Roger Sharrock, in *The Figure in a Landscape*, says that a poet is "not a camera, but a consciousness." This profound observation is very useful in analysing not only poems but all creative writing. The novels that we have analysed in the preceding chapters are not photographs of life as it is lived; they are re-creations of life as perceived and transformed by the novelists’ perception and imagination. A novelist as a person need not conform himself to a system of values, but as a creative writer his consciousness is moulded by a sort of value system. The novelists we have discussed are serious artists but are not committed to any one system, except that of the self and its relation with other selves. A sociologist may think that society derives its form not from individual "selves" but from the functions these "selves" perform. But a creative writer's idea of the self emerges from his consciousness and acquires a shape and

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a vision by being made an organic part of a dramatic action which is meaningful. Most modernist writers, while dramatizing life as a struggle between opposites like the sacred and the secular, faith and lack of it, society and individual, artist and man, integration and alienation, the outer and the inner, seem to forge an aesthetic in which these opposites are reconciled, or at least remain in a state of mutual coexistence. Of the novelists under review, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi appear to be modernist, while Rajan, Raja Rao, and Narayan appear to be traditional, in the sense that the aesthetic we notice in their fictions is very much rooted in the Hindu tradition. But in all these writers we notice a felicitous fusion of the transcendental and the humanistic traditions in Indian thought.

Apart from the novelists we have discussed, writers like Kamala Markandeya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, to mention only two significant names, dramatize actions in which the self, the family, and society are sometimes in conflict and sometimes in harmony. In a sequence of novels culminating in Pleasure City, Kamala Markandeya's stories deal with social justice and injustice, poverty and principle, faith and lack of it, the East and the West, and individual and society. A good example that could be cited is A Handful of Rice. Ravi's
migration from a village to a town, his growing acquaintance with another young man, Damodar, who is a part of the black market racket, his association with Appu's family, his marriage with Nalini, Appu's daughter, his decline as a member of society, and his struggle between the tempting luxury Damodar gives for joining hands with him and the unbearable poverty he faces are typical of any fiction that tries to convey the tragic sense of Indian life. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* conveys with remarkable subtlety the view that the great Bengal famine was partly the result of vicious economic exploitation. The feeling of the central character, Kajoli, is conveyed in the following passage, which is unmistakably representative:

> A fighter? Had she not yielded to her fate without a struggle? Become one with the mass of mindless destitutes? Feeding at the free kitchen. Picking from muck-heaps. No grit. A mere beggar-woman. And soon to die—die a thousand deaths.

Unable to sustain themselves in a village ravaged by an unprecedented famine, Kajoli, her mother, and her brother go to Calcutta. In Calcutta we notice various sorts of hunger prevailing. The poor are hungry for food, the exploiters are

hungry for money, and the vicious characters are hungry for lewd pleasures. Kajoli sacrifices herself and her character just for satisfying the hunger of her poor, starving mother. A crude realist may say that it is a daily event in any third world country. But the novelist creates the image of a society under pressure, in which other strains like unscrupulous exploitation and scant respect for the time-honoured values could be clearly seen.

II

Of the five novelists we have discussed, Rajan's novels present a society that is sophisticated and glamorous. But his characters involve themselves in the contemporary critical issues like the communal disharmony. As has been shown earlier, the contemporary issues and events are not in themselves significant. What is significant is the way in which they divide and unite characters who are groping in a hostile milieu for that sort of stability and social security in which they can enjoy their personal gains. The novels are organized on a very sensitive issue that still remains alive in the Indian social context, the arranged marriage. The problems that arise in an arranged marriage make Krishnan a divided self. The disruption and resumption of the Krishnan-Kamala relationship is an inclusive and significant thematic
base that operates in terms of dualities which are part and parcel of the Hindu transcendental tradition enshrined in the Gita. Krishnan and his counterpart in Too Long in the West, Nalini, while coming into terms with the dualities, also acquire a state of selfhood, which makes the word "Brahmin" acquire transcendental connotations. It is here that the transcendental and the humanistic strains in the Hindu socio-cultural thought earn a symbolic meaning. Nataraja and His Consort create, sustain, and destroy the palpable world, of which the self is an organic unit. The Cosmic Dance is a perennial process in which Krishnans and Kamales have their significance and reality. However much the sophistication imbibed from the West stands in the way of achieving an intrinsic integration of the self, the family, and society, the overall import of the Krishnan-Kamala relationship is that integration is possible.

Raja Rao's novels are more complex and ambitious than Rajan's. Raja Rao's characters are members of traditional Hindu Brahmin families. As Ramaswamy often says, "Brahmin is he who knows Brahman." Brahman is the Cosmic Self, in which

3 The Serpent and the Rope, p. 5.
each individual self beholds its own identity. But this is not a mere matter of words. It is more easily said than achieved. Raja Rao's fiction as a whole dramatizes the various socio-cultural changes which subject the traditional Hindu family and its values to a severe and honest probe. The caste-ridden Hindu society gives ample scope to Raja Rao to explore the tensions within society which are generated by the rigidity and the inflexibility of the caste system. Moreover, a traditional Brahmin's journey to the West, his stay in the West, and his return to the mother country give him an opportunity to assess objectively the meaning and the significance of his own values. There is a possibility, in the process of the reassessment of the alien values, of becoming conscious of what is vulnerable in one's self. A similar creative quest is seen among the European artists. As Robert S. Ellwood observes, "Many in our day have made the Journey to the East of Hermann Hesse's paradigmatic novel. For some, austensibly, it has been a quest for that sort of knowledge which makes for power in the commercial or political worlds. For some, like certain of the Company in Hesse's novel, the search—often never physically leaving Europe—is the romantic quest for the Distant which unlocks the Past, the Sunrise East of ultimate origins—for the secret of one's lost identity,
for the barely-remembered splendor of one's childhood world. Others, like the subject of the present paper, Percival Lowell (and more recently Arther Koestler), have professed that the East has only sent them back to the West with renewed confidence in its values.\(^4\) The foregoing observation suggests the possibility that an Indian after a prolonged stay in the West may return home with a renewed confidence in the values of Indian tradition and culture. What happens in Raja Rao's fiction is that his characters not only acquire a renewed confidence in their values but try to reorganize those values from a humanistic perspective. In the case of Moorthy and Govindan Nair, the humanistic perspective has an Indian origin, and in the case of Ramaswamy and Kirillov alias Padmanabha Iyer, it has a Western origin. The Independence struggle and the Gandhian social revolution inspire Moorthy in Kanthapura to do away with the caste system in spite of the protests of the traditional society. The conflict between the self and society in Kanthapura consists in the hostility that Moorthy's visits to the Harijan quarter provoke among the inmates of the Brahmin quarter. But it is Gandhi's humanism that helps Moorthy triumph in silencing his oppo-

nents, who are indeed formidable. Govindan Nair in *The Cat and Shakespeare* seems to succeed in blending the transcendental and the humanistic in Indian thought by being faithful to both. Though a Nair, he has a profound knowledge of Indian transcendental thought, while Ramakrishna Pai, a Brahmin, does not have any of it. Govindan Nair exemplifies in himself the definition of a Brahmin as one who knows Brahman. His absolute confidence in Divine Mother symbolized by the mother cat helps him negotiate with all kinds of stormy weather. Keeping pain in one eye and joy in the other, he appears to be a man who has an intuitive knowledge of the self, and harmonizes its relationship with the family and society. Although he is aware of the shortcomings of his colleagues, acquaintances, and neighbours, his humanistic perspective influences him in showing a charitable disposition towards their lapses. To put it in a different way, Govindan Nair shows, in a remarkable way, the impersonal attitude of Shakespeare towards humanity, which is detached and at the same time compassionate.

In *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswamy finds himself in a cosmopolitan setting and elitist society. He hops from place to place. Paris and London are the centres of his intellectual activity. As has been pointed out earlier,
Ramaswamy is a typical example of an Indian whose journey to the West confirms the authenticity of Hindu society and its values. One may construe the misunderstanding and separation of Ramaswamy and Madeleine as an unnegotiable gulf between the East and the West. But this is not so. A mature understanding of the issue appears to be that Ramaswamy's self evolves from romantic notions to transcendental notions. To put it in a different way, the romantic self slowly but steadily evolves into the imperial self. Considering this transformation as a quest, we notice that the experience of familial and social relations stands him in good stead to proceed from academic, cultural, and romantic pursuits to the pursuit of the exploration of the self. In the novel, there is a sustained comparison and contrast between Georges and Catherine, and Ramaswamy and Madeleine as married couples. Apart from the advantages of sharing a common culture, Georges and Catherine have the additional advantage of pursuing activities which are in harmony with the society in which they live. We notice in the case of Madeleine and Ramaswamy a simmering dissatisfaction with each other's cultural background and in the case of Ramaswamy it is aggravated by his relationship with Savithri. Ramaswamy is very much aware when he thrusts marriage on his sister Saroja.
that the permissiveness that obtains in these matters in Western society is totally absent in Hindu society. But this does not in any way affect his faith in the sanctity and the inviolability of the self as embodied in the Hindu transcendental tradition. It is not surprising when he takes the decision to go and seek the feet of his Guru in Trivandrum. It is a time-honoured and established tradition in Hindu society that one should seek enlightenment from a Guru. The relationship between the master and the disciple is still the solid base on which the self can nourish and earn an inclusive vision of the self, the family, and society.

III

Narayan's Malgudi stories may be construed as a critique of the manners and morals of the South-Indian middle-class life. In all these stories the family appears to be the centre of activity. Narayan's mild and gentle irony probes and reveals some of the common foibles of a middle-class Indian. As John Colmer rightly observes, "The successful critic of society, it may be suggested, is the writer who learns the wisdom of indirection. He is the writer who learns to combine instruction with delight, without in any way compromising his integrity of blunting the force of his social
The foregoing observation appears to be an apt description of Narayan the story teller. His characters like Margayya, Nataraj and his friends, Vasu, Raju and Rosie, Jagan, and Raman and Daisy are the products of a society the values of which are simple and direct. They may be reckoned as characters who struggle to preserve what they have and what they acquire. But, as it happens in life, it so happens in Narayan's comedy that the loss and the gain are the result of one's character and action, or, to put it in the Hindu way, the result of one's karma. It is in passing through the alternating phases of loss and gain that the self acquires stability and harmony. Narayan seems to advocate the view that evil, either social or metaphysical, has in itself the roots of its destruction. It may take a long time for the process to reach its completion. But in spite of the terrible hardships they face, most Hindus believe in the ultimate triumph of the satvik elements in society. The foregoing idea is creatively presented in The Man-eater of Malgudi. Although Vasu, a taxidermist and a local menace in the novel, may be construed as an embodiment of what is evil in man, there is a possibility of considering him as Narayan's creative comment

on the subversion of values that operates in most commercial activities. The suggestive irony in a passage like the following cannot go unnoticed:

'I think there is a good business proposition here. I can supply them stuffed eagles at about fifty rupees each. Everyone can keep a sacred Garuda in the puja and I'll guarantee that it won't fly off. Thus they can save their eyes from glare. I want to be of service to our religious folk in my own way.  

The Financial Expert, apart from being an interesting story in itself, is a subtle comment on the fate of persons who like to climb the ladder from poverty to riches and leap from fortune to fortune. It also brings to the fore the various ways in which social welfare schemes are exploited to enrich private individuals. Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets is a typical Narayan character, in the sense that his Gandhian ethic doesn't prevent him in hoarding currency in the attic of his house and carrying his cheque-book wherever he goes. Raju in The Guide, in trying to exploit the resentment of a housewife against her husband, lands himself in an awkward situation from which he cannot disentangle himself. Raman, the painter of signs, propagates the virtue and the efficacy of family planning with the fond hope of acquiring a wife to

6The Man-eater of Malgudi, p. 64.
beget children. This does not mean that Narayan is against the idea of family planning. It only suggests that there is an unnecessary fuss about simple matters which could be tackled at the base level without terrorizing the village folk. When we construe a creative work as social criticism, we should not make the mistake of ignoring the value of a creative work as a creative work. Moreover, Narayan's irony, while providing the socio-critical insight, suggests that in fine, the self reposes itself in the stability of truth. A story like A Tiger for Malgudi reinforces the idea that any transcendental quest should necessarily be in harmony with an enlightened humanistic perspective. One of the ironies of the story appears to be that the animal world is more responsive to spiritual orientation than the human world. Man is eager to exploit the animal world for his own ends whereas an animal is not capable of it. The built-in ironies, such as those we have just noticed, make it hardly easy to subsume Narayan's stories under any fictional genre. Hence we think it not inappropriate to call the entire corpus of Narayan's fiction the comedy of the self.

IV

Robert Penn warren, discussing the relevance of Faulkner, makes the following observation:
This is where the question of the "relevance" of literature comes in. As a kind of short-hand, we may say that literature may carry a sort of built-in rebuke to the hubris of its age, and that the more powerful the drives of an age and the more successful they appear, the more powerful, radical, and complex may be the literature on "rebuke." For instance, we may cite the tragedy of Athens in the age that drove toward the debacle of Syracuse, or that of the Elizabethan period with its newly opened society of "ambition," the poetry of the English Romantics in the context of the Industrial Revolution, the work of Hawthorne and Melville in the society of the 1840s and '50s or that of Melville again, Mark Twain, and James in the Guilded Age, and of Dreiser in the age of Coolidge. Furthermore, such a "rebuke," though it may be literal and direct (as it often was, but not always, with Zola), is more apt to be "mythic" and "radical"—that is, to take a form which, because of its distance from the literal, may give a drama at once more strongly focussed than life ordinarily affords, and more deeply suggestive. As Aldous Huxley says of tragedy, such a "rebuke," whether tragic or not, gives only a half-truth; it gives only one, abstracted perspective on actuality, but that may be an essential truth, a "radical" truth, not to be ignored.  

Arun Joshi's fiction and its relevance may be construed by making use of some of the insights embodied in the above citation. His fiction carries a sort of built-in rebuke to the hubris of our age. The Apprentice, for example, is an incisive comment on the contemporary Indian scene, closely modelled on Albert Camus's The Fall. It unravels hypocrisy and corruption that are ubiquitous, although the protagonist's penitential role seems to salvage the crumbling self. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the protagonist of The Fall, like Ratan Rathor of Joshi, sees the falsity of his existence and tries to salvage his fragmented self, christening himself judge penitent. He narrates his experiences in such a way that the norms of our civility are placed in their proper perspective. In a revealing passage, he says, "He who clings to a law does not fear the judgement that puts him in his place within an order he believes in. But the keenest of human torments is to be judged without law. Yet we are in that torment. Deprived of their natural curb, the judges, loosed at random, are racing through their job. Hence we have to try to go faster than they, don't we? And it's a real mad house. Prophets and facts multiply; they hasten to get there with a good law or a flawless organization before the world is deserted. Fortunately, I arrived. I am
the end and the beginning; I announce the law. In short, I am a judge-penitent." Ratan Rathor narrates his experiences like Jean Baptiste and although he doesn't call himself a penitent, the entire narrative, punctuated with words like "sham," "bogus," "fake," "whore," "humiliation," and their analogues, is an unreserved confession of the self which transforms penitence into prayer. The sort of penitential prayer we have just noticed is a characteristic of Joshi's maiden novel, *The Foreigner*. Sindi Oberoi passes through a therapeutic process in which he feels that an "indefatiguable surgeon" is cleaning up his soul with the sharp edge of his scalpel. This suggests that Joshi's protagonist, while submitting his self to a clinical probe, earns an awareness which makes his own self a labyrinth.

The image of the labyrinth, as we have noticed earlier, controls the narrative perspective of Joshi's fiction. The consonance and the dissonance that characterize the self, the family, and society are metaphorically suggested and authenticated by the following passage from *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*:


9 *The Foreigner*, p. 207.
If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then I do not know of any man who sought it more doggedly and, having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its call. In brief, I know of no other man who so desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.  

In fine, Arun Joshi's fiction, without appearing as an overt sociological exercise, gathers within its fold most of the issues that trouble and torment the post-Independence generation. The way out of the labyrinth is not to make the self a mirror but to liberate it by constantly reminding oneself that the labyrinth is not an unsafe place to exist, provided one is apprenticed to the sublime principle of giving, which is very well exemplified in Anuradha in The Last Labyrinth.

Anita Desai's wounded self, which is dramatized largely in terms of a woman's world, doesn't expand in space and time but always turns inward. Familial disharmony brings in a kind of self-alienation, which in turn impels Desai's

10 The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, p. 8.
protagonists to subject themselves to a search for an emotional centre within to which they can cling to in their crises. *Voices in the City* dramatizes the inner dissonance in Nirode's family which is a consequence of his mother's indiscretion. The wounded self in Nirode in its outward emergence transforms itself and manifests as a cynical irreverence for all the traditional norms of social behaviour. His blistering frankness disturbs his friends and makes him feel that he lives in a hostile social milieu. An identical state of feeling we notice in Nanda Kaul. Even those Indians who stay abroad suffer from a sense of isolation and selfprivation. Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* and Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* converge on the theme of Indians abroad. In *The Nowhere Man*, Kamala Markandaya deliberately makes everything go against Srinivas, who has lived in London for over fifty years. Srinivas tries to evict his anti-Indian tenants on the plea that he is a leper and hence would like to isolate himself from everybody. But he doesn't succeed. He dies in a fire accident caused by Fred, who hates Indians. The tragic sense of life that emerges from *The Nowhere Man* makes one think that we haven't emancipated ourselves from the prejudices and the restraints of colonialism. An Indian
in London is not a man but a coloured colonial. While Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* makes the point directly, brutally, and cynically, Anita Desai reinforces the point with subtle irony. Of the two friends, Dev and Adit, Dev appears to be positive, in the sense that he tries to adjust himself to the conditions in which educated Indian immigrants have to survive in England. Adit, on the other hand, is always preoccupied with the problem of arriving at a solution to the problems he visualizes when he goes to India with his English wife, Sarah. Though Adit and Nirode look at the problem of existence from different perspectives, there is a great deal of similarity in their practical approach to the problem. Adit, like Nirode, always indulges in irrelevant talk which is a mild symptom of the wounded self.

In the individual chapters on the writers discussed in this study, the author's intention is to bring to a central focus some of the dominant fictional themes that are unmistakably there in the Indian novel in English. "Self, family, and Society" is neither a theoretical concept nor a sociological principle. It is not employed in the study as a yardstick to measure the success or the failure of the individual novelists or their novels. Since all the novelists under review in this study conform to the conventions of
realism and since most of their fictions basically explore
the quirks and turns that are common in human relations, the
self, the family, and society are used as a theme and varia-
tion which have explicatory convenience and exploratory luci-
dity. One thing that emerges from the study is obviously the
variety and the richness that the Indian novel in English has.
The achievement of the individual novelists of this study con-
sists in sensitively responding to the various socio-cultural
problems that an Indian has been facing since Independence.
The response crystallizes itself into an imaginative construct
the meaning and the relevance of which consist in making sense
of modern India, its problems, its people, and its fast-chang-
ing socio-cultural milieu.