she knows that deliverance is close at hand.

When one deal with words for so long one tends to wonder about the realms of silence and mythology that lie beyond verbal expression. Images float up from the subconscious mind and coalesce with the impressions of our mundane daily life. ‘Draupadi and I’ is a poem that takes us into the intimate world of a successful professional who has complete
confidence about the purchasing power of his credit card in a globalised market. Once he confronts a myth of his making he is no longer very sure of his locus standi. His crumbling confidence shows the blinkered approach he adopts towards life.

The myth about heaven’s superiority is smashed in this poem ‘Nebulous Heaven’ Even the earth supports and sustains man from birth to death he always looks heavenwards for his romance and inspiration. The poet point out that heaven always remained unknown and nebulous to us therefore it does not probably deserve the fascination we have for it. Earth is our real home.

The poet’s jubilation rings out in clear notes in ‘A Slice of Heaven’. In the previous poem she dismissed our romantic illusions about heaven and promoted earth is our ultimate shelter. In this poem she takes up a totally contradictory position and shows that even a bit of heaven can transform the sordidness of our earthly life. Read together, these two poems actually present the frequent arguments about the dichotomy in man’s existence.

‘Darkness and Light’ illustrates the way man’s efforts towards self-realization are defeated continuously. Each time he lights the lamp to discover himself it gets snuffed out. ‘Even then lamps are lit’ tells us the poet who reiterates her faith in man’s basic goodness. The perennial battle between light and darkness forces man to wonder whether he can ever find his true destination. Even when prophets try to keep the flickering lamps safe from the onslaught of darkness the baseness of common man’s nature forces him to jeer at it. The torch-bearers of humanity refuse to stumble down and lose their way.

Man’s realization of his basic vulnerability helps him to respond to a greater force. Even when his conscious mind rejects the presence of a superior force his dormant self stirs itself to glimpse it from distance (‘Divine Grace’). How do we find deliverance? The poet assures us that our aspiration helps us to progress beyond the limitations imposed by time.
The anthology titled Incelebration: the Women Poets of Pondicherry edited by Prof. P. Raja begins with the poems by Themis. It has twelve poems by her. All her poems have an unmistakable optimism and a yearning for the life beyond. Her poems are about renunciation, tolerance and acceptance; which she believes would lead to fulfillment and bliss.

The poem “Renewal” talks of the transformation that happens with the coming of daylight. The roof, the angels, pillars, wall and floor shines as the beauteous Sun descends. The place gets renewed and veiled in golden grace as the sun rises.

“Magdalen” is a plea to let one find one’s own way unless one decides to come back to stay. The persona seems to ask to trust enough to let one go.

“Reed of Yamuna” is an optimistic poem which tells that the hardships one endures will lead to a better tomorrow. The Reed is warned that passionate and strong hands will ‘wrench’ it and before it is ready to hum the ‘mad rhythm’ it has to go through much sorrow and strain. The Reed has to bear the difficulty and hardship involved in its transformation from reed to flute. The one endures the poet promises will find ‘music and meaning’.

In the “Confessional”, the heart is unable to forgive what one has brought on oneself. It is unable to forget or offer a remedy for what is troubling the mind. But the heart feels it right not to forget and forgive and tells that the regret it feels is a sort of ‘mock’ regret because ‘no sacrificial fire could purify the deed that builds its life’.

The poem “Be Mute” is about reaching out for God when in agony, since he listens to ‘all dumb lone things’. The poet advices one to cloak one’s pain and sorrow. And when hatred tries to come out one is asked to go out in search of the ‘pool’ which will heal the pain, tears and hatred.

In “Yearning”, we see the longing to cut across the ‘empty days’ to ‘pristine purities’ which lies beyond Time. There is a yearning to break lose from the ‘earth’s mesh’ and to reach for what really spirit seeks and longs.
“Unfulfilled Fulfillment” talks about a vision of ‘richer glory’ which lies within each fulfillment, which leaves our heart with a feeling of unfulfilment. Each fulfillment is in fact a mock fulfillment which one must learn to pass. The fulfillment which lies beyond our power can be a blessing which might bring ‘undreamt meeting and fulfillment’.

“The Roots” takes us to October when the leaves which has drunk too much of sun falls from the trees. Being drunk they hear ‘Wonder’ singing. In their death they see a world where throughout October flower, leaves and fruits live. In most of Themis’ poems we find the longing and promise of another land which waits us beyond death.

In the poem “Dreams” the poet says when one dream is fulfilled we dream a mightier one. The web of prayers goes on widening. Though our dreams are ‘earthly spun’ it is connected to the ‘glory there’. The poets says ‘Thy reverse are we’ always connected in some way and duty bound.

According to poet our being rose from strange “Dark Roots”. In each of us lies ‘same stars’ and ‘same rivers’ and all other things which ‘primeval Hell and Heaven have spun’. The answer to the riddle of our life lies in the contradictions which are knotted in the web of mysteries.

In “Yonder Word” the poet claims that His word comes singing to her soul over the silence of the night. She is unable to comprehend it completely. But the depth of her entire being reverberates with his beauteous Name. The earth also trembles and releases sacred fountains.

In “Memories” the poet wonders what the voices speak and to whom does all these tunes belong. The dreams of earlier generations and of other births and life in other realms mingle with our memories. So each word reverberates with inner stress and its meanings unfold in the silent heart.
In the poem “poets” the poet thinks it strange that the oddest words should rhyme with ‘sublime’ words. ‘Malice’ rhymes with ‘chalice’ and ‘curse’ with ‘verse’. She wonders what poets would have to say about this. She imagines that poets would say ‘verse is a curse’ and would advise people to avoid them if one wanted wisdom. But, she reminds us, that poets hardly mean what they say.

Nature is heralded in most of Seema devi’s poem and there is an earnest desire to shed identities be it man or woman and get identified with nature. Nature to the poet become eternity personified, but again nature becomes a sort of refuge that the woman seeks after the harsh brutalities faced amidst mob. Worldly pleasure, physical cravings are all pushed aside when compared with the divinity of nature, the egoistic self-withers away only to reassert rather a serene self in unison with nature. The noise “I” dies, silence is born. In silence is born the contentment. (Contentment- A Flower).

Poems of Seema Devi are adequately strewn with the merging of the self into the spiritual realm. There is a constant communion with nature which at a point turns into religious metaphors. “I want to run to my Love the creator, /And vanish away in the serenity.” While consciously using the nature imagery to establish the tranquility of the self, garden becomes a metaphor of the woman herself and the woes of the female is brought forth. The tone of her woman voices is bitter and there is a note of self-loathsomeness. The woman shuns away from the chauvinistic crowd and is resolute that her garden- herself, her physical body, her thoughts are only virile. Being a gynecologist by profession there are also subtle references to the naked brutalities of the female infanticide. This is the unlucky garden of mine Where there is never a flower fine each time a bud open its eyes The cruel hand pinches and destroys.( never come to this garden.) There is a stark note of helplessness “Squeaky lifeless owl is howling:/...Twigs of dead trees stand desolate,/ oh it is a desert isolated. Her poetry also registers the excruciating experience of love and its aftermath consequences
where only there is dejection and spitefulness. Seema Devi even visualizes women without love as barren and most of a couple of her poems clad women folk with a mystical nature. The love relationship too is not a run of the mill sort of thing but weird and numinous, I met you first beyond horizon, We walked together in the dunes, How I don’t know I lost you In the vales of dunes, come Where have you gone? (Eternal Call) She also attacks lustful relationships clinging to the traditional value systems of unsullied love, “You search for money with lusty eyes/how can you see my loving heart”. But all this chaste love also is capable of turning into disgust towards men, where man becomes a deadly disease, who wears false smiles but in reality is vindictive. Finally her poem after revolving around all highly romantic subjects also retaliates at the harsh brutalities present in the society. I shall not be afraid of your debris I scream that love is where there is No betrayal, I shall grow a creeper. But the tone here again adopts the nurturing one of the classic womanhood; the women never intends to destroy or ignore the debris or filth of the man but has no other go and declares to grow rose or creeper on the useless filth an debris On death the poet adopts and Emily Dickinson view. Here the woman is in search of death, there is an inherent wish to embrace death and the eternal tranquility it would provide. The self to the poet is nothing but a pseudo being therefore issues of thanatophobia are to be pushed aside.

The poems of Shyam Kumari are an attempt to understand eternal truths like love and affection. It also endeavors to reach and analysis of one’s inner self. Love and longing forms an integral part of her poems.

In “Sweet Distance’ the lover pleads to keep him/her at some distance and not to come too close, so that he can ‘savour’ to the full the magic of the beauty. Not physical union but their eyes will ‘weave into one’ what is most ‘precious’ in them.
The persona in the poem “Mock Me Not” feels foolish for having tried too hard to please, not knowing that the other was already waiting with the arms outstretched. But now she is sure of acceptance if ‘the candle fails in the darkness.’

“Silver Solitude” is about the mystic experience one feels when ‘mute are the murmurs of life’. The calm atmosphere on a moonlit silent night and the faint whisper of the wind can fill one with ‘sacred solitude’ and bliss, which is beyond ‘mortal mind’.

“The Lover’s Laments” questions whether loneliness is the last price for withered love. It paints the picture of a lover who has lost all hope and wonders whether this is all that the gods have devised for man!

In the poem “What am I?” it is clear that the persona of the poem is female. She wants to know what she is to the ‘Master’ - ‘What am I to Thee?’. She has played the role of a daughter, sister, wife and mother at various stages of her life but she was deeply disappointed. Her only hope lies in the ‘Master’. She wishes Him to ‘take away the mirages’ and to reveal the ‘Reality’.

The poet craves for the ‘vast unknown’ in “A Drop”. The present becomes unbearable when one thinks of the ‘glorious empyrean’. The poet wishes at least for a moment’s grace or a drop from the immortal source.

In “O Scholar!” the poet asks to lay down the books. The poet says even ages wouldn’t be enough to comprehend the ‘core of life’. She asks whether he can predict the future, inform her about the source of creation, and explain a smile or the beauty of a rose. Books may not offer answers to the basic things in life. If one is too engrossed in acquiring bookish knowledge, one might even fail to look up when He comes and stands in front of him.

In “Wings of Dreams” the poet asks not to clip the wings. It is only on the strength of one’s dreams that one can conquer ‘vastest seas’ and soar high.
We find the beloved waiting for her lover in the poem “To Wait”. She asks her friends not to wait and worry about her. She assures them that nothing will harm her ‘since things of the forest love him’. As the moon rises and its silver beams fill the night, she would eagerly listen for the ‘far-off golden notes of his flute’. She considers waiting for him as supreme felicity. The poem is about Radha and Krishna.

In “A Question” the poet wonders why man was made kin to beast. She is also amazed that man who would grab ‘all heaven and more’ would grudge others even a barren field! She also wonders why God keeps the earth safe on its orbit.

“Nothing Withheld” shows that God is benevolent. He never withholds anything from those who shows gratitude and are good at heart even if their thoughts are still ‘stained’.

“Prayer of an Old Mother” is a touching poem about the woe of an old mother. The mother is worried that the son will come home for money and finding that she doesn’t have money; he would fly into a rage. She laments that she is old and cannot see well enough to weave baskets. The baskets which she weaves by touch don’t fetch much. She wonders whether a son who comes home to ‘rave and rail’ is the reward for the love she showered on him when he was young! She had always kept him out of harm’s way and has fed him well even if she had to go without food. She wonders whether a mother’s love should be rewarded thus. She seems to have had enough of life and wishes Lord to call her to his side. The poem shows the ungratefulness of children who are insensitive to parents at their old age and forgets about the care and love shown to them when they were young and helpless.

The poem “Sri Radhika’s Face” reflects on the ‘flight of time’. Every second is precious since we do not know how the life will end. There are chances we missed and mistakes we did but that is not the end of life. One should look at the brighter side. From the east a new sun arises and with it new hopes.
The poetry of **K. M. Shantha** are characterized by simple language and vivid imagery. “January” promises a new beginning. The poet longs for joy which one gets from peace and everlasting bonds or relationships. She finds delight in simple things of life like sunset or a child’s face. She longs for harmony, peace and security in a world “full of Great disharmony”.

The poem “Home to Harmony” is an ode to Pondicherry. She considers Pondicherry blessed because great sages like Agasta and Aurobindo lived there. Pondicherry for her is a ‘confluence’ of people and cultures. It is home of poets like Bharathi and Bharathidasan. Pondicherry according to her is a place where people of different tongues- Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Bengali- live peacefully. It is a beacon of hope in these troubled times.

“Surya” describes the glory of the Sun-God, Surya. Surya dispels tamas or darkness and bestows knowledge. Surya enlightens mind and spirit of people with its luminescence. The poem is homage to Surya, the sun-God.

The poem “Monsoon Patterns” describes the various effects of monsoon. It rattles the windowpanes. It fills men, cattle and birds with fear about the ‘cosmic patterns’. Monsoon also causes disaster. Houses gets either drowned or blown away. A calf finds shelter at the doorsteps and sparrows peck at ‘rain-swept green’. The poem presents a vivid picture of monsoon.

“Gothic Gateau” describes the church of Sacre-Coeur as a gateau or cake. The church is graceful and poised in clear sunlight. She considers it a jewel when it is lighted at night. She considers the church as a magnificent jewel of God’s grandeur.

With the Influence of her elder sister who is a poet, **ASHALATA DASH** began writing poetry at a young age. Having taken voluntary retirement from the government service in Orissa, she joined the ashram in Pondicherry. K.D Sethna, the captain of Sri Aurobindonian School of poetry, has watched over her development as a writer of mystic poetry.
The poem “Mother Satisfied” is about the satisfaction one gets by being a companion or matron to the elderly. The poet says she pushed a ‘baby of ninety in a wheel-chair pram’. The pleasant nature of the old man made the passers-by happy as would a nine-month year child would have. Poet felt nothing but pride in accompanying the old man. She says her motherly heart which was sealed long ago is now brimming with pure and perennial love.

In the poem “Wishes Have...” poet advises us not to hesitate to wish, because it might ‘fructify’ someday. The poet encourages one to wish sincerely ‘anything to anybody’. We shouldn’t exasperate the fertile heart with demands and doubts, thought it might at times bring inevitable realization.

In “love” poet compares love to a ‘blushful bride’ who never shows its face to all. It discriminates and chooses whom to show and whom not to. It maintains its glow away from lust and flows away from envy. Love is a perennial stream of exquisite charms which has the capability to sooth, cool and heal all harms.

“All-Pervading” is about the all pervading presence the poet could feel in the whispers of the breeze, in the drizzling rain and in sun. Whenever the poet stumbles, she is reminded of the ‘never-failing’ warmth’ which reawaken in her the ‘regal pose’.

In “A Surer Communication” the poet shows that deepest of communication is possible only through the heart. When one talk she may listen but she is keener when one does not speak. The unuttered words shatter the locks of door of her heart faster than the uttered words. The heart acts as an ‘unerring eye’ to see other’s real self.

In the poem “Under Protest” the poet says life and love is coupled with death and divorce, which may trouble or puzzle under certain circumstances but it would never ‘pounce’ on the one who aspire. Poet says love is love and life is life but the contrary may pronounce panic but it will not submerge those who are sincere at heart.
“When Hearts open” is a poem which tells us that the fond words and loving care are sweet but a ‘faint smile’ after a rift is even sweeter. A rift can swiftly severe our minds and cut all our bonds but if we keep our hearts open everything will be relieved and reshaped. The poet asks to keep the hearts open so that sincere hearts can rejoin overlooking the damage mind does.

“Muse Beside Me” is about the poetic inspiration. The poet says when muse comes everything becomes easy. Once the muse come the words which played mischief and which were rigid and inaccessible blooms voluntarily in poetry. With the muse beside her new luminous ideas and feelings sprouted. The muse fills her with poesy.

In “An Offered One” the poet talks about the flower which is offered to the ‘supreme gardener’. The flower which is fresh and radiated purity remains untouched in storm, fog, and sun. The onlookers pass by after stopping to look at it for a while. They can neither touch nor pluck because it is a flower which is offered to the ‘supreme gardener’, the God.

In the poem “Recurring Deposit” the poet compares love to a deposit. The poet says love is a recurring deposit which grows by giving. If spend lavishly and rightly it returns to the giver ‘magnifying itself’. In love, it is in giving that one receives.

In “Blessed Suffering” the poet says when she reached a near-death situation and doctors declared the days are numbered the poet undergoes a sort of spiritual rebirth. She considers her suffering to be blessed if that is the outcome of it.

“Read and Reveal” is a poem in which poet says that she loves poems and poetry. She laments that people do not look beyond the words to try to comprehend the real meaning or the ‘poet’s heart’. She wants to read deeply and freely and to reveal what a poet really means.

As a professor of English, R. Jayanthi has genuine socialist leanings which do not turn into mere rhetoric in her poetry. The broad range of themes in her poetry indicates her wide reading and general exposure. “Except...” is a beautiful poem in which the poet says she
hardly think of him except when she hears a tune which both of them loved or see a flower which both of them have caressed, the list goes on. In fact the poet says she hardly misses him except when she breaths. It shows that she misses him every single minute of her life.

“The Cat on the Wall” describes a nightmarish situation filled with an eerie sense of doom. It shows the human predicament where ultimately people become insensitive to the things happening around them. They had ‘lost the capacity to shed tear’ because their eyes are now glazed with indifference. In “Christmas Eve”, while the child hangs stocking with hope and joy the poet could hear only despair in the carol. She says this night cannot be a holy night because we killed Jesus and the second time even made sure that he doesn’t come back. She wonders whether it is the night he was born or the day he was killed. According to her we are sinners with blood on our hands. She doesn’t dare to think because she doesn’t dare to know.

In “Faustus’ Heirs the poet says that we are descended from Faustus. Here she talks of communal fights that are plaguing the nation. She wonders whether Islam can be defiled by a mere book. She here refers to the controversy created by Salman Rushdie’s book Satanic Verses. People fight in the name of religion for a mere excuse. She refers to the Babri Masjid and Ram Janbumi controversy. Both religions fought over a bit of land. She believes that Ram and Prophet would have been disappointed to see their heirs fight. Even Christ was disappointed when he came on Easter morning because what he saw was not his but Faustus’ heirs.

In “Sati” she says that all of us shudder at the inhuman practice of Sati. But we hardly think of the woman who is burned everyday by ‘man’s fiery ego’. Women are made to suffer injustice but nobody seems to care. The poet says the death of dreams can be equally painful and so is the unquenched passion, frustration and disillusionment that woman suffers.
According to the poet this ‘other Sati’ will go on ‘till man is man’, that is unless man changes.

In the poem “temple” the poet wonders whether the nature of man will now influence even the God. The God is now imprisoned in the temple built with corruption, greed, jealousy, fanaticism and hate. The poet asks whether such a place is a fit place for the God to dwell. The poet wonders whether the filthy minds of men would influence God.

The poem “The Singer of the Songs” shows poet’s indifference to either praise or abuse. She says praise and abuse are two ironical twins which had followed her throughout her life. She is indifferent to both. She says the design is woven by ‘Hands Unseen’ in front of whom she is nothing. She is the singer but wonders whether she is the song.

In “Monotony” the poet recalls that once she was full of hope and dreams. But the monotonous reality changed her life. The monotony of life filled with mundane works he laments has now filled her frustration. In this changing world for her nothing changes. But life goes on even though hopes and emotions are paralyzed.

In the poem “twilight Zone” the poet says she is in the twilight zone and that she is filled with contradictions. To her, the very being seems to be filled with opposites which are constantly at war. In “Just another Year” we see that the poet is not at all enthusiastic about the New Year. For her 2002 is just like any other year. New Year will come one after the other so would the troubles, she believes. People will keep on repeating their sins. So the poet says a new year is not going to change anything. Our dreams will also get torn away like the frail pages of the calendar.

In the poem “Middle Class Dreams” poet refers to the consumerism of the middle class people. Rose plants which people buy will die like everyday middle class dream but people buy it with hope and dreams. They neither want to accept or face reality. They live in an illusory world.
Maria Netto has been writing poems for the last two decades on a variety of themes. Her experience as school teacher has sensitized her to the problems faced by youngsters. Her works have appeared in a variety of women’s magazines.

In the poem “Lament of the Sleepless Eye” she says that she fails to find ‘comradeship’ in the Night. The poet wonders whether the night was made speechless too when it was rendered blind by nature. The poet fails to relate to the night and patiently waits for the dawn in the hope that it will bring her back to normalcy.

In “A Plea for Insight” the poet wonders whether every man should chart his own fate and commit the mistakes in life until it’s too late. She asks why foresight is denied to people. The poet wonders whether the soul enjoys seeing people suffer, and asks why can’t it offer at least a glimpse to the secret Master-Plan.

In “Oppressor” the poet refers to the high caste Brahmins who are very proud of their high birth. The poet says they could have been prouder if they were just too. They oppressed the poor even though they never showed retaliation. The poor would have forgotten the cruelty done to them but the poet says the mother earth will neither forgive nor forget it. Like the poor the Brahmins too will have to return to dust at that time their high birth or ascetic ways wouldn’t mean anything to mother earth.

In the poem “To a Garland Weaver” the poet asks the garland weaver not to weave since it compels her to buy them. The poet says the weaver’s fingers must be numb and the back must be aching from constant weaving. She wonders whether these garlands will bedeck some marriage bed, a politician’s neck or whether it will be used at the welcome feast or at a funeral. She asks the weaver not to weave because her fingers are numb and it compels her to buy.

In “Somalia” the poet paints the picture of a Somalian household. The place is filled with silence like a tomb. They have not had their fill. They are filled with despair at the
crying of hungry children. They look at the dying with sorrow and think that the fate is unfair. They desperately hope that they could be happy and light hearted like before.

In the poem “Dreams”, we find that the poet is able to find refuge from the harsh realities of life in her dreams. She says when dreams go nothing would remain. Dreams offer relief from mundane things. The poet says dreams have the capability to ease pain. She believes that it is dreams that help her to remain sane.

In the poem “Awareness”, the poet says silver stars and the golden grains are beautiful and it delights us forever. We do not have time to see the swallow in its flight, the singing of the nightingales and nests of sparrows. The poet says we miss on the beauty of the nature because we are too busy. We do not have time to hear the things we do not hear, or to see the things we do not see.

In the poem “From a Hospital Bed” the poet asks whether one can feel another’s pain. She says perhaps true that we can. But she wonders whether another person can really feel the same pain. The sunlight bouncing of the white antiseptic walls tell her that they have seen many like her and it reminds her that she has to travel the road of pain all alone. She is skeptical at the encouraging and the fond words of family and friends because she knows that the road of pain has to be travelled alone. It is a road where even your soul deserts you.

In “The Reluctant Poet” the poet portrays the dilemma she goes through. She asks herself whether she dares to bare her soul in her writings for all to see. Words deserts her but they keep coming back to urge her to write. She wonders whether she should just play with words, rearrange phrases or write empty words. She asks whether she should keep people guessing the meaning of her writings. Or should she be her real self and bare her heart for all to see.

In “Theme of the Mirdangam” the poet asks when Mirdangam would beat that beautiful tune. The theme of which is love. Two lovers eyes meet she weaves magic to
surrender him. When she passes with jasmine in her freshly washed tresses, his heart misses a beat and is drunk in her loveliness. Whether it is a tragedy or a love story one does not know, the Mirdangam plays on.

The poem “Shadows” tells her the fleeting nature of beauty. The poet looks at the mirror and finds the shadow of what used to be. Many a winters ago the same mirror showed a face which was vivid, beautiful, alive and sensuous. The fame and name of that face was of enviable magnitude but she never let it get into her head. Now she sighs and thinks that it was good while it lasted.

The poem “A Tribute to Working Women” depicts the scene of working women returning home after the work. They stream out of the platform their shoulders rubbing and jostling each other. In that crowd one face stands out. The poet says though they fade into oblivion they are intent on living. She calls them ‘victorious-victims’. That face is just another face to all others but not to the poet. Post says she is a bird on its wings, which is poised and is waiting at the threshold to fly. She is also a tear drop which is glistening and frozen in motion. She is waiting for eternity filled with hope.

In “Rebirth” the poet shows the pleasant and loving nature of children and the relentlessness of the grownups. The poet looks into the eyes of the six year old child and thinks of all the faults that she had committed. When she holds her loving hands, she realizes how harsh she has been. Listening to her voice the poet wishes her voice to be as musical. The actions of children make her long for innocence. The easily forgiving nature of the children makes her feel that she is too relentless. Without meaning her child makes her feel guilty. The poet wishes to be a six year old child again.

In the poem “Flame of Life”, the poet says, one comes to world from the core of the burning light, ‘an embryo aflame and alive’. One learns to iron itself out into ‘calm pastels’. When it goes it goes it leaves a life tested in life.
S. Murali started writing at a very young age, drawing suitable inspiration from his ardent enthusiasm for natural history, especially, ornithology and his exceptional talent for sketching and painting. His early poems are replete with imagery of nature: animals and birds, mountains and forests, the sea and the sky, all find their place in his work alongside the human. He loves to travel and sketch people and places. His earliest significant poem – Night Heron—appeared in Chandrabhaga, and the poet Jayanta Mahapatra noted it mainly for its singular appeal and original voice. Another longer poem Ganga also found a place in Chandrabhaga in the early eighties. From then onwards Murali’s poems have appeared in many reputed journals and periodicals. Whatever his other preoccupations he has been writing Poetry fairly regularly.


His first book of verse, Night Heron (1998) Conversations With Children (2005) his second collection, had no illustrations but was distinguished by poems featuring characters from the Mahabharata like Ekalavya, Amba, Karna, and Krishna. Earth Signs is profusely illustrated, with the poet’s line drawings adorning almost every page. The collection reveals the naturalist in Murali; it also contains three poems written in Gotha, Germany in 1998. On the forthcoming Volume: The East Facing Shop: What marks out these poems are their genuineness in feeling and form—They stand testimony to a life lived from the inside, a life struggling to be relieved of the burdens of a past and a future equally alike, a sensitive will to be uninhibited by regret, remorse and misgivings. They are definitely poems from India, but they would communicate with any sahridaya in any part of the world. They are set forth in a language free from any jargon and technical terminology. The inner and the outer aspects of human being are the territory that these experiences tread. Poems like these are ample proof
that the poetry of the world is never dead—strong feelings and emotions can still be felt deep in our inner being.


Both the poems appear under very apt title in correspondence with the theme of the respective poem. The first poem titled “The Tsunami Ghost” speaks of the author’s experience on receipt of second Tsunami warning on the 30th of December 2004, 4 days after the devastating Tsunami which had claimed millions of innocent lives in a flash of seconds.

This poem is written in prose style rather than the conventional poetic style. The author describes the panic the Tsunami warning he received on his mobile created in his mind when he was in Pondicherry University at his department. The news was that the entire town of Pondicherry had submerged into sea and the Gandhi statue on sea shore stood headless. This created an inexplicable terror in the author’s mind as his mother was left all alone at his house in the town of Pondicherry along the sea shore. He raised his two wheeler to the ever speed of 70 KM to reach the destination without any other second thought. He regained his breathe only when he found town safe from the horror of yet another tsunami. His heart was further relieved only when he saw his mother at peace in his house. The entire panic development was the follow up of the tsunami warning declared by the Government of India. The poet says, the entire panic on the 30th of December 2004 came to a stand still only when the Tsunami warning was withdrawn by the government.

The poem has been titled “The Tsunami Ghost” as the very warning itself had given the dreadful fear of another Tsunami in just 4 days as ghosts always give dreadful appearances.
His poem “To Tagore: With Due Apologies” speaks of the essential qualities or the basic characteristics of a good University. In this poem, the poet addresses Tagore his God as Tagore made hassle free higher education possible in his Shanti Niketan and prays him to make the Pondicherry University free from all prejudices.

The style and tone of this poem is very unique that each line starts with the word “Where”. Each line very directly says how a University shouldn’t be in all its sense. More than a poetry, it is a prayer for a better university without any Corruption, Intellectual harassment, partiality, non-standard publications, unhealthy competition among the faculty members, sexual harassment in the name of research and unnecessary intervention of politics, communalism, religion and University Administration into academic affairs.

The poet strongly believes that only when a University is free from all those hazards, it would be a real temple of learning as visualised by Rabindra Nath Tagore.

The poet ends the poem by seeking the blessings of Tagore to make his Pondicherry University a Real temple of Learning free from all its filthiness. This shows the poet’s quest for a clean environment for healthy academics at any cost.

With the distinguished career in academics, U.R. Anusha is seriously committed to her creative writing. She writes on a variety of social themes and one can detect strains of feminism in her literary output. In the poem “Independence and after” the poet asks the citizens what they have harvested of fifty years of independence. The horrifying sight of ‘starving eyes’ and ‘parched bellies’ still exists. The poor becomes poorer and the rich richer. The poet asks whether we can hear the heart rending cry of the children and women. The poet says corruption has entered the adder of politics. The poet asks us to think of the struggle of great men went through to gain freedom for the nation. But now men are killing men. All the violence and corruption of the present have stolen the smile the infants’ face. We do not seem to value the hard earned freedom.
The poem “The Song of a Leper” is about a leper’s lament. The leper says everyone is afraid to befriend him because they think it is contagious. They are engulfed with morbid fear and repulsion. Even the physician’s assurance that he is harmless doesn’t convince them. They fail to see that he too breathes and like them has feelings and dreams. He also longs for warmth and a kind word. He too gets hurt by unkind words. He too feels miserable to live without friends. He says if only everybody could think what they would feel if they had the disease. Perhaps they might understand his pain and won’t hesitate to be his friend.

In “The Posture of Liberty” the poet says she woke up from a drunken sleep to a naked child sprawled on the old dingy cot beside her. She appeared to sleep in liberty and content in sleep. She warns her heart not to think of liberty. But strangely enough she finds herself dreaming of life and liberty. And she recalls people have opined that she often dreams of the impossible.

In the poem “The Individual among the Crowd” the poet says the world is a ‘blind dependant’. Everybody believes a crowd but nobody supports an individual. It is always the rule of the majority. The individual’s voice does not seem to count.

In “On Death” the poet says that people always find virtue in dead people. When the person was alive yesterday they had only dad things to say about him. The moment he is dead, they praise him and scandalize another living person. This process goes on.

The poem “Cry of a Woman” is a lament of a woman who had been raped and abused by men. She questions Nature whether she is the one who is to be blamed. She wonders whether she should commit suicide or continue to survive through the brutal violence she suffers. She asks whether it is wrong to be born a woman. She says she too human and also has dreams and ambitions. She wonders how long she can take refuge in hope. She feels defeated.
In the poem “The Prostitutes Song” the prostitute says she had met many men of different background, intellect and profession. All of them had taken advantage of her. She says she had also heard of a woman, who is not a prostitute, say that she too had been taken advantage of by her family members- father, brother, husband, father-in-law, son, and brother-in-law; and also by family doctor, daughter’s counselor, the house owner and the man next door. And even by the parish priest. The men does not treat woman with respect but rather exploits them in every possible way.

The poem “The Blood Sucker” is about a mosquito and an old bedridden man. The mosquito wants to suck the old man’s blood which he violently refuses. The mosquito tells him that he is obliged to give him blood since his grand-daughter has wounded her companion, who is now between life and death. The mosquito tells the old man that contrary to what he thinks they do not find pleasure in pain. They suck blood because they are made that way. But the human beings suck each other’s blood not because they do not have any other path but because they ‘cannot think’. The mosquito says though human beings are believed to have sixth sense, they even lack common sense. The old man asks the mosquito to blame the ‘great king of paradise’. The old man finally offers his blood to save the mosquito’s precious companion. The mosquito goes back without sucking the old man’s blood. The mosquito’s companion says now he can die with a happy heart that she didn’t take the blood of such a good soul.

In the poem “To Loss” the poet says she fear getting things because she loses what she gets. At the age of three she got a doll with a stubby nose and blue eyes. A friend of hers played with it till it disappeared. At the age of seven she got a kitten. It was killed by two ruffians next door. At the age of twenty she got a man and conceived. But she suffered miscarriage and lost the man too. Now at the age of sixty she waits in the fear of losing her breath.
In the Poem “the Killer Sea”, the Poet B. Sankar addresses the Sea with sorrow. The Poet is unable to digest the unimaginable disaster created by the Sea to the mankind through Tsunami. He asks the Sea whether it has claimed the life of millions of innocent People just because we harm and kill its properties such as Fishes, Purls etc. He ends the Poem by pleading the Sea not to bring another Tsunami any more.

**Short Stories and Fictions**

Ever since the consolidation of British power at the end of the famous Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 English education took rapid strides and the climate was very conducive for a new flowering of the creative Indian genius, although Indians had, in a small way, begun already to learn English under a few institutions sponsored by the East India Company. The spread of English education had resulted in the importation of Western ideas and techniques. Needless to say that it made Indians familiar with the Western short story. Before the 19th century came to an end, the short story captivated the attention of Indian readers, and there was a fusion of the best in our past with the best in Europe's present.

The short story has been one of the most popular forms of literature produced in India during the last hundred years. The earliest short story collections by Indian writers in English appeared in London in 1885: *Realities of Indian Life: Stories Collected From the Criminal Reports of India* by Soshee Chunder Dutt and Sourindra Mohan Tagore (Naik: *The Indian English Short Story: A Representative Anthology*, 13). Following the introduction of printing and the gradual extension of literacy in the land, a considerable number of periodicals arose and thereby paved the way for the growth of the short story.

The short story form seems to be peculiarly suited to the mirroring of Indian life since the writer of it can choose any one part of life and deal with it with the attention, care and mastery which it requires. The brevity of the short story, - the comparatively less faxing
demand it makes on the time of the reader and the possibility of its including all aspects of life and society have made the short story popular among our readers of fiction.

The Indian English short story is a successfully established art by now which is fast developing with justifiable confidence and pride. As a matter of fact, the Indian English short story is in no way inferior to the short story of any other country. That the Indian English short stories can stand comparison with the best continental short stories is enough evidence not only of their thematic and technical maturity but also of the confidence with which the English language is being handled.

In Pondicherry, it was Prof. Manoj Das who rooted short stories in English. As of now, he has about 20 short story collections under fascinating titles to his credit. Following him, there are a very few like Aju Muhkopadhyay and Prof. P. Raja who have been penning short stories in English from Pondicherry More prominent in association with the style and method handled by any typical Indian English short story writer. As the short stories by these writers are wide in range, a best few among them have been critically analyzed in the following section of this chapter.

Aju Muhkopadhyay is a budding and renowned poet, scholar, essayist, critic who has penned a couple of volumes of short stories in English as well as in Bengali. His love and passion for creative writing are seen in his attempts to write in various form of literary genres such as poetry, short story, essay and fiction “The White Bird and its Black Shadow” is a collection of 15 vivid short stories, that reveals his strength, personality and skills as a short story writer. The stories are embedded with writer’s rich experiences of his daily life, at the same time they highlight the social cultural and political aspects of the contemporary Indian society in general and west Bengal in particular.

The collection of short stories, “A White Bird and Its Black Shadow”, can be interpreted, analyzed and criticized from different point of view; based on theme,
characterization, message, technique, Nature, language, and symbol. The richness of these short stories can be understood and appreciated as they open window for a wide range of criticism, discussion and analysis.

The first story of the volume entitled “A White Bird and Its Black Shadow” which is also a title of the volume, is about writer’s personal experience of the past as he recollects the days of his teen age. The writer feels that each vibrating living things desire something, and he forgets his own desire eventually. The writer also talks about fear of blindness engulfing him and separating him from the visible earthly world. This blindness can be interpreted as spiritual blindness of every individual of the world; and people usually desire for pleasure than the prayerful life.

The second short story is entitled as “My Ever Abiding Friend” as an interesting descriptive account of an object that is his ‘spectacle’ that has series of changes of the writer for years. The fear of losing eyesight prevails, but the writer reveals the fact that eyesight and spectacle have not only improve his personality but have also reached him towards success and achievements. Like shadow of the white bird, the shadow appears again, he sees shadow as his companion. Somehow both the short stories “My Ever Abiding Friend” and “A White Bird and Its Black Shadow” tell of the loneliness of the writer. Perhaps a bird of loneliness that would drive him towards meditation, and bind him with the truth, the light, The Divine.

The Next story entitled “Winter”. Appears to be the tragic activities of human beings. The story is presented in first person singular ‘I’ and plural ‘we’ again a kind of remembrance of the past. The writer causes the death of living father of the interpreter of the story. This story reminds the reader of temporary nature of earthly life the colour white is described again. Perhaps symbolizing purity and eternity of the soul.
“Blessed by the Bees” is a comic account of the life of a politician whom the author describes as VIP. It is about daily practice by the politicians and VIP’s that they appoint women as their secretaries. Though comic story is also ridicules people going mad behind the VIP’s.

“The Pride of a Woman” is perhaps the best story of the volume interpreting flights and pathos of a widow of a soldier who is assumed to be a martyr in the war with Pakistan in 1965, but escapes in the war and is led in Pakistan, Where he is converted into a Muslim and marries a Muslim girl.

The story is appealing and disturbing as Vinita Sing, an ideal Indian wife spends her entire life devoting it to the sacrifice of her husband while she breaks down at the news of her husband marrying a Muslim woman in Pakistan. Vinita Singh is presented as a bold, courageous and strong character, who is ready to face and challenge any adversary of life.

“Slavery” is a depiction of the poverty ridden rural places of contemporary fast developing India. This story reveals that in India still illegal practices of slavery prevail, when poor are unable to pay their debts either to the bank or village leaders. The story is again depicted by 1st person singular ‘I’ indicating the writer’s either personal experience or his close observance of incidents tabbing place in the society.

“A Very Happy Journey” is a story about train journey where a young boy along with his old mother decide to go to Delhi to attend a marriage ceremony of his cousin. The story is comic at a time but ridicules the corruption prevailing in the government owned public sector, especially the railways. It is also a story about hop, optimum and rightness. It focuses on the evil practices by the TTR in the train and how people bribe them in order to get their birth confirmed or how TTR demands money from the passengers.

“The Passport” is a story about a man who applies for obtaining a passport from the government in order to go abroad. Much a habitual drinker, dies and is cremated in day
when the government official brings a passport issued by the office. The story is about the mortality of human beings, as death does not wait for anything and anyone.

“The Emigrant” is a story about love relationship, and it’s fulfillment. The writer depicts the social, cultural and political happenings practices, and events. The story satirize the government for its failure in developing the state. “CHAMELEON” is a story which creates criticism for its title. In the story there is a lot of description of garden, trees, flowers and plants, and the personal account of the speaker. There is a hardly one paragraph about ‘Chameleon’ ironically the story is entitled as “Chameleon”.

However the story reveals speaker’s love for the garden, and has been interest and minute observation of the nature objects and nature.

Other stories like “A Marathon Race” caught like a thief in the night and “A Unknown Love”, are about human nature and physical relationship often considered as immoral in the society. The title “A Marathon Race” perhaps does not justify the action of the story. The story is about four school friends who as the days pass by, get settled into their lives. One girl and three boys, a group of friends finally find embarrassing and insulting; (When they come to middle age) about the kind of immoral life they lead. In their middle age. The girl who is a middle aged woman now is ready to ditch her T.B. affected husband and her daughter, develops relationship with another man. The story ends in without any solution of the problem or the immoral practices.

“Caught Like a Thief in the Night” is again departs a pleasure seeking man Duncan, above to and a bachelor, and a charmer of women. He is a womanizer, reduces many women finally caught by the police and is made to marry a woman, who projects herself being intimate with Duncan. The story can be analyzed keeping human values at the base.

“An Unknown Love” is depicts a possible incest of cousin of opposite sex. Seen by the relatives family and society as brother and sister, they cross the limit to be united and
married later. The story is disturbing as Ranabin, cousin sister, who is already married to an engineer. As she is without a child after five years of marriage. She develops an unknown emotion a kind of love towards her cousin Ranobir, and runs away with him.

“The Law of Life” describes the struggles and sufferings of individuals which occurs to them in the form of fate. Its about Parimal who seems into his friend Gopal and Parimal, also gets contaminated by leprosy and is abandoned by her husband. She constantly meets Gopal. While Gopal keeps mum about her visit to Parimal. She finally succumbs to leprosy and is cremated by Gopal.

The story is a symbolic as it speaks about the fate and sufferings which can come to any individual rich or poor young or old. The last story of the volume is “New Birth” a personal affection of the author of his journey towards embracing Light. The story raises certain question of its depiction whether it is a journey into a thick forest in search of a glowing light. Coming from somewhere or whether it is a fore thinking of writer’s own death and his body cremated amidst poll of woods. Whatever it be, the story enlightens the symbolic presentation as there will be “New Birth” often death and as per the religious belief the soul never dies it evolves and takes form of a body birth after birth.

As mentioned in the beginning these stories can be interpreted from various perspectives as themes, characterization, message, technique, nature, language and symbols. Most of the stories of the volume have been presented in first person singular that is ‘I’ indicating that the speaker of the story becomes the mouthpiece of the author. This kind of description affects or minimize the characterization of the story. For example the following stories “ New Birth”, “A Marathon Race”, “Slavery”, “ The Winter”, “ My Ever Abiding Friend”, and “ A White Bird and Its shadow”, have been written in the first person singular, limiting its characterization, and further exploration of characters in the stories. The personal experience therefore, indicates the involvement of the writer directly or indirectly in relation
with subject matter or themes of the stories. Therefore, the stories become more of personal reflection of imagination. This kind of depiction is one of the dramatic techniques employed by the writer for a required effect on the readers. Another technique used by the writer is reminiscences of the past. Most of the stories begin in the present, while the middle of the stories is depicted as the past events, or recollection of the past happenings either by the speaker or other character or the writer himself. And this recapitulation later leads to the future course of action. Most of the stories, thus, do have a beginning, middle and ending based on the present, past, and the future actions.

These stories appear to be symbolic and philosophical at a time. The symbols like, A white Bird, a Black shadow, death, fire, creation, Light, journey in the train, have been used, quite carefully and sufficiently. They may not only be symbols but can also be metaphorically used in order to convey deeper meaning. For example, the white bird symbolises the reality of life. A centre of achieving purity and perfection, the black shadow, becomes an illusion, or a world of mortality; where illusion rules while reality becomes a dream. Death is seen as a symbol of new birth, because it is not mourned or hardly mourned. Fire can be symbolized as purifier or a destructor destructing the worldly existence, and sins while purifying the sins and leading towards new life. Cremation symbolizes temporary nature of human existence, reminding us Thomas’s Gray’s philosophical line, all paths of glory leads but to the grave. Finally journey in the train symbolizes, a metaphorically interpreted as human beings their life from one end as their birth, and have to reach the other end that is death. If journey begins it has to end, whatsoever may be the case.

The languages of these stories have been clear, well-polished, uses of phrases and idioms have been the mark of the stories. In puristically, the stories have been written in a refined language, while creates interest. The depiction of minute details and keen observation
flow from the mind of the author increasingly. Through depicting Indian life style. His characters or description hardly touch the cultural influence.

The themes and managing of the stories are of daily life, straight dealing with mundane realistic social life. The subject matter of his stories is from ordinary situation for example a childhood desire, seasonal tour, garden, banks and slavery, personal details, journey in train, sickness, relationships, ambition, incest, and death etc. The stories, in other words, treat everyday life as it was, it is and as it will be. The message becomes clean that life is a journey, a journey from mortality to immortality, a journey from sins, to salvation, human beings should not mourn or regret death, but they should be happy to prepare for other life. In other words, the stories, become portrayal of social and political consciousness.

The short stories of Manoj Das, mostly in humorous frames, comment on varied aspects of life. He has stories with hardcore realism, stories of psychological import, satires in the garb of folktales as well as man's encounter with supra or infra human elements.

A poet at heart Manoj Das combines the old art of storytelling with modern ideas and techniques. He is one of those few writers who can express in simple language issues of considerable importance while entertaining us: while making us laugh or cry, happy or sad/His targets are often the pompous politicians and pretentious pundits. As a social critic he uses the short story form to depict the passions and foibles of man as they surface in different circumstances. As one who understands human psychology Manoj Das makes some very observant comments, achieving this in a sympathetic way. The reader also develops insights into several typical Indian situations, a process in which the author helps him unobtrusively and unprejudicedly.

Manoj Das story might contain fantasy, humor, nostalgia, satire and irony all at once. The method he adapts goes back to the oral tradition. It would be more appropriate to call Manoj
Das a teller of stories than a writer of stories. Young and old are charmed by his style, for;
besides an extensive knowledge of adult human nature he shows a convincing study of the
psychology of children and adolescents.

Many found in him a significant story teller who while giving an authentic portrayal of
the Iridian scene, presents his characters in an entirely credible frame. His ability to stimulate
in his readers the age-old urge to enjoy a story, is a major factor in his popularity. These are
tributes of quality which merit recognition. Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the doyen of Indo-
Anglian literary criticism, brackets Manoj Das as a writer of short stories with Tagore and
Premchand. A British poet and critic, A. Russell, while reviewing The Vengeance and Other
Stories, admits that

There is little doubt that Manoj Das is a great story-teller of the sub-continent and he has
too few peers, no matter what yardstick is applied to measure his ability as an artist... He
shows how powerfully all artifices of story telling can be used to write a story in realist genre
without any attempt at being faithful to the photographic details of facts. His world has the
fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height of
sublimity can be courted by the depth of the fictive. He proves that the reality is richer than
what realists conceived it to be (Poetry Times 12.2., 135: 1987).

From Realism to Sublime, everything is vivid through Manoj Das’s short stories

I was born in a village, born just before independence and hence living through the
transition at an impressionable age, I could present through English a chunk of genuine
India. Well, right or wrong, one is entitled to one's faith in oneself,” said Manoj Das in
an interview given to “The Times of India” (May 18, 1980).

India, of course, is like the proverbial elephant experienced by half a dozen blind
seekers, one feeling its tail and describing it as a rope, another passing his hand on its flank
and describing it as a soft mountain and yet another hugging one of its legs and giving it out
as a pillar, Manoj Das admits. But like the elephant who has certain characteristics that are
different from those of a tiger or of a monkey he believes that India has her specific
characteristics too and an Indian writer, when guided by his spontaneous inspiration, is bound
to breathe the Indian spirit into his writing.

In the earlier stories of Manoj Das one can observe an undertone of typical Indian
mysticism pervading the theme, but never showing in the contours of the plot, invariably
allowing the reader a range of possibilities from which to formulate his impression and
conclusion. An example is “Sita’s Marriage”. Through an amusing but totally credible chain
of events a little girl named Sita leads herself to believe that she had been married to Rama.
Her loving parents laugh at her hallucination. Juxtaposed with her silent drama of dreams is a
drum-beating drama of real marriage - that of a wealthy neighbour's daughter, Vasanti. When
the news of Vasanti's suicide reaches them, Sita's stare seems to put this challenging question
to her parents: which marriage was real - hers or Vasanti's? But the story ends a few lines
thereafter - in what seems to be a matter-of-fact reporting by an unsuspecting narrator - to the
effect that he had just received the news of Sita's death after a few days of suffering from
fever at a time when her parents were trying to marry her off. Any day can be the day of
death for any one and no extraordinary disease or situation is necessary for that. But Sita's
quiet death assumes a significance in the context of the mystic faith that certain souls
dedicated to the Divine would decide to depart when their inner life is threatened by external
circumstances.

Another example of (Manoj Das's earlier stories where mysticism and plain mystery
urged in a twilight zone is “Farewell to a Ghost”.

But Mystery and mysticism do not exhaust the scope of Indian sensibility in Manoj Das's
stories, a different aspect of which is revealed by “Mystery of the Missing Cap”. The early
post-Independence India is the setting. An Honourable Minister on his visit to a village loses
his cap. His host announces in a public meeting that the cap had been stolen by an ardent devotee of the minister who desired to treasure it as a momento. All are happy. muses the minister in ecstasy,

The way the things are moving, ha, ha! I'm afraid, ha, ha! people would start snatching away my clothes, ha, ha! and ha, ha! I may have to go about, ha, ha! naked.

I don't mind, ha, ha! That's the price of love, ha, ha!” (CL 31)

But the climax comes when the thief, who is none other than a half-tamed monkey, springs up before the minister and in a show of affability returns the cap.

While the climax itself was stunning enough, again the last few lines of the story leave the reader in a reflection: the minister and his ambitious host both soon drifted away from politics. The narrator says, “I strongly feel that it was this episode of the cap that changed the course of their lives,” (CL 33)

The reasons for this have been strewn over the story unobtrusively. The host, an honest villager who had perhaps never spoken a lie, was obliged to speak one before thousands. He had nursed an ambition to become a legislator, but his ambition did not survive the shock. Similarly the shock of disillusionment proved too much for the minister.

The story is a socio-psychological comment on the clash between the traditional values and the demands of the franchise-based politics, in the lives of some people. It reminds us of “The Only American From Our Village” by Arun Joshi, a contemporary of Manoj Das. In Arun Joshi’s short story, Dr. Khanna who has become a celebrity as a professor at an American University, has ignored his father, an “old fool” dreaming of receiving an air ticket from his worthy son for a trip to the States. But the ticket never comes. He dies a frustrated man. Years later the professor visits his native place along with his American wife and learns all about his father’s last days from an old man. Back in the States he shows signs of slight mental derangement. His father, in a bit of anguish over his son’s behavior, had discarded his
shoes and had his feet scorched by hot sands. Dr. Khanna begins to stare at his own feet and keeps doing so for hours at a stretch.

There is nothing common between the two plots, yet a subtle knowledge links them. Prof. Khanna’s *Swadharma* and *Samskara* have not died down despite his Westernization, just as in the “Mystery of the Missing Cap” the demands of a new pattern of politics have not been able to alter the inner mind of Moharana. In an interview given to the *Sun Times* Manoj Das said,

Our liberation from the prevailing gloom does not depend on any alternative ‘system’, but in exercising our potential capacity to rise above our propensity for hypocrisy and fear of our own conscience which makes us cowards before ourselves. (April 4, 1989)

A story like “Mystery of the Missing Cap” portrays on one hand a funny, farcical situation that can arise when a good man forgets his *swadharma* and takes recourse to a lie. In his tears and the tears of the Minister (whose ego had been temporarily inflated) and in the fact that both the characters were soon forgotten politically, we see the signs of their redemption.

Very few stories in Modern Indo-Anglian fiction have so successfully tackled this subtle theme as these two stories of Manoj Das and Arun Joshi respectively. The penance of Khanna in Arun Joshi’s story goes like this: “To a psychiatrist Dr. Khanna has confided that he has periods of great burning in his feet. He has further indicated that he thinks he has been cursed. Dr. Khanna’s output of research since he came back has been zero. He has generally come to be known as the man who does nothing but stare at his feet”. In the “Mystery of the Missing Cap”;

Shri Moharana’s political endeavour is not known to have gone any farther. And it is strange that the Hon'ble Minister, Babu Virkishore, who was willing to be robbed of
his clothes was soon forgotten in politics. I have a strong feeling that it was this episode of the cap that changed the courses of their lives (SVOS 77).

While these few examples give a clue to the appreciation of Manoj Das’s later fiction, one may find his canvas suddenly enlarging to embrace a number of forces at play in a setting of transition, again typically Indian, in A Tiger at Twilight. The physical backdrop this time is not an average village, but a valley.

With an extensive forest to its west and a river to its east, its location was enchanting. A rocky road meandered through a myriad barren rocks and tribal villages for fifty kilometres or so, linking our valley, Nijanpur, with the headquarters of the district, Samargarh” (TT: 2).

The place had been the summer resort of the Raja of Samargarh. Their attraction for the place was chiefly due to the situation of an ancient deity in a corner of the valley to whom generations of their ancestors sacrificed a son each, and later, at least a commoner’s son adopted for the purpose. The last Raja of Samargarh left for some unknown destination after the merger of feudatory states within the union of India.

The story opens after a storm:

For three long days and nights our lonely little valley was tossed by a violent gale that seemed to threaten its very existence. The frequent claps of thunder that echoed in the surrounding hills, seemed to be playing hide and seek; sometimes they made such a terrible noise that I plugged my ears and shut my eyes and imagined myself trapped in a desolate and dreary wasteland, its last blade of grass licked away by thunderbolts. At relatively sober times, the rumbling of the thunder was like the anxious cries of a brood of lion-cubs lost in the hills, yearning for its mother” (TT: 1).
At last when sunlight breaks out late afternoon, the sun looking “so weak as if one could just blow it out”, the narrator discovers two important things having taken place during those uncanny days: A man-eater had dared into the valley and the Raja of Samargarh was back there after twenty years.

An absorbing and event-packed drama develops on these two intertwined events. The Raja is out to kill the tiger - which is found to be a tigress - but in the process he demolishes the political career of a gentleman who had been in the days of the Raj, vociferous against the system. But the Raja’s reappearance brings a lot of strange developments in its trail. He has with him Heera who, “was the subject of many a rumor, some juicy and some fearfully weird” (TT: 3)

Who was she? Our Raja's father, on a visit abroad, had acquired a mistress who had just ceased to be a European nobleman's consort. The Raja, if he was in a good mood, said that he had married her. The truth remained a mystery. However, she remained in the Raja's bungalow in a distant city and was never seen at Samargarh. Heera, born to her in undue haste, was declared to be the old Raja's daughter, though nobody took her official genesis seriously.

After the old Raja passed away, it became evident that Heera was exercising an ever greater influence on his son and heir, older than her by ten years” (TT: 3).

Heera is an enigmatic influence on the prince (now Raja) even now and what is more, she keeps the Raja's only child, a daughter (the Rani is no more) under her spell, convincing her that she would live but to her care.

Soon to be drawn into the circle of her spell is an orthodox pundit who undergoes a metamorphosis under the delusion that she loves him. It is a pathetic situation and at last jolted off his delusion, he tarries behind the Raja's old villa to return her gifts to Heera when the man-eater grabs him.
The narrator, the scion of a bankrupt feudal family, has many reasons to fear and hate Heera. But he could not have anticipated the situation into which she - and himself too - were thrown. He had just climbed to examine a machan on which the Raja and himself were to wait at night for the man-eater. Heera happens to come to the spot:

I do not know how long I sat sealed in a state of vacuity. I woke up with a terrific jolt. It must have taken me a second or two to realise that what disturbed my peace was a shrill human cry. But I could not trace its origin instantly. Perhaps my sudden shock, together with the dusk, blinded me for another second. Then I discerned the figure of Heera, standing alone, petrified and staring at something in a dazed manner.

I followed her gaze and saw a giant beast facing her - perhaps it was the tigress we awaited. They seemed transfixed by each other.

I forced my gun into position. The man-eater roared and Heera gave a blood-curdling shriek - simultaneously. The shuddering impact of the sound shook me and I was sucked into a state that will ever defy my attempt at describing it. It must have been a combination of utter bafflement and stupefaction - though it could not have lasted more than a lightning movement - and in that time I could not distinguish between Heera and the beast. Looking at Heera I wondered if she was not the tigress and looking at the tigress I wondered if she was not Heera.

It was dreadful; the sensation was simply maddening. I felt like dashing my head against the tree. I thought I wept blood. But I could not know the human from the beast. I do not trust the accuracy of my vision or my memory of that moment, but I think I saw them springing on each other with equal frenzy and fury. At once my power of discrimination was restored. I shot, aiming at the beast, before I fell into a dead faint (TT: 119).
The Raja who believes that he had discovered a buried treasure in a steel trunk finds it to contain a human skeleton.

It could have been the remains of a rebel punished by an ancestor of the Raja, or the remains of country lass who had inspired the passions of a prince but had endangered his honor. The victim had wreaked its vengeance on the last of the Rajas. (TT: 125).

The story may be the only document in Indian English fiction of an aspect of Indian life in transition. Hailing from Orissa which had more than twenty feudal states of an exclusive kind, some of them marked by the sort of places described in the work, the author evidently had an intimate knowledge of them. He says in the introductory note to the novel which appeared in a slightly abridged version in the inaugural issue of The Heritage (Jan. 1985), a cultural monthly he edited:

There are times and times. Sometimes even a century appears to have meant so little in terms of change. Sometimes a decade might change a tradition or a habit or an attitude that had prevailed for centuries.

The typical Indian feudal world has vanished. The contours of their settings too have rapidly changed. Many readers may find the characters, situations and the settings of “A Tiger at Twilight” strange. But they are not fictitious. Of course, in no work of fiction, the factual realism is the sole realism.

It will be obvious to any reader that the author has transcended factual realism. One feels in the narration the author’s deeper understandings of, or faith in, different levels of karma, the play of occult forces in human life and the knowledge or unpredictable developments confronting and baffling us. But all this will perhaps not fall into line but for the author’s faith in the role of a transcendent element in life. The novel ends on a subtle and sweet note of hope, on a touch of grace as if, when the Raja’s daughter, Balika, the silent
character in the work, believed to be a paralytic, walks into a sunny meadow. The narrator says,

Balika was in a light blue sari. In my heart, frozen by the recent events, her image shone like a bluish flame. I felt a delightful thaw set in” (TT: 132)

Manoj Das may be a prolific writer when it comes to his features (his weekly column “The Banyan Tree”, now discontinued, was a favorite with the academic section of the readership of the *Hindustan Times* and his editorials and articles in the *Heritage*, but now he does not write more than two or three stories in a year. *A Tiger at Twilight* is undoubtedly his most important contribution during the period in focus. But it will be an unjust to his short stories of the period unless at least one of them is mentioned. “The Submerged Valley”. is a good example of character portrayal. We meet an assortment of people visiting a rock and a temple. Once the centre of a village, but since submerged in a dam and temporarily visible as the water level goes down in summer. Among them is Abolkara (literally, disobedient), a half crazy egotist who claims that he had been always there, in a mysterious way. Soon all the visitors leave in their boats as the water-level begins to rise. The narrator's father, an engineer, had a tough time in persuading Abolkara to leave. He fails and returns with his family in his motorboat to the bungalow on the bank and goes over to attend a meeting.

The narrator, his younger sister (both children) and their mother are pensive when, at midnight, the engineer comes home with a guest, none other than Abolkara. At midnight he had sailed all alone to fetch the lone visitor on the rock, only the tip of which still remained above the water.

While in Abolkara we meet an unforgettable crackpot pampered by loving villagers, in the engineer we see a stern man on the surface revealing his tender inner self, at the end, through a subdued dialogue between his two children:

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Father is wonderful, isn’t he?” she whispered to me. “Fool, how long you take to realise things that are obvious!” I quipped and, imitating father’s stern style, said ‘Little one, will you now go to bed?’ (SVOS: 11).

The mother too, throughout silent, has a sweet impact on the reader. Brief descriptions at the right place achieve this. For example, on their way to the rock, the narrator observes: And mother - she sat absorbed in her thoughts, her cheek resting on her hand. The clouds, the sombre lake, and her deep eyes meant one serene experience for me (SVOS: 6).

By the time one has finished reading the story, one is reminded of Yudhisthira’s statement before Dharma that mother was greater than the earth and father greater than heavens. And this happens without word of a didactic nature uttered by the author. With precision Manoj Das creates the authentic rural atmosphere. In “The Submerged Valley”, where the atmosphere contributes to the effect of the story to the maximum, we find an excellent fusion of the environment and the character in the inaugural passage:

We became conscious of our village the day our headmaster asked the students of class three to write an essay on the topic. So far we had taken the village for granted - like our breathing or our mother's love. But there after the elements that made the village - the trees, the pools, the Shiva temple and the hillock adjacent to it - had begun to look significant.

Our village had several other aspects to it. A lame crow perched on a crumbling stone-arch of the temple and it cawed on in an abnormal and ominous tone. Nobody ever dared to disturb it. A certain member of the Harijan community looked all white because of congenital vitiligo. His fond grand-parents had christened him Sahib. From some mysterious source he had secured a cork topee the white men in India used. He visited the weekly market sporting the topee and invoked in the throng something of the awe that was due to the real Sahibs.
The trees that stood in front of our school were as human to us as the wandering bull of Lord Shiva. One of the trees looked as if it knelt down in meditation. Two more were never tired of chattering between them. If the teacher had scolded or thrashed us, they seemed to be sympathizing with us. At the approach of the vacation they seemed to be talking of the many sweet moments that were in store for us.

Last but not the least, there was an insane woman who lived on the hillock behind the temple. She had for her pets a mad dog and a mad cat. Whatever be the standard applied to measure the states of mind of the woman and her dog, it was intriguing how our people had become so sure of the lunacy of the cat. But before I was of age, all the three had died. The woman had left behind a son, crazy and no less arrogant. He chose a house a day and planted himself in its courtyards, refusing to budge until fed to his content. Somehow he had learnt to claim that jackals and ravens talked to him. His incoherent speech and enigmatic hints added a pinch of weirdness to his personality. And that was to his profit (SVOS: 1-2).

Only some aspects of the Indian sensibility in the fiction of Manoj Das has been presented so far. While his technique of handling the Indian idiom in English can establish an immediate rapport with the Indian reader who finds in it a certain familiarity, it gives an added flavor for the non-Indian reader. This observation is particularly applicable to his stories, which, for their primary plot, is dependent on some of the ancient tales, but of course the author handles them with a different intention. Even in his non-satirical and realistic stories, we find the statements concerning places and characters quite non-involved and straight which perhaps is the result of the influence of the popular Sanskrit classics - as the author himself admits:
The heritage of Indian fiction - the great yarn-spinners of yore like Vishnu Sarma and Somadeva - constitute the influence of which I am conscious” (The Times of India, May 18, 1980).

According to the Statesman:

His stories leave a refreshing impression on the mind of the reader because of the indisputable power Das has over the English language. It is, indeed, his forte and instead of using the familiar, imported phrases and idioms, he plays about with the language, picking words and using them in fresh connotation to build imagery suitable to the Indian background. (June 2, 1989)

Some of the stories of Manoj Das included in Fables and Fantasies for Adults were continuation of the fables of the Panchatantra in a satirical vein, to focus on the labyrinths of human mind in the light of psychology and politics as they have since grown. But the influence of the story-tellers of India has spread into the fibres of his stories, occasionally perceptible but generally imperceptible.

His collection “The Submerged Valley” and “Other Stories” is noted for a happy combination of two elements. The Indian realism embracing the imagery and idiom through which the situation or characters come out best and the appeal of the stories which easily transcends any frame of geography or time.

The greatest gift he seems to have imbibed from the tradition is the subtle and natural art of mingling natural with supernatural and men with animals. Just as the supernatural suggestions in his stories (like the ghost in “Farewell to a Ghost”) can always be explained away in physical terms, so also the conduct of the animals appears realistic, except, of course, in fantasies where he intends to be allegorical or didactic.

Let us examine the shortest story in the collection “Bhola Grandpa and the Tiger” - the portrait of a rustic who has a knack for forgetting things. One evening in the forests of
Sundarbans he finds himself face to face with a tiger. Grandpa swiftly climbs a banyan tree and the tiger took position under it. The night passed. Early in the morning grandpa climbed down the tree and went to a nearby hamlet and asked a tribal for a little fire to light his bidi.

“What is your secret, Sir, that you walked past that hungry beast and it just gasped at you and did nothing else?” (SVOS: 16) asked the bewildered tribal. Only then did Grandpa realize that he had forgotten all about the tiger. He looked and saw the beast “stretching its limbs and yawning and preparing to leave” (SVOS: 16) in utter disgust. Half a century later when grandpa died at ninety-five the most original lament came from his wife: “The old man must have forgotten to breathe” (SVOS: 16).

The forgetful grandpa while calmly walking by the tiger must have proved too perplexing to the beast to let it act. But the tiger here instantly becomes a descendant of tigers of Indian folklore - never characteristically cruel or violent, always liable to be outwitted. The charm in the situation in this story is, grandpa has outwitted it unwittingly.

Manoj Das's process of humanizing the non-human extends to nature, not in the pantheistic sense, but again in keeping with the innocent folk way of taking the presence of life in the elements of nature for granted. Here is an example from his "Friends and Strangers":

From the tree-tops a gust of absolutely naughty breeze swooped down under Pramath's head and rumpled and rummaged his well-groomed hair. And there were lesser flurries around to smuggle away into the bushes half of the words from his answer (SVOS: 110).

This attitude of an innate affection for aspects of nature finds a different expression in another story entitled “The Love Letter” when the setting is a town and the protagonist who views the object has a sophisticated mind:
Over that cosy little town in the Northern valley the moon looked like a municipal property -as though all that was necessary to shift it to another place or switch it off was a resolution passed by the city-fathers” (SVOS: 153).

One of the techniques of the ancients that Manoj Das employs is knitting a story into a story. In “The Tree” we thus read the undying legend of a king who had tried to cut down the primeval tree and consequently going to be destroyed himself, the other good old technique concerns the beginning of a story, each story has a direct beginning, related to the main thrust of the story, almost like Asti Godavari teere visala shalmali taru of the panchatantra. It is remarkable that not even one of his stories begins on a note which betrays a conscious effort at creating novelty. No story of his so far has opened with a dialogue, the only exception being “Statue Breakers are Coming”. It seems he voids any deliberate effort to hook the reader's attention with some kind of dramatic beginning. Many of his stories begin with comment on space or time that matters. For example:

“Miles and miles of marshland and sandy tracks; but nothing could disturb the calm quest of Dr. Batstone, the distinguished sociologist from the West” (SVOS: 17).
“Bhola grandpa and his wife lived at the Western end of our-village” (SVOS 12).
“That April a highly exaggerated spring had burst upon our valley. In and around our small town most of the trees had overdone themselves in burgeoning and, consequently, looked dumbfounded” (SVOS 28).
“It was on moonlit nights that the deserted villa looked particularly fascinating” (SVOS 78).

In a provincial town of the third decade of this century dogs still barked at motor cars and spectators sat for hours gaping at silent movies and signs of love were quite different from what they became later” (SVOS: 114).
Stories in which a particular character is of supreme importance, the beginnings refer to thoughts or actions of the characters which establish their states of mind.

At times the one appeared so big and so close to Asnok's balcony that he thought he could follow it and even reach it in a few bounds and take hands with it. *(SVOS: 37).*

Here the mind of an old man who spends his time between amnesia and nostalgia or innocently dreaming and dozing, finds a suitable introduction.

A similar introduction apparently amusing but helping the reader a great deal in appreciating the developments that follow, is:

It had been a fond habit with Mukund, the teacher of history and sometimes of geography, to offer his smiles to the tall, the burly and the brawny, in the way of greeting them. He did not do it just as a safety measure, weak and lean though he was. “These stalwarts roaming up and down the earth could cause a fat lot of trouble to the already harassed humanity if they so pleased. But how innocently they move about! Don’t they deserve a show of gratitude?” This was his thought. In fact he thought on behalf of humanity *(SVOS: 90).*

Even though such beginnings steer clear of deliberate efforts to arouse suspense, it cannot be said that they do not arouse sufficient interest. In a very subtle way, the expectation or curiosity is aroused in the reader and this is the author achieves while making the beginning an integral part of the theme.

A truly creative writer absorbs the influence of those for whom he has loving respect - *Shraddha* - in such a way that the influence does not become obvious. To the discerning reader it comes like a vast backdrop. The reader feels that the author’s credibility rests on a strong foundation. Often brief observations by the author, made at the right place, build up this trust in the reader. Numerous such observations remain scattered in the short stories of
Manoj Das, convincing the reader of his thorough comprehension of the situations and characters he is projecting. Here is an example from “The Tree”.

Right from the time the season was on the brink of the monsoon the village elders had begun to look grave. The sinister cloud formation on the mountains several miles away, and a wide ring of uncanny aura around the moon had informed them that there were terrible days ahead (SVOS: 46).

Here is another from “Farewell to a Ghost”. In a meeting of the villagers on a painful topic a certain view expressed by an elder has brought a spell of silence. “Then a lizard tick-ticked and two or three people muttered, “True, true” (SVOS: 85). In yet another story “The Crocodile’s Lady”, a sahib goes out with the narrator to interview an old lady, at night.

I led the way with a torch. The professor stumbled twice, first against the mildly protesting dog and then against a tortoise out for a nocturnal meander” (CL 41).

An hour or two (and a few pages in the story) later, they are returning to their lodge. Although many may not absorb the small change in the situation, it is an example of faithfulness to realism on the author’s part: “We walked silently. The professor stumbled against the same dog which did not protest any more and perhaps the same tortoise now on its way back to the river” (CL 45).

While native imagery is a marked trait in his stories, he is extremely cautious in using the Indian idiom, style of speech or proverb in their translation. He uses it only in dialogues and only if it is indispensable to reveal the character. Here is a typical example from “The Crocodile's Lady”.

Will you believe, Sahib, he was my cousin, my very own father's own maternal uncle's own son-in-law's own nephew? And hadn't I done everything for him from sharing my own pillow with him to doing half the shopping for the marriage? Yet who does not know that when he died - this treacherous brother-in-law - of all the millions and billions of people of
my village - his ghost chose to harass me? Who does not know that for a whole year, till his annual Shraddha fully satisfied him - and for your information I was obliged to share half the expenses - I never stepped out of my house at night even at the most acute call of nature? Who does not know about all this?

No, Sahib, you are, after all, a foreigner. You are not familiar with the ghosts of this land. You should not trust them. If they get a chance they twist the necks of even those occultists who can take them.

It cannot of course be said that there are no good-natured ghosts. As a boy I saw the illustrious Mahatma Languly Baba. Yes, I saw with these very eyes. Will you kindly, Baboo, explain to the Sahib that the Baba was stark naked? I saw him when he was 300 years old.

Isn’t the history of his birth and life most amazing? There was once plague in the land and the Mahatma's mother was believed to have died and so was thrown on the burial ground as people had no patience to burn or bury with so much dying everyday. And what happened? The Mahatma was born there and howled for one full day and one full night till he was picked up by a couple of vagrants. Tell me, who protected the Mahatma for twenty four hours? Jackals and dogs and vultures and ravens, all were there, but all sat twelve yards away, watching the Mahatma in silent awe. They could not come near him. Tell me who threw an invisible cordon around the infant Mahatma?

One of our prominent villagers threw this question like a challenge to the wide world while inching near the professor, and promptly provided the answer himself. Evidently a committee of enlightened ghosts. Did Languly Baba ever care to talk to human beings or did he care to wear clothes? No, never! If at all he talked, it was with the invisibles around him.

‘And, Sahib, isn’t the question of believing in God or not quite absurd? Is God a money-lender or pawn-broker that the question of trust could arise?...’ (CL: 36-38).
In the same story, the narrator uses the phrase ‘seven seas’ a typical Indian fairytale idiom to denote remoteness only when he is talking to the old lady:

Look, Granny, here is a sahib, not a native baboo, mind you, but a genuine sahib who has come from beyond the seven seas. (CL: 42).

Manoj Das has been compared, as a short story writer, to Hardy, Saki and O. Henry. This is misleading; he is like no one but Manoj Das. Indeed it would be a serious defect if he wrote like an Englishman or an American.

As Srinivasa Iyengar, the historian of Indo-Anglian writing has said, for an Indian writer to succeed in English: “What is written has to be recognisably Indian to the Indian reader and recognisably English to the English reader”. One of the delights of Manoj Das's writing is that he has not been trained to write like Charles Lamb or George Eliot, but writes spontaneous English quite free from imported literary idioms. And he writes as an Indian indeed, with a wholly Indian view of things, from an Indian background.

One of the intriguing qualities of his English writing is the lack of cliches - the totally unexpected use of words and their collocation, arising perhaps from the exact and fresh description of his visual imagining of Indian situations and agents, of a kind that an English writer would not have Seen. For example, what he says about the Sundarbans in “Bhola Grandpa and the Tiger”.

Powerfully he moulds language and form to serve the needs of his tale, for primarily Manoj Das is a storyteller, a yarn-spinner, and he knows, may be from his experience with children, how to hold one’s attention, never digressing, and never tiring one with too much description - just giving one enough to help one picture the scene of the action, as, for example, (in the vivid evocation of the villa in “Farewell to a Ghost”) or the hut lived in by the crocodile’s lady (vii-viii).
India became free. It took to a Western pattern of democracy. While there is no
gainsaying the fact that it is a sound ideology, it must also be admitted that the Indians were
hardly ready to adjust themselves to the pattern.

Over the vast country thousands of leaders must emerge. Each one of them must
impress upon the people that he and he alone was eligible to lead them.

Perhaps in no other short story in Indo-Anglian literature has this peculiar demand of the
situation been so artistically and convincingly portrayed as in Manoj Das’s “Mystery of the
Missing Cap”.

As is well-known, the ancient land of India has had four major castes since time
immemorial. But during the days immediately preceding independence a new caste
was emerging all over the country - that of patriots. The 15th of August 1947 gave a
big boost to their growth. In almost every village, besides the Brahmins, Kshatriyas,
Vaisyas and Sudras, a couple of patriots came into being (SVOS: 66-67).

This was the climate in which Shri Moharana, a happy villager was fired with the
ambition to become an M.L.A. His well-wishers planned to launch him to politics through a
reception given to the Hon'ble Minister of Fishery and Fine Arts. To put it in the words of the
narrator.

In those days, a minister’s daily life was largely made up of speech-making at public
receptions. Shri Moharana’s huge ancestral cane chair was laid with a linen cover, upon
which the best village seamstress had laced a pair of herons with two big fish in their beaks.
For a fortnight every day the children of the lower primary school devoted the afternoon to
the practice of the welcome song. Among the many strange phenomena wrought by the great
spirit of the time was the composition of this song: for the composer, the head-pundit of the
school had lived sixty-seven years - without any poetic activity. The refrain of the song still
raises echoes in me. Its literal translations would be:
O mighty minister, tell us, do tell us, How do you nurse this long and broad universe!

(SVOS: 68-69).

Things seemed to go smoothly until it was found that the visiting minister's white cap was missing. A crisis dawned in that remote village. He prophesied,

Mysterious, mysterious! repeated the Public Relations Officer. “I fear, it may have devastating effects on the politics of our country,” (SVOS: 72)

The child who knew the mystery of the missing cap passed it on to Shri Moharana, in confidence. But Shri Moharana could not divulge the bare fact. He told the agitated minister that a noble soul, an ardent admirer of the minister, had taken the cap away to retain it as a sacred memento and, in return, had donated one hundred and one rupees for the minister’s charity fund. It was announced in the mammoth public meeting to prolonged applause. But just before the minister's departure, the crude truth revealed. The cap had been stolen by a half domesticated monkey, who most genially restored it to its owner.

Shri Moharana's political ambition did not go any farther. The minister too was forgotten soon. “I strongly feel that it was the episode of the cap that changed the course of their lives,” (SVOS: 77) concludes the narrator who, as a child, was a witness to the incident.

Shri Moharana had never spoken a lie. But when, under a compelling situation, he had to depart from his truthfulness, he had to do so before several thousand people. His nature could not stand this unexpected demand. The best he could do was to refrain from proceeding any farther in politics, if he were to remain close to his Swadharma. Similar demands, no doubt, would have obliged many others, the more ambitious ones, to smoothen their Swadharma and continue in politics.

The minister, who for a while lived in the fool's paradise of his growing popularity, received the shock of his life. But he too, as a living soul, must have grown within through this episode of disillusionment.
Disillusionment, indeed, is a cardinal force in the stories of Manoj Das. But his handling of this element is original and purposeful. Through disillusionment his characters grow. An example is “A Night in the Life of a Mayor”.

The Mayor is quite proud of his achievement in life. He laughs at his old professor, who (also a member of the corporation council) is upset over a stray cow chewing up his grand daughter’s psychology note-books.

The same evening the mayor was having a dip in the river at a lonely spot leaving his trouser and his shirt on the bank. In the water he was obliged to take off his underwear too and it slipped off his hand. Imagine his predicament when, crawling ashore, he finds the notorious cow moving away, his half-eaten clothes still clinging to its mouth.

His open car on the bank soon rouses suspicion in some passing officers. The police arrive. The naked mayor lets himself be drifted away resting on a small canoe. He had not been alone for a long time. Under the starry sky he has a dialogue with himself. At dawn a little girl comes to his rescue by sacrificing her soiled frock for him and then, upon learning that he was a ‘big man’, by fetching a towel for him.

Back in his town, the first thing the mayor does is to apologise to his professor. He had realized to what helplessness one could be reduced any moment. “I believe, I earned my adulthood last night,” (DHOS: 62) he says.

Manoj Das evidently believes in the continuity of life. The psychic growth one experiences in life can perhaps go with him to his next incarnation. In some of his characters we see this point of growth arriving at the last moment. In “Birds at Twilight” Kumar Tukan Roy, an illegitimate son of a Raja Sahib and a bachelor has been accustomed to leading a care-free life. Even when times have changed with the fall of the feudal system, he has apparently not changed. He shoots down birds and there is a friend to cook them for him.
One evening, as he is about to pull his trigger, the bird aimed at flies away. Instead of feeling disappointed, Roy runs pacing with its flight along the valley, propelled by a queer sort of joy. He soon finds it great fun to make covey after covey of birds fly.

At night he frees the solitary tiger, the last member of a small zoo, the late Raja Sahib has founded. In a bid to teach the reluctant tiger how to run, he runs along with it, giving it a lead till both enter the forest.

They are followed by a party of officials who think that Roy was being chased by the tiger. The two found locked together and the tiger is shot down, but Roy too, is no more - though without a scratch on his body.

The thrill Roy was experiencing at the flight of birds was only a sign of his soul’s readiness to fly into a new horizon- through making the tiger test its freedom. Such poignant moments in life - and the changes they mean - are strictly personal. Others, however sympathetic, are not likely to understand them just as the officials fail to understand why Roy died.

How one grows almost mad when this touch of freedom comes, is the theme of “The Kite”.

Kunja is a prisoner, but a most obedient one. A master kite-flyer in his childhood, he grows nostalgic at the sight of a kite hanging on a tree-top, while being led with the fellow-prisoners from one place to another. In his mind the process of recollecting the days gone by are gathering momentum when suddenly a gust of wind releases the suspended kite and it is swept towards the horizon.

Kunja reaches the sea. The kite perhaps has set over it. He jumps over the waves. “He was beginning to fly, he couldn’t” (CL: 119).

The police jeep stopped at the brink of the hour. Two perplexed fishermen pointed their fingers showing the direction the prisoner had gone.
There were clouds and lightnings in the horizon. The narrator observes:

Suddenly the jailor and the superintendent of police began to feel small for no reason whatever. As though the lightning and the thunder and the laughter of the wind and the sea's roar were the kith and kin of Kunja who gave them the slip—they felt. (CL: 119).

The community's failure to appreciate the subtle workings of an individual consciousness is shown most pointedly in an unforgettable story “Lakshmi’s Adventure”.

A little girl creeps into a shrine and pours out her problems before the deity. The problems range from if God cannot hear prayers properly unless they are sent up through microphones, to her grappling with arithmetic. Engrossed, she feels as if the deity too is talking to her and asking her to take away a pair of bananas offered to him.

As the little one is leaving with the bananas, the priest who was lying asleep wakes up. He gives her a chase taking her to be a thief. Others join in the chase. The terrified girl, in a daze, enters a pond. Her father wades his way through the crowd and leads her away, after the two bananas are recovered by the authorities.

Down with a fever, the girl dies. Her death is interpreted by the people as the consequence of her stealing from their deity, whereas the truth is quite different. Her soul has left the body because of too unworthy an environment.

But the priest is shown to be realizing his error at raising a hasty scare. He mumbles: “God! Next time let this sinner be born without a tongue!” (DHOS: 77).

The flashes of soul are not always revealed through such radical turns in the lives of the characters. There can be sublime moments, gestures, and dreams that bear the stamp of something more in man than the mind. In “A Letter from the Last Spring”, we meet another little girl, who not knowing that her mother is dead is awaiting her promised letter. As she keeps standing on her balcony for hours on end every day, looking for the postman, a retired man regards her regularly. Thinking that the old man too was waiting in vain for a letter from
his mother, the little one sends as a gift the only letter she had ever received from her mother, to the old man - a noble gesture that can come only from a motherly sympathy welling out the child's innermost being.

A subtle communication between two souls is the theme of “The Brothers”. The elder brother had fought for the country's freedom. Once a rising star in politics, he finds himself lost in the whirlpool of corruption. The younger brother, under their father's prudent advice, has pursued a career and has become a success in life. Spending a number of years abroad the younger brother returns home to find the elder brother almost given up by all for an impossible mental case.

Suddenly the younger brother receives a slap. When a boy he had been threatened with this consequence if he smoked again - and the elder brother had found him smoking now. The elder brother, of course, realizes the folly of his action and breaks down. But the slap has worked. The younger brother has forgotten all the subsequent developments. He sees the bare loving soul of his helpless and hopelessly idealist brother. The two brothers understand each other.

Manoj Das's stories have many aspects, as his range is very wide. But the most noteworthy trait of his works is his powerful penetration into the subtle realities beneath the surface realities. He achieves this penetration with ease, without making the reader conscious of the depth to which he is leading him. This is where lies his art.

A great trait of the heritage of Indian literature has been the transcendent quality inherent in the characters. They may be thrown into a whirlpool of crises; they may be found to be intricately involved in a mundane situation, but the triumph or defeat on the surface is not the last word in their destiny. The Pandavas do not ‘arrive’ at their destination with their victory in the Mahabharata war. Their journey continues as they undertake the arduous travel through the Himalayas. In Ilango Adigal’s Silapathigaram Kannaki does not rest satisfied with
avenging her husband's death; she takes to the life of a mystic and finally transcends not only her human qualities but also her human limitations.

This truth of transcendence accounts for the spirit of several short stories of Manoj Das - marking a progress from realism to the sublime, reminding us of Longfellow’s “The Light of Stars”; “Know how sublime a thing it is/To suffer and be strong”.

The touch of the sublime in the stories comes not in any set form, or following a specific pattern. It comes according to the logic of the development of the story. Let us return to “Lakshmi’s Adventure”. The priest, who raises the alarm and leads the chase of the little girl, has acted according to his ordinary nature and habit; but he has realized his folly. Such however are the circumstances, that he can do precious little to undo the tragedy.

He can only atone for it in his own silent suffering and in his resolve to be a better man when reborn.

It is a tragedy because Lakshmi does not survive the shock. But her death when viewed in keeping with the writer's concept of death, is nothing but a doorway into a worthier environment.

The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being” (The Life Divine: 822) says Sri Aurobindo, the master in whose vision of reality Manoj Das reposes his faith (Amrita Bazar Patrika, August 19,1989).

Vilas Singh, the chief character in the short story “The Vengeance” wants to put an end to the life of Bahadur who snatched not only his Sumati but also his savings of a decade. But Bahadur had given him the final slip, bringing his five-year-old enterprise to a futile end. When he reaches home, he sees his newborn son. He is aghast at discovering the child bearing the delicate miniature of the wound he had once inflicted on Bahadur. Hidamba Baba’s words have come true. How radically the values and passions change when our vision
is not confined to one life, but goes beyond it! Who is an enemy and who is a friend? Vilas will now dote on the very ‘person’ on whom he eagerly wanted to wreak vengeance.

Roy Sahib, at the end of the story titled “Trespassers” has learnt his lesson. There was a time when he drove away the narrator (as a boy) and reprimanded him for trespassing into his mansion. But now he plays with the narrator’s son. Sahib’s sons who once took orders from their father now take them from their wives. At his old age, Roy Sahib needs company. This idea is well expressed in the last two lines of the story: “Roy Sahib’s glittering denture rested on the table. And without that, he looked beautiful” (VOS 56). His is a sublime progress from rudeness to loving indulgence. Likewise, in “Miss Moberly’s Targets”, Miss Moberley - a failure in her loves - remembers all her lovers by naming her dogs after them. Disappointed in life, she finds consolation with her aged friends. In the end she begins to see a guardian in everyone. Sadhu Baba of “The Murderer” was once known as Dabu Sahukar, the reputed moneylender and litigant. Thirty years after his supposed death at the hands of Binu, an orphan and an honest man in the service of Dabu who employed him for realizing his dues from his debtors. It took little or no time for the villagers to identify him. The news spread at lightning speed. Sadhu Baba’s presence had spread a festive spirit over the area. Hundreds came to have a look at him. And on the day of Baba’s departure, the much dreaded murderer Binu also came. After releasing his feet from Binu’s clutch with great care, Sadhu Baba said to the crowd: “Who says Binu had not killed me?” (VOS: 8) Of course, we know that the celebrated murderer never did it. But the granny at the end of the story informs her grandchildren thus: “Binu had of course beheaded Dabu Sahukar. It was the grace of the ascetic that joined his body and head together and gave him life - a new life” (VOS 8). Her words give a meaning to the question asked by Sadhu Baba. It is: the evil genius in him had been killed and he had been given a new life. The reputation of a murderer attached to Binu only symbolized his death - which was a regeneration.
The capacity for transcendence, a moment which alone can bring one the taste of the sublime, remains hidden in man. It may come out to the surface sometimes through the destruction of the very idea or object to which one is deeply attached. Man may cling to his pet fancy, sure that he will suffer when deprived of it, but his experience may be quite different when the thing is really lost.

“The Statue Breakers are Coming” seems to be a clear example of this truth. Yameshwar Gupta, a retired politician, fears that his own statue which he had got erected through his admirers when in power, may be destroyed by some anarchists who were out to demolish the memory of the old guard. Several statues had been bombed by them. Gupta desperately tries to alert the authorities, but nobody seems to take it seriously. One night Gupta himself goes out to survey his statue. To his excitement he finds some dubious characters moving about the statue. He is sure that they intend to destroy it. A member of the gang climbs the statue, obviously to survey something else. Gupta is disillusioned when he sees the gang about to leave the place without even making a scratch on his statue. He challenges them to answer what right they had to use the statue as a mere pedestal. The gang is nervous; while fleeing it hurls a bomb at the statue, shattering it in the process.

We don’t find Gupta a frustrated man as a result. Along with the statue is gone his egoistic fondness for fame; the destruction of the statue - a day realistic incident - suddenly becomes symbolic of his transcendence and the sublime in him emerging to the forefront. And the narrator of the story comments:

The next morning and the days that followed saw Guptaji unusually bright. He breathes contentment. ‘Life without a statue is just wonderful!’ He reminds himself at times. He spends his time visiting old friends and laughs a lot. (DHOS: 97).

Comic or tragic experiences at the physical plane often produce some effect at another level. Death of Lily in “Dusky Horizon” does not simply occur as a tragedy. The memory
inspires the sublime in all the three characters involved. One becomes a writer, another a sage and the last one realizes with a bang that the memory of Lily should have left an impact on his life and he sheds tears under the impression that it had not. But in his shedding tears we feel the touch of the sublime.

The experience of the sublime is a strictly inner process and no external facility can earn it for anybody. But the external factor came to add to the process. “A Crack of Thunder” demonstrates this fact. The Zamindar is bent upon violating the modesty of a dumb girl who is blissfully ignorant of his motive. Suddenly the Zamindar’s motherless little son appears on the scene. He finds in her a wonderful model for Goddess Durga and he puts on a crown on her head and begins drawing her picture. A moment comes when the Zamindar is bewildered at looking at her, for she suddenly creates in his mind the illusion of being a deity! Unconsciously he folds his hands. It is a moment of revelation for him of the truth that there is the mother hidden in every woman, as well as of the truth that even the villain has the capacity in him to recognise it (Raja 1993: 12-25).

While reading Manoj Das’s stories, one tends to agree with Thomas Paine’s observation on the sublime and the ridiculous:

The sublime and the ridiculous are often so nearly related that it is difficult to class them separately one step above the sublime makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again” (The Age of Reason, 2:73).

Everything of value about me is in my books,. I will say I am the sum of my books. Each book, intuitively sensed and, in the case of fiction, intuitively worked out, stands on what has gone before, and grows out of it!, so said V.S Naipaul to the noble committee and the Swedish Academy in Stockholm on 7th December 2001.

He speaks for every writer who is the outcome of “what has gone before” and what grows out of it The universal sensibility of writers today is marked by a quest for identity, a
search for the self with their place in their past. The voices are dynamic, spirited, open, desperate, cynical, and hopeful in turns, yet reaching a strange chorus that is one. It is here that Indian fiction writers exist in a class by themselves. They deserve to be called a ‘unique class’ for their ability to blend a myriad languages, cultures and creeds into one through the use of an alien language - English. Their class also needs special attention for their adaptability, their craftsmanship and their ability to express the hidden attributes of man during his existence in the universe in a very Indian context. To speak of life, it has to be thought about first, translated into words and then manifested on paper. For most Indian English writers this would amount to a translation not only of a thought into words, but the very language in which the thought process has taken place. But there are also Indo-Anglian writers for whom this is no barrier.

If Indian English is to find acceptance, it must be used without nervousness by Indian speakers and writers. Most Indian writers of English whose works have won praise in the west have been educated in England and America and write like Englishmen and Americans.

These writers use their innate Indian sensibility to depict Indian life and living.

Other writers succeed in another way: by using homespun Indian English to weave a tapestry of Indian life. The most successful and respected of such writers is R.K Narayan. One wonders how the Painter of Signs would read in Tamil.... for Narayan deliberately chose to write not in his native Tamil but in a learned European language. Another writer who has chosen to write in English instead of Tamil is the poet and short story writer P. Raja.

Indian short story writers have advantages and disadvantages in equal measure. The enormous canvas that is India with its numerous sects, languages, customs and creeds, the topographical beauty and harshness and rich cultural, mythical past, make it ideal material for a story to take root and grow. Yet, the contrasts can be intimidating too. Combing all these ingredients and making it wholesome requires a deep and committed sensibility. How can
one blend successfully, a past steeped in tradition, with a society that is in the throes of a rapid, dramatic change, almost a modern battlefield. How can one comment effectively on 'India's ragas and Mantras' while its children are swaying to "heavy-metal" and "hip-hop" bands!

It is this awareness, sensibility and sensitivity that makes P.Raja a writer of calibre for these turbulent times in India. Stalwarts like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Arun Joshi, Raja Rao, Manohan Malgonkar and Kamala Markandaya to name a few find an echo in Raja. An echo cushioned by his own ability to create spaces for thought processes to take place within the reader and to think aloud -all this within the parameters of a short-story. What we have is a product of individual conscience and a song from the soul. A song, for the poet in him is evident in the short stories he writes.

The story The Stone has many poetic lines which come as a relief from the eerie suspense of the tale.

The moon had retired from the sky and the sky was dark with clouds. A few drops of rain fell. I pedalled. The bicycle wheels spun eerily. As we entered the woods, the rain drummed in the trees. (TBOS:82)

In ‘After Grandma, who?’ he describes the singing of birds,

The winged choristers on tree tops sang and welcomed the sun who put the devil of darkness to flight. (KGC:133)

While using the story as an instrument to be heard, he has unwittingly placed himself among the great contributors of this form of writing in India. ‘Unwittingly’ may seem the wrong word, but it reflects his opinion of himself. He calls himself an ‘entertainer’ first and has stated in an interview, I do not know where I have gone wrong. This self-assessment and the wrong - moves' he has made has given us an able Contributor to contemporary Indian English, a reflector of our culture and literature, a creative writer who has given a voice I to
not only the writer of the short story in India, but to the essence that is Indian and an India that is struggling to balance itself in the terrific transition it is going through.

In The Wife this essence is captured in a simple way. Raja speaks about the protagonist's meeting with Saroja who had once been a maid at his home. On enquiring he comes to know Saroja is married. Further probing makes the woman speak up about her affectionate husband.

She pulled out the burning sticks and extinguished them by sprinkling water. She lifted up the mud-vessel from the oven and poured the sauce into a pot that contained boiled rice.

My husband is very affectionate towards me and the children,” she resumed.

“Every night when he returns from work he comes with jasmine flowers for me and goodies for the children. I give him just fifty paise for a cup of tea. But he forgoes his tea to buy flowers and goodies. (TOBS: 100)

The mud-vessel, sticks used for fuel, jasmine flowers and Fifty-paise' for a cup of tea, all coalesce to give a convincing picture of pavement dwellers and their life.

She washed her hand and dipping it into the pot of rice, mixed it with the sauce.

“At twelve I take food to my husband. On the shore by the boat’s shadow, I give him this mixed rice. He is very adamant, aiyah” I could see blood rush to her face. “He will not eat unless I make this into balls of rice. He will receive on his palm and munch leisurely all the time fixing his eyes on me.” (TOBS: 100)

This simple but totally explicit handling of the Indian pathos is what made Peter Heehs write,

....everywhere the texture of his language is Indian to the core. Not bad imitation of Somerset Maugham or F.Scott Fitzgerald. He is an Indian English writer at ease with himself. In this he approaches the achievement of his
countryman R.K.Narayan. His stories are not yet on the level of the Malgudi novels but like them they give us a glimpse of the life of ordinary South Indians speaking the local dialect of English. (Heehs 1994: 63)

Speaking of the relation of English to the Indian short story, is synonymous to speaking about the impact of the west on this genre of writing. Some of the influencing agents are the British Colonial rule, the historical event of gaining independence, the subsequent partition and the reconstruction of India. All these events give the Indian story writer in English the inspiration and grist needed for his mill.

The impact of Indian languages in the Indian writing in English too cannot be denied. Indian words have crept into the English short story, just as Sanskrit words have become part and parcel of the Tamil language. P.Raja places the idioms of the native language in an 'English' way. By doing this he establishes a bond with the non-Indian and sense of familiarity with the Indian reader, making fiction into reality.

He enriches this realism further by introducing vernacular words, phrases and idiomatic expressions and slangs. Tamil words like sambar, dosai, aviyal, thuvaiyal, tope, amavasai, poojari, kolam etc and French words like bon ami, raconteur, tres bien, monsieur, etc. the anglicized Tamil words like blackie, old tamarind; Hindi words like namasteji, mataji, pranams, mataji ki jai, feature in his stories. (Asha 2006: 12)

P. Raja overcomes the difficulty of finding apt translations for these words by using the regional word. By doing so, he captures the local culture with its complexities and absurdities in a realistic way.

If we want to learn how an Indian reacts to life in California, we should turn to Vikram Seth. But if we want to immerse ourselves in the speech habits and environment of South India, P.Raja is our man. His works proves a record of Indian
English at a crucial stage in its development: not yet fully assimilated into the mainstream English, still delighting in its delightful idiosyncracy. (Heehs 1994: 63)

In India, the writing of stories can be traced back to the *Kathasaritasagara*, the *Panchatantra*, *Totanama*, the *Bhajiku(ha)* and the *Jataka* Tales and even before to the tradition of the aged and learned, the native and unlettered reganing their folk-lore and legends to any attentive ear. With these indigenous foundations the short story has found its way into Indian literature as a genre to be reckoned with. The stories of P. Raja have been featured in almost every one of the popular journals and newspapers in India. There is a story for every occasion and every occasion turns out to be a story! He knows where to find his satires when he needs them. In one of his essays "The serious business of storytelling", he names all his sources:

Story telling has accompanied the growth of humanity from the darkest ages, and its chief function in every age was, as is today, the illumination of experience by emotional reconstruction. It was by the practice of storytelling that our ancestors kept alive much of their experience. Since wise men learn from other's experiences, the stories passed from one generation to the other by word of mouth played the eminent role of not only entertaining the audience but also showing them the way of the world and thereby saved them from their impending disasters. (Raja 2006: 12:).

This is his take on storytelling and the source, he first mentions, is about sage Prahalada who had listened to tales while still in the womb and so had inborn ideas about worship about god. Such was the power of the tales the sage narrated in *Bagavatam*, composed more than 1500 years ago. Be *Panchatantra* is the most famous of Indian tales which he expressed through characters of animals. Then there is a collection of seventy stories recited by a parrot called "The nchmied Parrot" or "Sukha-sagetati". There are hundreds of lessons and morals to be taken from the epics *Ramayana* and *ahabaratha*.
When P. Raja gives forth high expectations he does so with the knowledge that these hopes also bring with them painful brushes with reality: and the knowledge that realising hopes can be at the cost of suffering or the burning of innocence. Destruction can be the price of unreal goals, betrayal is the result of expectations that are beyond the reach of men, women and societies that strive for it. “Raw Material” is the best example of the trend of going to Gulf countries with the intentions of earning hefty pay packets and the ensuring heart breaks and tragedies. Chakravarty leaves his mother heartbroken as he goes to Qatar with his new and beautiful wife. At Qatar, he introduces his wife Jothi to his boss - Sheikh. They are invited to tea at the Sheikh's palace. It is a foregone conclusion that Jothi will be forced to become just one more addition to the Sheikh's bevy of wives.

My harem remains the target of envy to every other Sheikh in Qatar. But what a pity! It lacks an Indian beauty,” he said with dissatisfaction ... your wife will fill the gap and she will be one more jewel added to my harem (TBOS : 33)

Chakravarty has sacrificed his wife, in return for his greed; for the unlimited expectations he demanded from life, the Sheikh has betrayed him. A tormented soul has its own set of values - heaven or earth is not for him and the knowledge makes him more a slave than a saint. All who pass by him are free to take a punch, punishing him for his very existence.

“Raw Material” confers on P. Raja the title of a fine story teller. It is absorbingly interesting due to its sheer narrative technique. Like O.Henry who mastered the art of ending a story with an unexpected twist or turn of event,

Raja springs a surprise on the reader at the end... From the world of the natural we are swiftly carried off into that of the supernatural and that sudden blood-curdling shift climaxes into an awful psychological experience” (Hees 1994:282).
In an interview this question was posed to him: "The story you provide as such in minimalist, but the picture you paint is truly brilliant.... Can you throw some light on his unusual technique of yours? His answer was minimalist too:

The best gifts come in small packages. The way a story is narrated should surely be more important than the story itself. What story is there in Hemingway's old man and the sea or in Stefan Zewing's lovely short story The Runaway or his admirable novel, Letter from an Unknown Woman? May be I am able to paint vivid pictures, as I am a keen observer. Nothing escapes my eye. Since I am blessed with photographic memory, I can use my pen in maybe the same way that an artist would use his brush, (Raja 2006: 57).

He has written vastly and voluminously. By now a household name in the world of Indian Writing in English, P. Raja’s work has crossed Indian shores. It is not often that we come across stories that affect us as well as express the reality of life. P.Raja's stories are engaging while also providing a social and psychological document to the reader. In the first and best of Raja's stories, The Blood', the poverty stricken Seelan considers the chicken, Minnal, to be a gift from heaven. The pet bird is his only means of escape from the misery of his life. But love sometimes demands the ultimate sacrifice. He sells the chicken to save his mother’s life. And as Sedan's blood mingles with Minnal's, the sacrifice becomes more spiritual than physical. ‘Raw Material’ is true to life; it can be seen as a social commentary - large numbers of Indians give up their jobs and leave their family in India, to work in Gulf countries - and the outcome is often tragic. To be content with what life hands out to us, is a rare gift indeed. 'The Wife' is a story that depicts two women Priya and Saroja. Priya, the protagonist's wife is shown up as grumpy and she is not satisfied with the numerous saris she has. Saroja, the wife of a rickshaw - puller on the other hand is cheerful and proud of the daily wages earned by her husband and the jasmine flowers he buys for her. This simple,
contented woman makes the protagonist become ‘overwhelmed by jealousy’. The husband and wife team - Sendhil and Sarala in Mr. Fishbowl’s Visit represent a typical urban middle class family. They work through the week at their jobs, doing the minimum household chores and wait with anticipation for the weekend. The unexpected arrival of a guest can throw them into a quandry. They adopt instant methods of making the house clean and presentable. The guest is impressed only until such time when a flaw shows up. Mr Fishbowl is satisfied with all that he has seen in house, when he suddenly decides to use the toilet. An area quite overlooked by the couple - and this proves to be their Waterloo. ‘Culture Shock’ can take many forms and for the boy in the story Crabs, it comes when he has to discontinue his studies in the pyal school and go into a missionary school. To sum up my harrowing experiences in a single line, I would say Shakespearianly: “As flies to wanton boys, were we to the teachers; they spanked us for their sport.” (KGC:27). Cannibals are best left alone and far away in forests - but P. Raja brings one into our dining room in the form of a French engineer. He devours all the delicious food served to him, but then tells the cook “I like to eat human flesh cooked by you”... (MFB : 33) This story “The Cook who saved the Natives” is one among many that Raja has based on the folklore of Pondicherry.

In order to sound convincing and feel comfortable in the world of children, a writer has to forego the fake masks he puts on adults. Only the ruthless truth can capture a child's conception of an adult world. P Raja, does exactly this in the story “My Father’s Bicycle”.

The boy who is so enamored of his father’s bicycle steals a ride, only to be thrashed by the father. The object of his desire becomes an agent of hatred.

P.Raja’s writing transcends the ideas of man or society while paradoxically getting under the skin of every character he portrays. Swami (in Swami’s Dog) is as real as any man we meet. In The Dad When wine goes in... reflects traits of Raja as a parent and The Professor is like a family friend. His imaginary characters are co-existent with and an
extension of the beings we meet each day. Their expectations are ours to ponder, their betrayals ours to mourn. Manikam and Maragatham in “The Day of the Minister” find their cries muffled by the suffocating power of the state. The sundal vendor cries silently at the injustice of the world around him. His fears and lamentations echo Job's cries. Like any of us he puts on a swagger and arms himself with a sharp tongue to express his outrage at the treachery and hypocrisy around him and shrugs off his betrayal with nonchalance that is tragic. Minnal and Seelan in The blood' open our eyes to the reality of rural life. It shows P.Raja’s sensitive handling of the psyche of child, woman and bird. This is a story quite like some scenes out of ‘Pather – Panchali’ the master piece of the great writer and film maker Satyajit Ray. Some of P.Raja’s stories are reminiscent of Satyajit Ray's ‘Appu’ series. They run parallel – Ray’s in picture and Raja’s in words. They go hand in hand in depicting poverty and the pathos of rustic life. The everlasting battle for the frugal rice bowl and for a roof that does not leak. Somewhere, suddenly through the same roof a ray of sunlight appears.

The stories in P. Raja’s three collections show a vast canvas and range from mature to immature opinions, sometimes brilliant and at times lacking finesse, but always engaging and surprising, and keeping us rooted to our ‘Indianess’. ‘The Sundal Vendor’ is a very Indian person. A person we wait to see at the beach, or on lazy summer afternoons on our streets. We too, like Gani wait to peep into the sundal vendor's basket which holds a mixture of peas with silvers of coconut and green mangoes, quite hot (TBOS : 69). We wait in expectation of a mouthwatering treat.

A revelation of Indianess that no India would like to hear, or read about is in ‘The Untouchable Goddess’, when the protagonist Seenu, introduces his son to his mother Ambujam. She refuses to touch her grandson as she “... must first of all have a bath.... A few untouchables were traveling with me in the train” (MFB.91).
Vast differences in social hierarchy and status are shown up in stories like ‘The Wife’. In this story, Priya and Saroja are at two extreme ends of society. One has an 'accumulation' of silk saris, the other wears a sari that has ‘patches here and there’. One has her money in a bank, while the other can spare just ‘fifty paise for a cup of tea’. As a nation, we are traditionally rather proud of ourselves and keep living and hoping for an even better future - though this is possible only by turning a blind eye and deaf ear to our surroundings.

It is here that as a writer and commentator that P. Raja exposes tales of suffering and exploitation. And when he does bring hope or expectation we see it in the light of the painful reality that will occur. This aspect of expectation and betrayal has a pervasive irony and is thankfully indisputably universal. The writer avows that he is first of all an entertainer - yet he cannot be dismissed as such. His work reflects a deep conviction and understanding of suffering and strife and calls upon us to face truth. The reader is cajoled to explore solutions to poverty, domestic peace and harmony, preservation of freedom and the dignity of the individual. By artfully raising and playing upon our sensibility, the characters we meet bring to the fore the fact that what annihilates is our ignorance and non-action in such matters and not any large threats from imaginary demons. In the story 'The Day of The Minister' we see the state as a wall that cannot be surmounted by the ordinary man. Any methods of resistance could be dangerous to the survival of the underdog. Hence, the great obedience and obeisance and ultimately, the breaking down of Expectation and the resultant Betrayal. Manikam and Maragatham hope to get a lift in life after the visit of the central minister to their home. The minister comes, with all the pomp and show usually attributed to such visits. The sick baby who is a tool used by the minister to garner votes, is tragically, dropped by the minister onto the stony floor. As for Manikam he is handcuffed and led off to an asylum. Men of power hold no moral obligations towards any man other than the self. Brute force paralyses the survival instincts in mortals lesser than these self-possessed beings.
In studying the short stories of P. Raja we perceive that there are times of elation and times of humiliation. There is no regular formula that dictates how an individual can experience the completeness of life. Pain follows pleasure, just as night follows day. Betrayal is an outcome of expectation. There is no fixed reason for suffering or despair. The only visible reason for betrayal is man's search for the unattainable, an unreal expectation and greed for the material. Other factors aiding in betrayal are superstitions and corruption.

P. Raja’s blending of the rustic and the modern is uncanny and true to life. He can even be accused of being too forthright. Mr. Fishbowl’s visit exposes the sense of deja vu that a middle-class family feels with their mediocre life. Cleanliness for them holds a totally different meaning than it does for their benefactor, the Englishman Mr. Fishbowl. He is a stickler for perfection while Sarala and Sendhil are not strivers. For them little is much. Their only aim is freedom from bondage. They do not strive or achieve or to open superior avenues for themselves. Only with the advent of Mr. Fishbowl's visit they realise that expectations fail in the face of non-striving. People like Sarala and Sendhil spend their life wishing, dreaming and crawling in an unreal world. P. Raja cloaks their plan of action under a word called "faith". They truly believe that things will literally fall in place by just wishing.

Scrutinising seemingly trivial oddities of daily life, Raja reveals the truth about human hearts and minds. At times he proves that he is no great wordsmith, but he does have a story. Though a very mediocre story like ‘Toffee’, coming from the pen of a seasoned and talented writer like Raja should not have found its way into an anthology like ‘My Father’s Bicycle’. In the beautifully crafted story Clouds, the writer etches out the character of a woman juggling the role of wife, mother and daughter-in-law with quiet dignity. When confronted with betrayal, women can turn out to be a stronghold for man. In the normal run of everyday life, it is man's inhumanity to man that we see. In ‘Clouds’ it is woman destroying woman. Radha is docile and peace loving, making her an ideal target for betrayal at the hands of her
mother-in-law and daughter. In stories like “Clouds and The Unforgettable Woman, P. Raj a reveals to the reader how women come out vindicated. Their uncommon courage, their survival instincts and optimism help them overcome any betrayal they face. They seek no revenge while their consolation comes from a supreme conscience. Good always overcomes evil. A creator of peace and harmony, it is difficult to see woman as vindictive. Her expectations are not unreal; hence her betrayal is not mammoth.

Within the contexts of Betrayal, we see that women are often betrayed. In stories like ‘The Unforgettable Woman’, ‘The Wife’, ‘Clouds’, ‘Toffee’, ‘Raw Material’ and ‘Darshan’, Raja delves into the heart of a woman. Small desires bring delusion and heartbreak. The ‘momentary sunshine’ they find, is snatched away rudely. Children can be cruel and demanding, other family members appear like ‘dark clouds surrounding their life. These are all reflective of a society that compels a woman to accept her lot. This gradual acceptance process brings temporary peace but turns out to be a way of life, relentless in its scope. Women are generally blessed with an adjustable and compromising nature is what the writer indicates, but the “false and empty smile” he puts on her face leaves no room for any expectation to come to pass. Instead, compromise, which is a virtue for her, has turned out to be a vice.

On the other hand, man, when confronted is ready to turn the table, usually on to woman or even an animal, whomsoever is closest at that moment. There is confusion at times in his mind as to who should dominate or who will come out triumphant when faced with conflicting hopes and expectations. This is mainly due to the dual personality the writer has put on him. This two faced Gemini is introduced to the reader in some stories. Monsieur Gautier, the engineer from France appears to be a man of dignity in the story ‘The Cook Who Saved the Native’. The cook after a few days is horrified to know that the ‘Gentleman’ is a cannibal. ‘Toffee’ shows the hypocritical face of the husband. An unfaithful man posing as a
loving husband. The father in the title story of “My Father’s Bicycle” is a much respected man by the villagers. When the son gets a spanking from his mother, the father chastises the mother. But the same man shows not even an ounce of pity on his son when he defies the fathers wish not to ride the much coveted bicycle. The writer speaks of this terrible afternoon in pathetic terms. The boy falls unconscious with the blows dealt to him. He is hospitalized and returns home after three weeks.

This autobiographical story reveals the writer’s clarity of perception and his deep understanding of a little boy’s tortured mind and heart. The very normal and natural longing and expectation of any boy to ride his father’s bicycle. The total betrayal he feels, makes the boy in him ask the bicycle ‘who is the son?’ The son may not have pardoned the father in the story, but the writer in penning the incident so honestly, has purged himself of past hurts on his psyche.

Childhood memories get embedded in the subconscious. The memories or incidents surface at unexpected times and in immeasurable dimensions. What a child expects from an adult and what betrayal it feels when the expectations are not met, can have a great role to play in the type of adult he becomes. Love for the mother is the predominant feeling in the heart of any child and it is the guiding force behind his actions. In the stories, ‘The Blood’ and 'The Unforgettable Woman' the extent of a boy’s love for his mother is woven so beautifully.

Apart from this psychological aspect, the stories are unforgettable for their realistic depiction of rustic scenes, characters and incidents. It is evident that he has a genuine feel for the country side. The erring son in ‘The Unforgettable Woman’ is able to come to terms with his bad behavior only when the mother shows signs of forgiving him. Only in her complete acceptance of him, does the son feel he can live up to her expectations and be a worthy son to the best teacher in the world. In contrast, the story 'The Blood' shows how the yawning gap
between the expectation of one and the betrayal of the other, merges into one divine union. The immense love Seelan has for his mother helps him overcome his ‘crime’. He feels like a criminal when he kills Minnal and their love, in one stroke of the knife. Sedan's own blood purifies the betrayer in him, while restoring the hope of seeing his mother again.

The death of a hope or a dream probably means one word for man - Desperation. Yet he keeps going heroically and diligently. In the process of striving, a human being goes through aches and pains and even collapses. But the will to rise always dominates. There are various factors or driving forces that compel him towards this end. In varying degrees of importance, they could be his family, a beloved, sheer pressure or just his zest for life and the will to achieve success in his chosen field.

Success and gratification either in the personal or professional life of a person so much desired, may taste sweet but can also bring new troubles, uncalled for insults and even a slap for hard labor. A teacher himself, P.Raja has meticulously sketched the character of Gopalan, the Chemistry teacher in ‘As Flies to Wanton Boys’. In the fourth chapter we have met this hard-working teacher. A slap for hard labor is what he receives in return for his sincere labor of thirty-five years in the school. He is accused of using the school premises for a candlestine meeting with a woman. The only expectation in his dreary life until that time has been the success of his pupils and the good reputation of the school, but there is none to believe him. Gopalan the teacher may have succeeded, but Gopalan the man faces failure. Victory is no guarantee that suffering will not visit. Like having a watch does not ensure that you will always be on time or taking out a medical insurance policy will protect you from falling ill. These are the truths of urban life and the writer puts them across to us in the same effective way that he uses when he speaks about the life and frustrations of the common man in a village. Life with its falsities, its simple truthfulness, death, joy, domestic harmony and
disharmony, spirituality or the lack of it, have all been dealt within the stories cited in this critical study.

Novels

The story of the Indian English novel is really the story of a changing India. There was a time when education was a rare opportunity and speaking English was unnecessary. The stories were already there- in the myths, in the folklore and the umpteen languages and cultures that gossiped, conversed, laughed and cried all over the subcontinent. India has always been a land of stories, the demarcation between ritual and reality being very narrow.

The Indian English novel erupted in the fiery talks of Henry Derozio, the spiritual prose of Tagore and the pacifist dictums preached by Gandhi. With the coming of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan, the Indian English novel had begun its journey. In “Coolie” by Mulk Raj Anand, the social disparity in India is laid bare. In R.K.Narayan’s imaginary village Malgudi, the invisible men and women of our teeming population come to life and act out life with all its perversities and whimsicalities. In ‘Kanthapura’ by Raja Rao, Gandhism awakes in a sleepy village down south. India no longer needed to be depicted by outsiders. The perspectives from within ensured more clarity and served a social documentative purpose as well. Though the number of celebrities who pen novels from Puducherry is very less, the amount of contribution by the handful of them such as Aju Mukhopadhyay and Sujatha Vijayaragavan is highly commendable as they very carefully handle the Indian sense and sensibility with no less significance, (Netto 10-25: 2008).

“In Train” a novel by Aju Mukhopadhyay deals with the exploitation of women in the Indian society. The novel opens in a railway station in hilly South Bihar. Alok, An employee in Calcutta attends his aunty’s daughter marriage along with his family members
and return back to Calcutta. Alok, being inside the train remembers his past sweet memories of his life. As the train moved, the family members started to enjoy the train journey. Benoybhusan an elderly man among the family started to talk and later enjoyed by sharing food. Sudha Alok’s wife has prepared food for all of them. Sudha’s care and affection for her husband is an admirable one in the novel. All the members of the family appreciate her for her delicious preparation of food.

As the train moved, after three stations, a woman with tattered sari entered the train. Alok seemed to know her but he could not properly place her. For a long time. Atlast Alok recognized her. She was none rather his own childhood friend named Radha. Alok was shocked to see Radha in such a situation.

Alok out of eagerness wished to talk to her. He was very anxious to know about the life history of Ratha. Alok would not control his feelings and emotions towards her. On the other side, he was very conscious about his wife. So, he was waiting for a chance to talk to Radha. The train started to move, Alok atlast got a chance to talk to Radha. His anxiety was growing more and more while talking to her. Radha, the pre-dominant character in the novel started to tell her own tragic story.

Radha being a brave girl started to narrate her story. After her schooling she joined in a college for higher education. Being social in nature, she needed to talk with the boys in a causal manner. Radha was invited for a party which she attended changed her life totally. She was kidnapped by her own friends. The tragedy is that she was seduced by all her friends for more than three years. She was ill-treated by men to a larger extend. Later she said that it was Ganen who rescued her from that hell. Later Radha introduced Ganen to Alok.

Ganen was a friend to Karthik but he considered Radha as his own sisster Chitra. Radha resembled her sister to a larger extend. So, Ganen had a soft corner towards Radha.
The train was moving in a high speed crossing the towns, villages, rivers, dams etc. As Radha was hungry, Ganen bought her some bread to eat. At last the train reached the Howrah station. Both Radha and Ganen were surprised to see the Howrah railway station. They came out of the station and were astonished to see the city. It was occupied by buildings, cars and buses. The people were busy with their own daily routine life.

Ganen was born in Calcutta. He lived with his parents and sister. As time passed away he went to Bandhaman. While entering the Howrah station. He remembered his good old past days with his family in Calcutta still he had his ancestral property in Calcutta.

Both Radha and Ganen were wandering in the streets of Calcutta. As the sun began to set, Ganen had an idea of staying in a road-side slum for the night. But Radha was not happy with their idea. Anyhow, she managed to retire in the slum for a night. A woman with a lamp in the slum helped them by giving blankets. Radha enjoyed the night by seeing the sky after a long time. It was early in the morning, when they reached Baranagar, Gannen’s locality in Calcutta. It was decided by Ganen that Radha should act like his wife after reaching his ancestral home. Radha nodded her head and she bought a vernillion container. It is essential mask for a Hindu married woman, to put the colour in the parting of the hair and a dot on the forehead. Ganen entered his ancestral home. Both were welcomed by Biren, the eldest Uncle. All the family members were in surprise to see Ganen after a long span of time. They were not able to believe that Ganen was still alive.

The novel introduces all the family members. Usually Bengali people prefer joint family system. Ganen’s house was crowded with people. Biren, his wife Sashilala their grand-daughter Kankllata, her mother Bibha. His next uncle Ramen and his wife Basudha, their son Raghumath, his wife Pratima and daughter Bannali. Henlata, his father’s only sister Hemen, the youngest uncle. Later Radha was introduced to all the family members. Ganen
began to tell his story that he was working as an actor for a long time. He also added that he wanted a change from his routine life.

Ramen, his uncle seems to be a shrewd person in this novel. He seems to be a self-centered person among all the family members. There was a great dilemma among the family members because of the sudden appearance of Gannen. They were not prepared to meet the sudden appearance of Gannen. At last all the family members decided to lease a room for Ganen and Radha.

Two days passed Ganen purchased some essential items required for a modest living Sashikala helped them by supplying a few kitchen wares. Pratima and Basudha were very anxious in knowing about Radha. But it was Shashkala who showed her care and affection towards Radha. Every evening Radha used to share the happenings of the house to Ganen. It was too interesting for Radha to see the nature of the family members. Radha started the plan of going to job. She has completed her higher in typing. She had a great fascination for going to job. Ganen after a long struggle got a job of acting. Ganen had a habit of drinking when he was in Bardhaman. Radha pleaded to him not to go back to his earlier habits. As days passed, a new problem entered the life of Ganen and Radha. As the house was too old to live. All the family members had decided to demolish the building and to convert the house into apartment. The ultimate idea was to convert the house into individual apartment which suits everyone’s need. They trusted Sukhendar, Gannen’s childhood friend for this plan. Being a contractor, Sukhender agreed to their plan. Ramen had a plan of sending Ganen out of the house. He called Ganen and informed about the plan of reconstructing the house. He was asked to vacate the house. Ganen disappointed with his uncle plan said that he cannot vacate the home. Radha, being a beautiful woman suffers a lot in the society. Radha was conscious about her position, about her need to earn and stand on her own feet. She started to equip herself with the latest information, general knowledge and a moderate speed
in type writing. She read newspapers, looked into employment opportunities for jobs. But one big problem was that the certificates giving proof of her age and educational qualifications were not with her.

Radha usually goes to library in search of job. One day a man unknown to her asked, when she was coming out of the library. He enquired her about the job which she prefers to work. He also informed that there is a vacancy for a clerk – cum typist in an office. Radha was taken to that place. While going to the place, she did not get any positive sign towards the job. The president of the company informed Radha that “all our workers are our party members”. She was called for illegal business. While hearing it, she was too hurted. Radha became nervous and left the place soon.

As days passed, economically, she started to struggle a lot. She could not manage to purchase good eatables green, meat, fish, etc., then she thought of meeting Alok. She firmly decided that she must contact Alok and seek his help. His office was located in Kolkata. The Dalhouse Square area. She was mentally prepared to meet Alok. But she could not make it possible because Alok was on leave. On the other hand, Ganen was under the pressure of vacating the house. Ramen was very keen in sending Ganen out. Beren, an elderly person in the house was attacked by massive heart attack. He was taken to nursing home for treatment. Radha, being a sentiment woman in nature, she liked Beren she started to look after him. Both Biren and Dadoma (Shalshkala) were happy towards Radha. Her care and affection made a great impact on them.

The next day she decided to meet Alok at his office premises. Out of anxiety, she got up early in the morning and prepared breakfast for Ganen. Ganen was surprised to see Radha in such a mood. Radha reached Alok’s office, it was the end of a lunch break. She was requested to wait outside as Alok Roy had not returned yet. After ten minutes Alok appeared before her. Radha greeted him, extended her hand. Radha was made to sit on a small sofa
behind the chairs. Later he introduced Mrs. Linda Brown, a stenographer in the office to Radha. Tea was offered to her. Then Alok and Radha left the office and went out for refreshment. Each found in his or her heart the possibility of fulfillment of something which each of them lacked. Continuously for quite a few days she went to Alok’s office in the evening. On the other hand Ganen and others were busy attending to Berin who was still in the nursing home. More than a month had passed. Radha later felt like visiting a old school friend, who was married and settled in South Kolkata. Radha somehow founded the address of her friend. Her friend named Romola was kind enough to receive her. Ramola started to narrate her own marriage story. Both had nice time while sharing the past incidents.

As days passed, she was keen in getting a job. But in order to execute the plan, she had to suffer a lot. Ganen was not happy with her plan of going to job. She would regularly meet Alok at his office and enquire about her job. Radha wished to stand on her own feet, where she would live more fruily. Ganen was busy in attending Berin who was still in the hospital. Radha, being a kind hearted girl went to visit Berin in the hospital. No one is usually allowed inside the Intensive care unit. But out of care and affection, Radha pleaded the Doctor for permission. Permission was granted to Radha and she was shocked to see Berin in his bed, in a corner of the hall, under a dim light. On seeing him, she felt that Berin was in critical situation. On the other hand, the Doctor did not encourage to take him away for an operation, at his age.

Next, the family gets ready for an agreement. Radha remains a witness to the agreement which is going to be signed among the family members. Agreement was signed between Ganen, and three brothers, their sister and the promoter of the apartment. According to the agreement, it is known that Ganen would get one individual flat. Hearing this Radha was over whelmed with joy. All the family members would get their own individual flats. Hearing this she thought of Howarh station, where both were standing as beggars.
At present, both were happy with their positions. Later, Ganen proposed his idea of marrying her. But, Radha clearly said that she does not have interest towards the institution of marriage. She loved to live an independent life rather to indulge herself in the institution of marriage. But on the other hand, she would not forget the help rendered by Ganen. Radha would often meet Berin in the hospital. She was moved by Birin’s immobility. She insisted Berin to agree to the right treatment for the disease. Berin kept silent for some time. And said that a major operation at his age. Apart from being risky may not be faultless. His practical mind towards death seems to be one of the important aspects in the novel.

As days passed, Radha used to dream about the job. Her only aim in life is to lead an independent life. One day, Radha was called for an interview at Alok’s office. She was interviewed by the General Manager and the Executive Officer. Radha was curious to know about the result. It was announced that out of thirteen interviewers only three were selected and Radha was one of them. Radha was appointed as an Assistant Storekeeper in Alok’s company. It was Alok’s personal influence on Mr. Rohan Chairman-cum-Managing Director that made her selection possible. She was overwhemed with joy. Both Alok and Radha had special lunch. Later Radha thanked him for being so kind enough in getting a job to her. One day she was invited by Alok to his home. She was introduced to Sudha, Alok’s wife. Sudha was anxious to know about Radha’s life. She brought some tray full of eatables and tea. Sudha disliked Radha and these words mean it “nowadays ladies are out in the market vying with men to get jobs” which in most cases are just their hobby. All these words pierced Radha and soon she left the place.

The day came where the contract was signed by all the shareholders of the family, agreeing to convert their home, into a multistoried building. Out of the newly constructed flats, as few, as mentioned with their nearest locations, were to be given to their owners, as a urtness, Radha demanded a copy of that agreement. The Registrar visited the house, got the
agreement signed from all the family members. Biren was seen sitting in a corner of the open space in the house. He was disappointed with the family members with the idea of converting the house into an apartment. This made him to fall sick very soon. Young people carried him to the bed. Berin’s life came to an end. Radha could not digest the death of Berin. She wept for some time, and then remained silent, with the sense of grief and irreparable loss.

The contract was signed and all the family members were asked to vacate the place. All the other family members have already decided to vacate the place. But Ganen was bit dis-appointed because he could not find any alternative place. One day Alok visited Radha’s house. Construction workers were busy moving about. The house was totally in a disabled condition. Next day, he phoned Radha to meet him at the Head Office. It was a pleasant surprise for when she heard about the arrangements made for allotment of a quarters in her name. She was given a quarters on an urgent basis.

Radha felt happy and soon shifted her house to New Alpin. She specially invited Alok and Ganen to her house. Ganen, a good – hearted man was happily engaged as an actor. He could not find time to see Radha In spite of that, he used to see Radha. As days passed Suhendar had some problem in contract work. The link between Ganen and Radha was weakened as both were busy with their own works.

One fine day, Ganen suddenly appeared in her office and informed her that their flat was ready. On hearing this, Radha was happy. Both went outside and later visited Sukhen’s house. They were made to wait for some time. Later they were asked to sign a document and the key was handled to them. Both were in a happy mood and they were struck with wonder while seeing the house. Just after entering, Ganen opened the new flat. On that moment Ganen again proposed an idea of marrying her. Radha denied his proposal and started to enquire about the family members. Later out of anxiety she enquired about Shashikala
(Badoma, Berin’s Wife). He informed her that she was sent to Kashi. He also gave her address to Radha.

Radha applied for three days leave and left to Kashi to see Badoma (Shashikala) Radha was shocked to see Badoma inside the shiva temple. Both of them sat there for some time. After completing the evening rituals, they returned home. Immediately she was busy in preparing food for them. Radha started to enquire about Shashikala. Shashikala said to Radha that she was allotted a flat in the apartment. But she preferred to spend her last days in Kashi. They were speaking about the changes in life. Then Radha started to narrate her relationship with Ganen. Shashikala was damn strucked to hear the story of Radha. Then later they began to discuss about the system of treating widow in the Indian society. Radha’s life takes a turning point after hearing the story of Badoma. Radha was keen in knowing about the life of Indian widow.

It is an astonishing factor to see Radha talking about the Acts like the Hindu Marriages Act 1955 etc., after close observation she understood that the life of the widow in Indian society is too miserable to live. Later she joined in her job. Alok was busy with his office. He was promoted to the post of General Manager, Radha after seeing Shashikala, changed her attitude towards life completely. She started to read books. Of Raja Ranuohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar, who were the pioneers of the movement Sati Prohibition Act of 1829 and Hindu Remarriage Act of 1856. She was too concerned about the widows after seeing Badoma. She has started to worry about the whole gamete of social hurdles. Problems of women, children education, child-labour, unemployment bothered her a lot. She started to blame Government for their lethargic attitude towards, the society. Radha’s mind has been totally moved towards the social evils of the society.

Radha started to think about the society. Suddenly she thought of going to her hometown to see her family. Her mind was moving towards Bardhaman. One day when going to
her head office, she saw her elder brother. She seed of her cherished desire to see her parents, brothers and sisters began sprouting exactly from that moment. Radha booked the ticket to Bardhaman. While traveling in train she was arrested by past memories. The train reached Bardhamam within 2 hrs. She hired a cycle rickshaw and very soon approached the door of her house. While opening the door she saw her mother Swarnalata in a white sarri. She was sure that her father had died for her mother bore all the sign of widowhood on her body. After a moment she declared herself as Radha. Her mother was surprised to see Radha and tears were rolling on her cheeks. Later she was introduced to all the family members. Radha was given a room in her house. She had a great time. With her family. Inspite of that her mind was deeply thinking about the social serils.

Radha started visiting Bardhaman on Saturday evening’s and coming back on Monday mornings. Alok was once invited by Radha to Bardhamam. Alok was surprised to see Radha. He cannot even imagine the woman with the tattered sari in the train and a dynamic woman of all brave qualities. Alok and Radha were busy with their works. Sudha one day had a severe pain on her stomach. After consulting Dr. Mitra, medicines were given to Sudha. After that doctor suggested for immediate operation, but it ended in b vain. She was almost fined to her bed. At night she expired. After her expiring, Alok had an idea of marrying Radha. But she denied the proposal and said that she is not proposed for yet another relationship. Radha got living with her work and she was inspired by the mother of Puducherry while reading the volumes of ‘The Life Divine’. She felt that meditation is the only way for peace in life. Her concentration turned towards the social services.

She also insisted Alok to join in that program. Days rolled on and Radha became a social reformer. One day Alok was with Radha from the morning. Radha was ready with her baggage to go to Bardhaman. As the Train move, Alok was dranged with the past memories
in the station. He thought of woman with the tattered sari on her body. After some time Alok became aware of the situation and he returned to his official work.

The Silent One: The debut novel by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, a professor of English at Pondicherry University amply reflects her proficiency in the language. Due to her specialization in folklore studies and oral traditions, the author has primarily dwelt upon the spiritual and religious aspects of her narrative, as she avowedly believes in a non-conventional writing.

However, the novel may not fascinate those who expect a romantic story woven around specified, inter-related characters belonging to a given milieu or time frame. The novel revolves around a character referred to as the Silent One, a symbolic figure characterized by timelessness, who makes his presence felt over many generations by presumably passing through a seemingly interminable process of rebirth and reincarnation. The Silent One symbolizes the ageless bonds between father and son, mother and children, guru and pupils. Surrounded by an ocean of unbreakable silence, he also epitomizes the unquenchable yearning for inner quietude and an invincible passion for true love.

Myriad stories and events seem to unfold before our eyes and in our mind with the Silent One perennially in the background, exuding an aura of mystique and awe. Through the masterful imagery created by the writer we see many pictures unravelling in a well-knit sequel. We can mentally perceive temples, priests, monks, mendicants, motley crowds and villagers engrossed in rebuilding the village after it is devastated by floods.

There is a pictorial depiction of a royal procession on the way to a pilgrimage, accompanied by wood carriers with marks of whiplashes on their bare backs, running helter-skelter to fetch silver fish from the streams, to hunt rabbits and collect water in pots from the wells. We vicariously revel in the festivities around the temples, the elaborate wedding
ceremonies and in the playful pranks of the youthful village boys splashing in the water alongside the crocodile they have named Rogue.

The author highlights a generation of priests devoted to ritualistic worship and literal asceticism. Paramasinam, lost in his worshipful reveries is oblivious of his youthful bride Paravathi; the clinking of her bangles and the rhythmic tinkle of her anklets do not distract him. Paravathi has a subtle rapport with her mother-in-law who is averse to the mono-maniac mindsets of the male members of her family. In her exasperation she says, ‘Grandfather, father, son, for whose sake did they do this penance? All this asceticism? Surely I will die without seeing my grandchild.’

Paravathi’s heart bleeds for her widowed mother-in-law with her head smoothly shaven and stripes of ash smeared on her head, neck and hands. In the novel we find vivid expressions of love between various characters in a village where people address each other as brother and sister, despite the lack of familial ties. The spontaneity of some expressions is particularly touching such as, ‘There is nothing to fear from the corpses. One has to be careful with the living ones.’ The novel makes for pleasurable reading, although at times the repetitive narration of events causes boredom. Yet the novel’s distinctive feature is that it is thematically different from those written with an unmistakable emphasis on romance, rivalry and melodrama. It is this feature that can make The Silent One popular with some readers and not so with others.

**Autobiography**

Autobiographical works are by nature subjective. The inability—or unwillingness—of the author to accurately recall memories has in certain cases resulted in misleading or incorrect information. Some sociologists and psychologists have noted that autobiography offers the author the ability to recreate history. If satire and sympathy make Raja’s stories memorable, his belles-letters and vignettes in For Your Ears Only, telling us of his kind of
disciplinarian wife and inspiring colleagues, his library and his kitchen, are marked by an art of humility and innocent eagerness to share his feeling with others, but invariably passing on only his joys to us and keeping his problems to himself.

P. Raja’s is a versatile pen, which has essayed not only poetry, fiction, biography, criticism, but also translations and the essay. The present title is a collection of his essays written at different times between 1985 and 1997. The essays are woven round the subject of ‘Me and Mine’, as the titles themselves declare: ‘In My Study’, ‘The Story of My books’, ‘They made Me a Writer’, ‘She prays for Me’, ‘I Have Time for You’, ‘My Poems and I’ and so on. The author’s touch is exhilarating. The essays are autobiographical in tone and spirit. Essays like ‘In My Study’, ‘The Story of My Books’, ‘Visitors to My Library’ and ‘My Inspiring Colleagues’ give us information about how the author struggled in collecting books and building up his home library. His home itself is a library. He is still adding to his collection. It is indeed an amazing quality which is rarely seen among the educated, especially among the learned academicians. P. Raja may be rated among the finest prose essayists in the English Language. In its range of interests, in that personal intimacy with the reader taking him into familiar confidence with that gentle, nearly indiscernible soupcon of irony, for his choice of phrase and felicity of expression, in the evocation of a mood or in dwelling on a sentiment, for that good humoured tongue-in-cheek-iness – for all these one need not turn to Western models.

Shyam Sundar Jhunjhunwala’s ‘Down Memory lane’ is a memoir reminiscing his life at Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. The book enlightens us with his close association with Mother and the Ashram life during the formative years of the Ashram and Auroville. It mainly gets its contents from 23-2-72. When he was entrusted with the responsibility of Auroville to 20.5.73.
The author whose first visit in 1949 to Pondicherry paved a path for his life long association with Ashran and Auroville later gave up all his worldly pleasures to become an ardent, admirer and follower of Mother. In the book he talks of his early associations with like-minded people who then like himself had been very young and enthusiastic about talking Aurobindo’s doctrines and teachings to higher plane (new heights). Their aim of life had been to make known the words of Aurobindo and Mother to the whole Universe (Cosmos) and to spread the light of Universal togetherness and brotherhood. A few names that make it prominent are those Rishatchand Nohnida Andre, Counowma, and etc. These were the people who had assisted Mother in bringing in to life the idea of Universal brotherhood. They helped her transform an abstract idea into a concrete form in the guise of Auroville. Their early contribution to the working of the Ashram and Auroville is indispensable. He writes about them with great regard and remembers each association so clearly as if it were of recent times.

The author talks about various responsibilities that he was entrusted with various post he held while at Ashram. Some were literary, some financial and others were administrative in nature. In all his capacities it is evident that he proved to be an efficient worker. Meanwhile he had the brave lots of oppositions and accusations and lost the favour of many of his old mates but never failed to live upto Mother’s expectation. He had authored and translated many Journals, weekly and periodicals on Sri Aurobindo and his teachings. In such quests he remembers the assistance he received from many who themselves were great scholars of Sri Aurobindo. He talks of his literary, undertakings like his translation of “The Message of Sri Aurobindo”, “The life Divine” by Aurobindo into Hindi and his translation of Srimadbhagavat Gita into English with such zeal that his passion for writing manifests itself.

Shyam Sundar recalls his acquaintance with Mother’s son Andre and holds him in high esteem as a very grounded and humble person. So does he speak of Roger, the Architect
of Auroville with warmth as he recollects various occasions when they had come together to work for Auroville. Roger aimed at architectural perfection and projecting Auroville to the world in all its splendour and glory.

A chapter dedicated to Indira Ghandhi makes the reader understand that despite of her not being an open supporter of either Ashram or Mother both, Indira Ghandhi and Mother shared a cordial relationship during a pressing line, Indira Ghandhi had even asked for Mother’s advice regarding a national impending danger. He also talks about losing his dear ones especially his parents in a chapter. He talks of Mother’s love and warmth which helped him to get through the difficult phase. He writes about the time after the life time of Mother. He talks about the tiffs and frictions he had while working for Auroville from both known and unknown quarters. When he was falsely accused of misappropriating the funds of Auroville he had to face both Criminal and Civil Charges against him. He sadly recalls how none of his friends and acquaintances had stood by him and how he had to fight his own battle.

As Auroville grew both in size and enterprises, it became difficult for Mother in her later years to discipline the Aurovillians. The author who had been a constant companion of Mother in her efforts to built Auroville has not strived from giving a clear and bold picture about the kind of ambience that surrounded Auroville during Mothers last years. There are various instances where the author has penned down the sadness and grief of Mother regarding the way Auroville was transforming itself. The Mother staunchly believed in the doctrine of work i.e, Karmayoge and had great disgust for people who shirked their duties. She also deleted lying and lairs and had absolutely no place for their likes at Auroville but sadly she was unable to keep a check on such people and regretted their admission to Auroville. She even talked about the licentious behaviour of certain aurovillians that was brought to her notice and shared her grief with the author comparing such people to animals.
The book “Down memory lane” in a nutshell is a journey of the author a journey from one to state of being a feeling of nothingness or voidness to a state of wholeness or fulfillment. While going through the book even the reader undergoes a spiritual and cathartic experience which eases him off his inner self. The book purges/purgates the reader off his lower being and transforms him into a wholly new person. The book indeed is a Souvenir to the followers of Aurobindo and Mother all over the world. It is a window that lets us have a peep into the life of Mother the legend that she was.

Translation

A few among the Puducherry creative writers in English such as P. Raja, Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, Clement Lourdes and M.L. Thangappa as well prove that they are nowhere less than any other most genius translator of Indian Writings in English. M.L. Thangappa’s translations from Tamil into English such as Hues and Harmonies from Ancient Land (Selected poems from the classical period), Songs of Grace (Prose rendering of Vallalar’s Thiruarutpa: A Selection), Selected Poems of Bharathidasan, House of Darkness, (Bharathidasan’s Irunda veedu and Selected Poems of Vanidasan have brought him name and fame. P. Raja has translated an enormous amount of folk stories, one act plays and poetry from Tamil to down to earth English making even an ordinary English reading population to understand the real essence. The most notable among his translation is stupid Guru and His Foolish Disciples: Fr. Beschi’s book Paramarthaguru Kathaigal that was published with the original script in Latin and a Tamil translation.

Hundred Folk and Tribal Tales by Sujatha Vijayaragavan is a translation of selected tales from Naatuppura kathai kalanjiyam, a collection of stories gathered from all over Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry by a committed team on the initiative of Aaru Ramanathan of the Tamil University, Thanjavur.
Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, in her well-worded preface, points out how the oral tale is “dynamic, aesthetic, inspiring, and while making light reading is capable of provoking deep thought.” She has grouped the tales thematically and according to the districts they were gathered from. Each section has a preface from the original as well as one by her. Among the many themes are “the aesthetic as social archive”, “troping and naming”, “ancient cities and tales,” and “folk dances.” The first set is from the regions around Cuddalore and the theme is “Gender and divinity.” It includes the popular Anandayi tales; the translator points out how Anandayi is worshipped only by women.

There are tales that deal specifically with Tamil beliefs and literature. The “Kuttiandavar” tale gives details of the glorious port city of Kaverioppattinam or Poompuhar, with Vijayaraghavan drawing attention to the fact of “the little canon shaping the big” and explaining how scholars hold the view that the literary classic, ‘Silappadikaram’ “grew from folklore.” The Tamil specifics are also brought in with reference to folk deities such as Ayyanar and Jakkamma, sports such as Jallikattu, and dances such as Kummi.

There is a distinct identity as well as universality about folk tales. The one about the sister who saves her brothers is similar to the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, “The Wild Swans” where the girl silently makes shirts for her brothers who have been turned into birds by the wicked stepmother.

The story of the jealous neighbor who tries to imitate the journey to the forest and gets thrashed by bandits is another that has universal tones. In “The Tale of Tales,” there is even a reference to “Shakespeare”? The story of the jealous queens trying to do away with the fecund one is only too familiar. Also included is the Tamil folk version of the last of the Vikram-Betaal tales.

The chants and songs have been translated retaining the local flavor. In the social context, the tales featuring the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are interesting. Tribal
tales are grouped under a distinct section, though there are not too many of them. Any attempt to document the richness of indigenous culture is appreciable in a globalized world, which is felt to be losing many of its distinct ethnic and cultural forms, languages, and performing styles.

*Kuyil and Other Stories* by Prabanjan is the translated work of Clement Lourdes that illustrates his art of translating in accordance with the local flavor. It had been a long pending thirst of the Puducherry Tamil short story writer Prabanjan to reach the English tongues. Nobody other than Clement Lourdes could satiate his thirst. Undoubtedly, Clement Lourdes has really taken a great care in translating the select 13 stories into English with very equivalent words. All 13 stories have been translated in such a way that even an average reader of English could enjoy the literary taste with no difficulty. Reading Lourdes’s translation of Prabanjan, any reader could easily acknowledge that Prabanjan’s literary works are considered to be the gems of Puducherry’s Literature in Tamil. His works travel along various issues faced by different sects of People. The entire society is represented in most of his Short stories and Novels regardless of any discrimination. Most of his works tactfully attack the major social evils predominant in the society such as corruption, bribery, women harassment and student harassment prevalent in Universities and colleges.

In continuation with an introduction of all contemporary Puducherry writers in English in Chapter IV, Chapter V has done justice in providing a critical appreciation about each of those discussed writer’s contribution to different genres such as, poetry, short story, novels, translation and autobiography. Certainly, this chapter would enable any reader to treat the literary genius of the Puducherry writers in English on par with any other reputed writer of Indian Writings in English.
In every sense, the writers who pen their creative writings from Puducherry maintain uniformity with the rest of Indian writers in English without any monopoly. The true sense of Indianness is vivid in all their writings in terms of theme, tone and diction. At the same time, reading chapter V any one could explore if the distinct culture and tradition of Puducherry is present in any other writings in English hailed from Puducherry.

After exploring the significant history, unique and distinct culture, literary artifacts of each language and the appreciation of Puducherry creative writings in English, Chapter VI sums up the entire dissertation in a nutshell and enumerates the fact that Puducherry’s significant history and cultural legacy is not echoed in most of the creative writings in English except in the writings of a handful of native writers like P. Raja, Clement Lourdes and B.V. Selvaraj.