What is a myth? The Random House Dictionary defines it as "a traditional or legendary story, usually concerned with deities or demi-gods and the creation of the world and its inhabitants; a story of belief that attempts to express or explain a basic truth; an allegory or parable." And a symbol, as defined by the same source, is "a material object representing something, often something immaterial; emblem, token or sign." Myths and symbols, as we know them today are, thus, by their very nature, things that are ancient or subtle and deep. It is only those writers who are initiated well into the culture of a country that may venture to integrate them into their writings. Again, it is only those readers who know these myths and symbols well that can fully appreciate the rich references and the concealed design in such writings. The exercise is rewarding, though highly taxing and demanding.

P.Thomas believes that an unenlightened ignorant world is a fertile breeding place for myths and it is the fears, hopes, despair and curiosity of the childhood days of mankind, embodied in myths, that have come down to us as
traditions, sacred and profane. He further reasons that myths are the "thought-fossils which teach us in allegories and symbols the stories of cultures and civilizations that preceded ours, and attempts of man to solve various human problems. As reason and science advance, myths lose most of their religious and dogmatic character, but are not discarded entirely as futile. In fact, they still find a prominent place in the essential life of the community in art, poetry and folk-lore."¹

One may or may not agree with Thomas about the low origin of myths, but certainly there can be no quarrelling with the last part of his statement — that myths/symbols included do occupy an important place in the emotional and cultural life of a country. And what is true of myth and mythology, of symbols and emblems in other countries, is still more true of Indian lore. Mythology is a live tradition in our country and even after the lapse of thousands of years, myths and symbols from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Upanishads and the Puranas are the everyday talk of the man in the street just as they are a perennial source of inspiration to great writers, philosophers, thinkers and artists alike.

Recognizing the valuable contribution that myths and symbols make to a piece of literature, Alphonsso-Karkala
remarks: "When a writer chooses to knit into the carpet of his creative endeavour composite myths, large themes, high motives, variety of symbols, the matrix of his work does in fact develop a depth and width in time and space, providing vast interior space. Because of this complex construction, the work generates a wave of fresh interpretations in every age, and surviving the tests of time, becomes a classic in world literature."¹ No wonder the use of myths and symbols is a world-wide phenomenon in modern literature and among others, great names like Kafka, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H.Lawrence and Faulkner have found them a most appropriate device to use. Echoing the universal trend, Indian writers of the English novel too, draw from the most ancient of mythic and symbolic conceptions. There are recurring allusions to Hindu Epics, legends, myths and symbols from ancient Sanskrit literature in the writings of Raja Rao, Sudhin Ghose and many other writers who are not so well-conversant with the ancient Hindu lore. Myths and symbols thus form a palpable section of the creative writing in English today.

Some very vital questions confront us at this point. What is the part that myths and symbols play in these novels? Do they contribute to the technique of the novel, besides feeding the bulk of its content? Are they an integral part of the book or mere superfluous impositions? Do they embellish
the characters or are merely an encumbrance to their understanding? Do they enrich and enliven the literary work or do they make it all an exercise in meaningless verbosity? In short, what specific purpose do they serve in a novel? These are significant questions and, of course, the answers differ with different writers.

In some Indo-English novelists the use of these myths and symbols is extensive whereas in others there are only limited references to this field of thought. Sometimes these literary devices form a part of the inbuilt mechanism and are deeply ingrained in the structure of the novel; at other times their use is only casual and superficial. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee, they are sometimes employed as "a structural parallel" and sometimes as a mere "digressional technique." Some writers use them as a device of characterization and others to drive home a special moral. Very often they go a long way in lending an Indian colouring to the technique of novel-writing, thus bringing it nearer to the Indian classical tradition of writing. These myths and symbols not only make the old relevant to the day and thus bring the ancient to our doorstep, but also lend a feel of timelessness and universality to what exists today. When rightly used, they, thus, help to make the novel richer, better, wider in range and more sublime too.
Sometimes literary artists make a conscious use of myths and symbols in order to add new dimensions to their writings but sometimes these are sucked into the body-blood of master-writings without the author being aware of it. In the present study I will concern myself with the conscious as well as unconscious use of Hindu literary myths and symbols — that is, the ones drawn from the Hindu Epics and scriptures and try to analyze at some length their scope and significance in the Indo-English novels of the period under study.

I

Raja Rao

The most prominent among the Indo-English novelists who have made a brilliant use of Hindu myths and symbols is Raja Rao. These are generally central to his themes though sometimes, no doubt, he uses them as a digressional tactic too. His magnum opus, The Serpent and the Rope, which Naik calls "a sustained piece of symbolism," owes its very title to the popular Hindu myth about Illusion and Reality. The serpent and the rope here are the two Advaitic terms, the two central symbols in the Non-dualistic philosophy
of Shankracharya, the celebrated Hindu philosopher. Swami Vivekanand in his lecture "One Existence Appearing as Many" expounds this central imagery of Sankar's philosophic thinking as follows:

There are neither three nor two in the universe; it is all one. That one, under the illusion of Maya, is seen as many, just as a rope is seen as a snake. It is the very rope that is seen as a snake. There are not two things there, a rope separate and a snake separate. No man sees these two things there at the same time ... We always perceive the one. When we perceive the rope, we do not perceive the snake at all; and when we perceive the snake, we do not see the rope at all — it has vanished. When you see illusion, you do not see reality.

The epigraph to the novel stresses the same idea using a different symbolism:

Waves are nothing but water.
So is the sea.

Interpreted on the philosophical plane it means that the whole phenomenal world is but a manifestation of God Himself. Lost in appearance, we ignore the substratum and are totally oblivious of Reality. The waves, the tides, the current, the bubble are all water but we have lost the sea in the waves, the wood in the trees. M.K.Naik sums up the symbolism of the title and the epigraph in the following words: "... the Rope in the title and the sea in the epigraph stand for the Ultimate Reality, the serpent representing Illusion and the
waves in the epigraph the Individual Soul which ultimately
discovers that it is nothing but the Ultimate Reality Itself."

The title and the epigraph only hint at what is to
follow. As expected, they are only a pithy summing up of the
central theme of the novel which may be described as a quest
for Reality as set against Appearance, for Self as against
Non-self. The Hindus believe that the summum bonum of human
existence is to go beyond the immediate, to be deeply
involved in this metaphysical quest. To quote M.K. Naik
again: "Man's life here in Samsara is an august mission to
find the Absolute. The Absolute according to the Indian
tradition being incarnate in the Guru."  

And this is what the hero of Raja Rao's grand literary
creation sets out to do. The Serpent and the Rope is "the
story of Rama's quest to reach the 'water' of self-realization
by following the 'direct path' of renunciation." Very early
in life Rama realizes, only too painfully realizes, that we
live in the phenomenal world — the serpent — and cannot
easily 'conjure it away'. And our running and rolling and
lamenting at the sight of this imagined serpent in all its
horror continues till "One — the Guru — brings you to the
lantern; the road is seen, the long white road, going with
statutory stars.' It's only the rope.' He shows it to you.
And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent."
And so Rama decides to seek his Guru in Travancore.

A masterly use of these metaphysical myths and Advaita symbols immediately wins the novel the distinction of being above the common run of Indo-English novels. It raises the reader to the spiritual level, very different from the plane of physical passions or social problems or psychic complexities. It does not teach us escapism by running away from problems; rather it seeks to take us to the root of all sorrow, suffering and frustration and from there on to the source of ambrosia — the divine drink, a draught of which will make us transcend all that binds and imprisons us. It teaches us the way to solve not just problems — but the problem of existence. It is a heavy burden to carry, by all standards. And Raja Rao accomplishes this challenging task not by turning the novel into a dry treatise on metaphysics but by letting it remain, on the whole, a very 'human' novel.

Besides this metaphysical mythic symbolism at the heart of the novel, we have here the Radha-Krishna and Savithri-Satyavan myths which are the key to the understanding of the Ramaswamy-Savithri relationship. Rama is married to Madeleine and Savithri is engaged to be married to Pratap. Yet the two are irresistibly drawn to each other. On the face of it, it is a most unsatisfactory kind of relationship and Rama's extra-marital interest puzzles the reader. What
could Rama see in the clumsy, unattractive Savithri to reject the sweet, capable Madeleine in her favour? Obviously there is more in it than meets the eye and Raja Rao wants us to go beyond the surface and look deeper.

The name Savithri has great symbolic significance for the Hindus. In the Vedas the name stands for the solar deity that quickens, stimulates and activates. Coming from the Mahabharata, the name becomes synonymous with wifely devotion that can force even the relentless Yama to relent. In more recent times Sri Aurobindo in his great epic Savithri has invested the age-old Mahabharata story with a new meaning, a new symbolism: "Here, Satyavan is Truth, married to Savithri who represents Love and the power of Devotion, the meaning of the legend being, Man can transcend Death by uniting Truth and the power of Devotion." It is these divine attributes that Savithri in The Serpent and the Rope is supposed to embody. She is dry-as-dust to look at, no doubt, but then so is the path of divinity in the initial stages. Travel further and new vistas are opened to you. Rama scratched below the surface and found deep spring-wells of spirituality in this short, plump, most unromantic, even 'anti-romantic' looking Savithri.

M.K. Naik asserts: "It is his encounter with Savithri that makes Rama fully and truly conscious of his spiritual
heritage, and his love for her becomes a stepping-stone to his ultimate realization of Truth. Savithri, in this sense, becomes a Guru to him, before he sets out to seek his Guru proper in the end."

In the opinion of the critic, "The symbolism of the ritual marriage between Rama and Savithri is plain: the Individual Self (Rama) has been united to purity and power of Devotion (Savithri), or the Masculine Principle has been wedded to the Feminine Principle. The outcome of this union is self-realization and illumination." Lines such as the following prove the truth of this contention:

'Will you exchange places with me?' I asked.
'Yes, if you like this wretched cloak.'
'If you become me, then there is no problem.'
'How so?'
'Then you, become me, will be the real Savithri.'
'And who's the Satyavan?'
'The self, the Truth.'

Collett corroborates the divine nature of the relationship between the two: "Rama feels that he would need to become a saint to know Savithri." Clearly there is much in the novel to convey the impression that "it is a spiritual, rather than a physical, affinity that draws them together."

The divine bond between Rama and Savithri has also been symbolized as Radha-Krishna myth. Savithri visits Rama in his room in a London hotel and "mythicizing him as Krishna, the divine lover, and herself as Radha, the beloved of
Krishna, offers him a ritual worship." She tells Rama: "A Hindu woman knows how to worship her Krishna, her Lord. When the moon shines over the Jumna and lights are lit in the households and the cows are milked, then it is Janaki's son plays on the banks of the Yamuna in Brindavan. ... What Gopi, my Lord, would not go to this festival of love? ... I've known my Lord for a thousand lives, from janam to janam have I known my Krishna..." Here the Radha-Krishna myth in relation to Rama and Savithri is plainly "symbolic of the seeker's unrealized longing for God or the Absolute, her ritual marriage with Rama symbolizes the union of Feminine Principle with Masculine Principle or of Prakriti (nature) with Purush (God)."

To Raji Narasimhan "Savitri is the Mirage, Maya. She is the dramatic tool for the illustration of the message of the Great Illusion contained in the theme of the serpent and the rope. Neither the serpent nor the rope is real. The rope might be mistaken for the serpent; the serpent for the rope. The physical attributes given to Savithri to individualise her are vestigial."

The story of Savithri and her relationship with Rama is open to a plethora of interpretations. It is all a tale loaded with symbolism and, one cannot help observing, loaded with rather too heavy a symbolism that seriously flaws the
characterization of this important figure in the novel. The abstruse, abstract, 'near-stylised' allegorical mode of her conversation with Rama takes away from the human character of her nature and almost makes her a 'mythological identity'. Though she represents "the very familiar and the very precious" in Hindu myths, she seems to be remote from everyday life. What she gains in spiritual stature as a result of mythic symbolism, she loses in emotional appeal. It is difficult to see how a discerning writer like Naik could claim that "Savitri is at once a symbolic character and an intensely alive human being." C.D. Narasimhaiah sounds much nearer truth when he states: "Savitri of the novel is there, no one disputes, but she is not fully developed..."

Besides these, there are several other important Hindu myths such as the myths of Shiva, Parvathi and Nandi, of Radha, Krishna and Durvasa, of Yajnyavalkya and Maitreyi, of Ganges and Benares, etc., woven into the pattern of the novel. These mythical allusions and symbols used by the author form integral parts of the theme of the novel and "to compare the small with the great" make The Serpent and the Rope an epic in the "Mahabharata" style indeed! Says Iyengar: "If Kanthapura has a recognizable epic quality, The Serpent and the Rope is more than a miniature epic — it is almost encyclopaedic in its scope."
Raja Rao's next novel The Cat and Shakespeare is rather enigmatic. As in The Serpent and the Ropes, here too, quest for the Ultimate Reality is one of the leading themes in the narrative and symbols — deep and subtle — have been profusely used to substantiate and concretize abstract ideas and metaphysical musings, the hobby-horse that Raja Rao rides so often in his novels. And if the symbols employed in the book are different from the earlier symbols, it is because here Raja Rao suggests a different way to reach the same goal — that is, the Bhakti-Marg, the Prapatti-Marg (the path of devotion and self-surrender) as against Jnana-Marg (the path of knowledge). For the highly intellectual Rama the path to self-realization lay through knowledge, but for Govindan Nair and Ramakrishna Pai the road to the Ultimate led through love, devotion and self-surrender. This doctrine of Bhakti-Marg as preached by Ramanuja (radically different from the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankra) does not mean extinction of self but rather a union of our will with the will of God.

According to the Visistadvaita school of philosophy discussed above, there are two ways to reach the highest truth — the monkey's way (markata-nyaya) and 'the cat-hold way' (marjara-nyaya). Explaining these two theories about the nature of man's dependence on God E.J.Kalinnikova writes:
On the one hand a believer can become like a blind kitten and utterly entrust his fate to Mother-Cat (that is to Absolute, Brahman, Atman, etc. — one can differently call God), who will carry its kitten by the scruff of the neck submitting to the instinct of self-preservation.

On the other hand, a believer can fancy himself to be a monkey's kid, whom the Mother-Monkey leads, holding him by the paw. In both cases the kids are under their mothers' protection but there is some difference between them: The blind kitten is more helpless. It is entirely in the power of the Supreme Being and is deprived of any support, while the young monkey though it clings to its mother but for all that goes by itself. 24

Raja Rao's preference is for the cat's way. The relationship between God and man is seen in the novel as that between cat and its kitten. Iyengar's exposition of the theme is:

Cats and kittens are the currency of Govindan Nair's talk:

'Have you ever seen a kitten fall? You could fall. I could fall. But the kittens walk on the wall. They are so deft. They are so young. They are so white. The mother cat watches them. And when they are about to fall, there she is, her head in the air, and she picks you up by the scruff of your neck. You never know where she is. (Who has seen her? Nobody has.) To know where she is, you have to be mother's mother. And how could that ever be? Mother, I worship you...!'
We all do stumble, the cleverest and the nimblest of us do; but had we the total trust of the kitten in the mother cat, our stumbling wouldn't matter, for we would be arrested halfway in our stumbling and jerked away to a haven of safety. This is the higher wisdom, Paravidya.25

Another important symbol in the novel is building the house three storeys high. To explain its deeper significance we could not perhaps do better than quote Kalinnikova's commentary on the subject, though it is a rather longish excerpt:

The topic of house-building is like a refrain in the novel. It appears not once. There is an attempt to 'build a house of brick in reality' — in Mahabharata it is built out of lacquer and in dreams it is built out of gold.

'Ramakrishna Pai has always wanted to build a house three stories high'... professor C.D. Narasimhaiah reasons, — 'Now the symbol of the three-storied house, like the green, red and blue ration cards — appears to be a private symbol but is not so if one has some nodding acquaintance with the gunatraya: tamas, rajas and sattva, enumerated in the Bhagavad Gita...'

An enlightened reader will recognize here the teaching of the Samkhya philosophy according to which the initial nature — prakrti — consists of three gunas or qualities:

(1) Sattva — serenity, (2) rajas — energy, (3) tamas — gravity.

In the system of Raja Rao's outlook house-building can be regarded as a symbol of self-perfection because every story of the house corresponds to the higher qualitative level. It is not by chance that Raja Rao identifies repeatedly the houses
with their owners. 'In fact, — it is said for example about Shantha, — her house is she' or 'Our houses must look like us, just as our ancestors built temples in the shape of man'.

Water as a symbol of life, the small white house of Pai standing for this world of here and now, the garden adjoining it being the Ultimate Reality, the wall dividing the two evidently representing the dividing line between the world of Appearance and that of Fality are some other important symbols in the novel closely linked with the Hindu religio-philosophy.

Well, what do these myths and symbols scattered in this long short story do to the book? They undoubtedly contribute much both to the central design and the technique of the novel. On Harish Raizada's testimony, they help substantiate metaphysical musings of the twin characters of Ramakrishna Pai and Govindan Nair. They also are used "for establishing the identity of characters with the help of mythical analogies." C.D. Narasimhaiah grows ecstatically eloquent when referring to the mythical analogy used by Ramakrishna Pai to explain Nair's melting heart that looked upon all mankind, including the enemy, as one organism. Quoting from the original he comments:

'He was like Bhima. You want the flower of Paradise? Why, here I go and come. And Hanuman himself will help, Hanuman, his half-brother, unknown to Bhima.'
What a telescopic imagination which takes the reader from the sordid present to the epic, and from one epic to another epic, and from that back to where he started from, so as to make it universal, a common currency:

'Everybody is half-brother to you, man and thing, so why worry? That seemed the principle on which Govindan Nair worked: I am, so you are my brother.'28

Myths and symbols thus add much to the literary worth of the novel, making it a masterpiece in its own right. But at the same time it cannot be denied that they make an obscure book still more obscure. They demand much mental exercise from the reader and make heavy claims on his perceptive powers. But then, does it not only prove that there is no unadulterated good in the world and we have to take the bitter along with the sweet?

II

Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand is a progressive, forward-looking writer. His attitude towards ancient Indian tradition is not one of great sympathy. It is, therefore, with a sense of surprise that we mark in his writings the use of ancient Hindu myth, a visiting from the old world that he as well as his heroes have
so vehemently rejected.

Gauri, the principal character in his novel of that name, is modelled after Sita of the Ramayana, though there is a slight variation in her final destiny. Meenakshi Mukherjee traces the close parallel between the two:

Like Sita she has to leave her home, and Sita's stay at Lanka can be said to present a parallel to Gauri's stay at Hoshiarpur, in the house of a lecherous Sahukar, to whom her uncle had sold her. Like Sita, she refused to yield to the demon. But it is after her rescue and return to the village that Gauri's predicament comes closest to Sita's. Aspersions are cast on her purity because she had been away to the city with unknown people. Gauri's husband refuses to accept her if she could not somehow prove her chastity.

At this point in the novel, however, the analogy with the Sita-myth ends. In the twentieth century, and especially with Anand, the ending has to be different. Exasperated at the continuance of the Sita-image in life and literature, he consciously rebels against it and we see in his heroine "a shift from the acceptance of the age-old idea of the self-effacing wife to a new urge to live as a self-respecting woman." Before the close of the novel we see Gauri, the meek, helpless, suffering creature transformed into a woman conscious of her rights and confident of fending for herself. To continue the argument in Mukherjee's words:
But unlike Sita who was swallowed up by Mother Earth to save her from humiliation, Gauri has no one to rescue her. Instead of meekly surrendering to further humiliation, as she had always done before, Gauri for once stands up against her oppressor. She leaves her husband and her village behind and walks to the city to find an independent existence. Gauri has earlier been a weak docile character, and before taking this final decision she wavers once:

"for a brief moment the thought that the earth must open up to rescue her as it had opened up to receive Sita, came as an echo from the memory of her race. But the ground was hard and solid under her feet, and showed no signs of opening up to prove her innocence. She waved her head to forget Sita, and thought of the road to the town".

Gauri at the end conquers her diffidence and acquires the courage of self-assertion.

This 'exploding' of the Sita-myth at the climatic point is no mere chance and Anand has a point in reversing the myth at this critical juncture. Plain enough that he cannot accept the old ideals of patient suffering or dumb tolerance and firmly rejects the old ideal represented in this particular myth. He would have his heroine challenge all wrong(s), hold her head high in dignity and freedom and walk out of her conservative, stifling world, never caring to cast a wistful look behind. There thus seems to be no room for the word "perhaps" in the following comment by Meenakshi Mukherjee: "Anand follows the mythical design to a certain point and then changes it totally, perhaps intending to indicate that the same ending is no longer
possible (or desirable) in our time."

The novel opens with the 'Gauri-myth'. Panchi, the farmer boy who marries the peasant girl Gauri, "had been likened to Shiva in his roggeries, and after his marriage the boy had felt as though a ray of the Great God had come into him, specially, when he made love to Gauri, in whom there seemed a ray of Shiva's consort, Parvati." In the course of the story Gauri rubs into the Kali-myth even. Keena Shirwadkar remarks: "When wronged, she appears as Kali even to her husband, by the 'sudden flashing power' that had come into gentle Gauri, turning her into her other incarnation Kali, the divine destroyer herself!" But these other short mythical associations notwithstanding, there is no doubt that her real prototype is Sita, the embodiment of 'patience and submission', though in a "negative use" of the Sita-myth Anand throws up a radically different ending to the story. Gauri shares with her archetype a common history of tyranny, injustice and suffering though in her filial mood of defiance she strikes a different note. Analyzing this aspect of the novel M.K. Naik observes:

The similarity indeed goes deeper, for if Sita, as tradition tells us, was found in the earth as a child, Gauri is truly a daughter of the soil. But unlike her ancient counterpart, the modern Sita does not need the earth to open up and swallow her; the anonymous crowd of a big city
can do the job equally well. The modern Sita need not renounce life, but can be reborn into a life richer and fuller; she need not vanish from the world, but can actually rediscover the world.

The novel is, thus, the story of Gauri as Sita as also the story of Gauri's transformation from "the gentle cow's acquiescence" to an individual "with a will of her own." It is an unforgettable product of Anand's imagination fired with 'humanist convictions' and 'humanitarian compassion'.

There are references to the Laxmi-myth, the Kali-myth, the Krishna-myth, the Yama-myth as also to so many other Hindu myths in Anand's other novels such as The Private Life of an Indian Prince or Confessions of a Lover. In the last mentioned novel we even hear of a Gandharva-marriage between Krishna and Yasmin. But all these references are of a cursory nature only. The myths in these novels do not go very far and are shorn of their ancient grandeur, glory and depth. This not very complimentary attitude towards what has served as a 'fountain-head of strength' to writers like Raja Rao may at once be the mark and outcome of Anand's un-diehard like attitude towards the values of the past.
R.K. Narayan

Raji Narasimhan is of the conviction that a major work in the Indo-English fiction cannot be attempted only on the basis of a conventional realistic approach. According to her "that approach gains credence only when the mythic element of the sensibility is alive. ... the creative task is to go farther than allowing the senses and faculties to be influenced by new philosophies. It has to relate and combine the new with the already present, to work out a new compound — it is indeed the old, old concept of synthesis that the present situation points up to."\(^{37}\)

It is exactly such a happy synthesis that we come upon in Narayan's masterpiece *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. How to deal with the problem of Evil in our world? The age-old question is as pertinent and relevant today as it was in the gone-by centuries. Narayan's relaxed answer to the anxious query is: Evil must destroy itself. And he invokes the Bhasmasura-myth from the Hindu *puranas* to carry the point home.

*The Man-eater of Malgudi* has been moulded on the pattern of 'a tale from the *puranas*'. Structurally, this
adaptation of a puranic-myth has a clear mythical design — order, dislocation of order, restoration of order. In thought-content it unfolds the doom of a taxidermist, Vasu — a modern demon in the race of Ravan, Mahishasura and Bhasmasura. The fate of this 'prince of darkness' amounts to a confirming of "a very Indian, ingrained belief in the ultimate prevailing of the good over the bad."  

Evil in the ancient Indian thought is self-destroying. Anyone who has read the Hindu Puranas knows for certain that a demon may become too powerful and threaten the universe with his elemental forces of disorder but finally he is sure to go up in the air like a bubble, leaving the universe as calm as before. This is what happens in The Man-eater of Malgudi too. To quote Sundaram: "The eruption into the little world of Malgudi of a non-moral creature like Vasu, bestriding it like a colossus, causes panic. There seems to be a huge eclipse. But it is a temporary phenomenon; what is unnatural carries within itself its destruction. The darkness lifts and the sun shines again."  

Vasu, the great bully, gate-crashes into Malgudi most unceremoniously and muscles his way into the life of the city without a scruple or moral restraint to check his behaviour. Swollen with ego, he rides roughshod over all those who chance to cross his path. Though this modern Rakshasa does not
have ten heads or twenty arms, there is no doubt that he is "one of the predatory rakshasas, many-headed giants, 'psychopathic' killers of the epics..." 0 Again: "Vasu is the killer of animals, the purveyor of carcasses, the enemy of Kumar the Temple elephant, and the terror of the men (the 'others'); he is of blackness all compact, he glows with evil, he is the prince of darkness. But where is the power that is going to rid Malgudi of this demon, this cannibal, this Rakshasa? Narayan takes a hint from the Bhasmasura myth!" 1

The invincible-like Bhasmasura was at last destroyed by no heroes or agencies of superior strength but by himself alone. Mohini, the divine enchantress, manoeuvred him into putting his fiery hands on his own head and he stood reduced to a heap of ashes. Similarly, when things become intolerable in Malgudi, the prodigious task of killing this monster is "accomplished by the lowest of God's creatures. A mosquito alights on Vasu's forehead; attempting to swat it, he crushes his own skull." 2

In his article, "The Quintessential Narayan," Edwin Gerow emphasizes the great affinity of the writer to the ancient Hindu classicists. In the writings of the latter

the irruption of the rakshasa can be countered only by the introduction of an equally potent
and inexplicable forces the divine (daiva), fate. Narayan accomplishes his story in the approved manner of the classicists; the rakshasa oversteps his own limits and kills himself, unintentionally of course. 'Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at a most unexpected moment. Otherwise, what is to happen to humanity?'

The mythic nature of the novel is reiterated still further when Narayan unobtrusively throws in the story of Gajendra-Moksha from the Bhagvata Puranam. In that classical legend an elephant threatened by a crocodile is saved by Vishnu when the tormented creature cries to him for help. The elephant in Narayan's story is in mortal danger of being shot dead by Vasu. The animal is blissfully unaware of what threatens it; but Nataraj knows and in his anguish lets out a terrific cry:

'Oh, Vishnu, save our elephant, and save all the innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot'. Those who hear him think of course, that the man must be mad — or at least 'possessed' and needing to be looked after. The chairman's speech is interrupted, the entire programme goes awry, Nataraj is taken hurriedly home, and his wife decides to look after him there rather than see the procession. But Vishnu has heard, and the elephant, and the innocent men and women pulling the chariot come to no harm.
Is Narayan's use of the myth-technique in the novel conscious? Like so much else in Narayan this has remained an elusive issue. But be that as it may, the important thing is its presence and role in the novel. In the hands of a lesser artist, such heavy reliance on the mythic elements as Narayan resorts to in the novel "could have blown the work out of shape." But Narayan has succeeded in creating out of it all a literary creation that Kalinnikova has termed "the novel-allegory of our time." H.M. William's tribute to the novel is: "The old battle of hero versus demon is on again though now told with Narayan's bitter-sweet charm and gently satirical tone, so that the heroic is transmuted into a comic experience." It is only rarely that critics have charged Narayan with underlining the traditional affiliation of his fable "a little too heavily."

R.K. Narayan has used the Hindu myths and legends in his other novels too, though not on the scale discussed above. We may cite just two examples.

Hailing the ending of The Guide as 'very Indian' C.D. Narasimhaiah writes, "Raju's death viewed symbolically means that the individual by losing his life in water brings rain (and life) to his fellowmen, and his death is just "death by water" which is really not death but a means of self-purification and self-realization. It is the triumph of the traditional way of living over natural and man-made
Kalinnikova painstakingly proves that in The Painter of Signs an "understanding of the relations of the main characters Daisy and Raman is based on the associative understanding of the legend about King Santhanu and goddess Ganga from the Mahabharata." The function of these mythic legends scattered all over the Narayan narratives is not merely ornamental. There is no doubt that they make the novels more colourful with the addition of such hilarious scenes as the opening ceremony of the puranic picture 'The Burning of Kama' and the scene of its final shot in Mr. Sampath. But that is not the end of it. Narayan's creative work, full of mythological stories, has great educative value too.

The legends of the past in Narayan's interpretation must not be regarded as an escape from the present life; on the contrary, he brings ancient myths down to illustrate our everyday reality. These legends are his pride for folk wisdom, for ancient Indian values and for spiritual heritage of his country.
Sudhin N. Ghose

Sudhin N. Ghose is another writer who weaves and closely integrates the Hindu myths and symbols into the very texture of his writings. Like Raja Rao, sometimes he uses them as a central structural device and sometimes he employs them as digressions in his narratives. What great importance he attached to the myths of a people is echoed in Cradle of the Clouds: "Myths tell us more than bare facts. Men would die for their favourite myths, but not for bare facts and imposing statistics."51

All the four novels of Ghose are richly laden with myths and symbols, legends and rituals. We have the halakarshan-myth, the Mansa-myth, the Nahush-myth, the Prajapati-myth and the important Radha-Krishna myth, to quote only a few from among the many scattered all over his tetralogy. He has repeatedly rendered "the idyllic yearning of Radha for Krishna to represent, on one level, human love — 'Every woman in love,' he says, 'is Radha, and her lover is Krishna' — on the other hand, 'the human soul's longing for reunion with the Divine as symbolised by Krishna.'"52
The use of myths and symbols adds much to the scope and range of Ghose's writings. It gives new dimensions to his art of characterization. The author's delineation of Ek Number, the leading demagogue in The Flame of the Forest, is no longer the bare sketch of an opportunistic politician; it becomes an archetypal pattern of evil when the Nahush-myth is attached to it. The use of myth in Sudhin Ghose's work, thus, is not arbitrary. Rather, it is done with the definite purpose of "imposing deeper pattern on the literal level of his narration." This is obvious from the myth built round the notion of matra, 'a feeling for measure, a sense of proportion.' In the words of Iyengar:

As Myna tells Balaram, 'The man who knows his matra will easily secure what he wants; he will not be denied the blessings he deserves. He can buy it for a song.'... it is fatal to overstep the line of chalk — one's limiting boundary. Nahush himself at last came to grief because 'he forgot his matra'. One way or the other — whether in the Kala Bhairav temple or in the Diwan's mansion, in public or in private life — it is always unwise to lose one's sense of matra. 'Always in a hurry! ' Myna chides Balaram towards the end of the novel, 'Where is your sense of matra?' What shall it profit man, it has been said, if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul! This too results from an ignorance of matra. The Flame of the Forest is almost a parable of our time, not the less pointed because it is so enjoyably presented.

Lost in the mystic aura of myths and legends, Ghose, however, does not forget the stark realities of the physical
world around. A sensitive artist, he is responsive to the needs and feelings of the poor and he uses myths only as "a framework for getting to the essence of everyday occurrences" and not as "a substitute for them."55

V

Other Important Names

There are other important Indo-English writers who have made the Hindu myths and symbols a part of their work, though in a limited way only. These writers do not use the mythical parallels by way of a digressional technique, nor as a central structural device, but employ them only incidentally—just "to illuminate certain situations or characters."56

Krishna, the hero of The Dark Dancer, is the namesake of Lord Krishna and conscious references to the fact are made in the novel. But the analogy almost ends here. In the course of the story this alien-like hero who has lived too long in the West to belong to the Indian milieu completely is compared to the Karna of the Mahabharata, the popular symbol of 'not belonging'. The last chapter of the novel is entitled 'Son of Kunti' perhaps to underline the 'mythical
tone' of the novel. But a careful study reveals that the symbolism here does not go far enough to be significant and one may well agree with Meenakshi Mukherjee that it served "no real purpose in the novel apart from giving it a pseudo-mythic appearance." 57

Kamala, the heroine of the novel, is patient and self-sacrificing "like the earth." 58 She suffers silently when the erring husband goes around flirting with the white-skinned Cynthia and takes him back gently when the errant husband returns to the fold. But though soft and gentle, Kamala has her sources of mysterious spiritual strength; she has the will to think right and act right. This gentle but spirited heroine thus embodies two important myths in her person. She in part symbolizes Sita in her patient suffering and in part "incarnates Shakti in her essential strength and unfailing gift of compassion and understanding." 59

There are other Hindu symbols like Gopuram and Natraj mentioned more than once in the novel but Iyengar rightly concludes: "Nor does the symbolism of The Dark Dancer come out with clarity and force." 60

The Dark Dancer is a serious novel and myths and symbols here aim at conveying a sense of personal crisis or national disaster. But as Rajan's second book Too Long in
the west is a farce, a much lighter and gayer a book than
the first one, it is for pure fun that these literary
devices have been pressed into service. Nalini is the
'Draupadi' of the Mahabharata and her bunch of suitors with
mythological names like Kuber, Viswakarma or Satyakam are
meant to give the whole affair the look of a modern Swayamvara!

In Too Long in the West the device of Swayamvara with
five suitors rouses in the reader the expectation of a
mythic parallel. But the reader is disappointed as he is in
The Dark Dancer, because the references are merely arbitrary;
they do not cohere into a pattern.

Manohar Malgonkar with his "bland, public-school
sensibility" is hardly the writer to whom one would look
for Hindu myths and symbols, but, surprisingly enough, even
he has not been able to steer completely clear of this
cultural complex. The lineaments of Sita are unmistakable
in the Maharani of Begwadi, especially in the early parts of
the novel: "She is the lonely abandoned woman, spending her
days in Puja from which she would emerge looking gaunt and
drained but cleansed and godly. The silent suffering, the
penance and the mute death-wish are familiar traits, hallowed
attributes of the Sita figure."

As a Hindu wife in a princely family she had to be
chaste and dignified and remain in the secluded world of the
purdah. The husband could follow his heart's desires while the wife remained in sad loneliness. Later in the novel, however, as does Anand's Gauri, we find this supine figure throwing away finally this Sati or Sita-image that had been the cross of her life all these long years, though she does not win the same approval from the author as the protagonist in the other novel did.

In his interpretation of the novel, John Morris observes that 'disintegration' is the key word to the understanding of A Bend in the Ganges. The destructive element operates in the novel at almost all levels. It is seen at work in "the defeat of the terrorist movement, the breaking up of Sundari's marriage, the disruption of normalcy on the Andamans by the arrival of the Japanese and finally the outburst of communal frenzy which lets loose the all-consuming violence." No wonder then that the god who rules this world is Shiva, the god of destruction, introduced in the early chapters of the novel. Dada discovers the Shiva-image while digging in the field at Piploda and he decides to shift his loyalties from Vishnu, the god of protection, to Shiva, the god of Death. The change is symbolic and a clear pointer to the direction the story will take. Shiva is the god of destruction and we may well expect deaths and murders in the ensuing chapters. The
Shiva-image assumes importance in the novel, both literally and figuratively. Gian, when all seems lost to him, gets a foothold in the aristocratic family of Debi Dayal with the help of this Shiva-image, something which gives him a new lease of life, so to say. For once the God of Death seems to preside over the life-giving forces. But the real purpose behind this entry of the image into the Kherwad House is different. Soon after, in the wake of India's partition, it plays a decisive role in the orgy of violence at Kherwad House. The story of Shafi's villainy is clinched with Gian striking him dead with the image of Shiva itself.

The Shiva-myth thus has something vital and positive to contribute to the novel. Because of it the narrative tone gets imbued with a "metaphoric elan." *A Bend in the Ganges* would certainly have been a poorer literary product minus this mythic symbolism.

In writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya (Shadow from Ladakh), Kamala Markandaya (Some Inner Fury), Manohar Malgonkar (The Princes), B.Rajan (The Dark Dancer) and Anita Desai (Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go this Summer), we have characters that embody the classical image of woman as Sita, or the more spirited female figures of Hindu mythology such as Kali, Draupadi and others. In none of these works, however, do they emerge as major
figures, though Anita Desai sketches them a larger size. Bhabani Bhattacharya has "reduced the Sita-myth to its sexual level" only. Suruchi suffers heavily as her husband's vow of sexual abstinence is a most painful and frustrating experience for her. Premala in Some Inner Fury makes desperate efforts to win her husband's love but fails. Her suffering is great indeed and she tries to drown her sorrow in her work at school and in the care of an adopted child. At last she courts death by entering the burning school to end her suffering.

Turning to Anita Desai we find that her "representation of the prototype is the opposite of the smouldering, long-suffering passivity of the Sita-image... It has the sexual ferocity which has been mythicised in our culture in trans-sexual terms as a divine, redemptive and deterrent force against evil. It evokes, in short, the goddess Kali, an evocation that the writer herself makes explicit." Anita Desai, however, "does not treat her prototype representation of Kali in its full complexity." As Bhabani Bhattacharya strips the Sita-myth to its sexual-level only, Anita Desai "confines the goddess to her awesome aspect" only. The mother of Amla and Nirode (Voices in the City) is built on the Kali prototype. She is the "portrayal of female malevolence" — the goddess of terror and death
itself. Nirode watches this modern Kali, statuesque and icy, walking down the air terminus building with a slow stately gait and is filled with awe and fascination. "She is Kali," he cries out:

Amla, I know her now. She is Kali, the goddess and the demon are one. When I was driving through the city with her, and I saw the sky darken, and people put on lights in her honour, and heard them wail and chant, I knew at once then, that she is Kali. She has watched the sacrifice and she is satisfied. Don't you see, Amla, the satisfaction on her lips? See how still and controlled her lips and hands are, because she has at last seized and mastered death, she has become Kali.69

And when Calcutta, the City of Death, and his mother merge in his mind into one symbol, Nirode sees them both as Kali. But though the writer has taken pains to project the Kali-image in the novel, the mythic symbol has not come out convincingly enough. It is more talked about than worked out in the novel. Iyengar aptly comments: "The double identification of Nirode's mother with Kali, and Kali with Death, seems an imposition more than an organic relationship to the action and characterization."70

In Where Shall We Go this Summer we have the Sita-myth in the modern context. The hero of the novel is named Raman and the heroine Sita, who, like the legendary Sita, had spent
many years of her life on a lonely island. But we see that the names, the locale and the situation have only a superficial similarity with those in the great Epic. In B. Ramachandrade Rao's words: "... the only valid inference that one can draw is that of an ironic contrast of the marital discord of the modern Rama and Sita with the idealized relationships that existed between the legendary Rama and Sita."  

One interesting feature of the Indo-English novel is the "closeness and intimacy" with which the familiar and time-honoured Ganga-myth and cow-myth are treated by writers as far apart in their approach as Raja Rao and G.V. Desani, as different in taste as Sudhin Ghose and Mulk Raj Anand. In Raji Narasimhan's words: "Even the distancing caused by English does not water down the note of intimacy." In our novels, round these myths are woven some of the most touching pages of "haunting beauty."  

The river Ganga has long been a sacred myth in this country. Rising from the toe-nail of Lord Vishnu and flowing down the locks of Lord Shiva, this sacred river has commanded
the love and respect of Indians in every walk of life since
times immemorial. With innumerable histories, legends and
songs built round it, the river is associated alike with
both the living and the dead: "... She represents joy (in
this life) and hope (for the life to come). She washes away
the sins of him whose ashes or corpse are committed to her
waters, and secures for him a rebirth among the gods in a
realm of celestial bliss." No wonder "the river does evoke
in the Indian an attachment almost personal."76

Indian writers of English novel become poetic when
refering to the Ganga in their writings. Whether it is a
historical novel like The Devil's Wind or a philosophical
one like The Serpent and the Rope, a romantic one like
Confessions of a Lover or one written in a mock-heroic
vein like All about H.Hatterr, the Ganga is not only a
recurring theme but almost a character in these novels.
To most of the Indo-English novelists she "is the holy
river, maker of music and peace, the adored Mother, the
Angel." Iyengar's comment is that in Raja Rao's
The Serpent and the Rope "the Ganges is a goddess almost." We have an example of it in words such as the following:
"Mother and I left the mountains and the Ganges with
immeasurable pain, as though we had been visiting some
venerable relations and had to leave them, with a broad
kunkum on our faces and their hands on our heads, the perfume of their feet in our nostrils. Mother Ganga had her feet all yellowed with turmeric and she carried the flowers of our evenings in her hair. In *The Flame of the Forest* we have a festival in honour of goddess Ganga. In *All about H.Hatterr* G.V.Desani, like Rama, rhapsodises:

"The holy Ganga...
She is beautiful...
She is beautiful, the river Ganga, the little goddess, mother Ganga!"

... The music made by Ganga, the roar wrought by Ganga, the peace blessed by Ganga, is like nothing else in the world!"

The cow in India has traditionally been the symbol of compassion, devotion, protection and bounty. The *Vedas* lay down that she is "the giver of life, the Creatrix, the supreme light — all the radiance proceeds from her." The average Hindu even today clings to this benevolent image of 'mother cow' and holds her in deep reverence as of yore. Not surprising, therefore, that the cow-myth is a favourite subject with the writers of the Indo-English novel.

*The Serpent and the Rope* shows that Raja Rao shares this Hindu tenderness for the cow. His alter-ego, Rama, the hero of the novel, suggests how during his visit to
Benares with Little Mother, "I wandered, like a sacred cow, among the lanes and temples of the Holy City." Later, referring to the same visit, he remarks: "I wandered also among the cows tied up inside the temples, and touched their grave and fervent faces and fed them with green grass. What wonderful animals these be in our sacred land — such maternal and ancient looks they have. One can understand why we worship them. I bought some Kumkum one day and decorated the faces of all the cows in a temple ..."

Even a hard core realist like Mulk Raj Anand, with not much room for Hindu sentimentalism in him, cannot leave the popular cow-myth untouched. The cow is an important character in his novel Gauri — not only literally but also symbolically. Gauri is compared to the cow because of her soft sweet nature: "Gauri is like a cow, very gentle and very good." Later, "Panchi felt like a holy bull going off to marry the little cow Gauri." And the novel is nothing if not the story of "the transformation of a cow into a tigress."

This is by no means the limit of Hindu myths and symbols in the Indo-English novels, but, for practical reasons, the talk about it all has to be confined to the glaring points of their insertion only. Owing to their universal nature and timelessness and power to convey that which cannot be otherwise conveyed, these myths and symbols are a useful
media for any ambitious and perceptive writer. Used in the modern context they enable him to "view contemporary human situation in a larger perspective of time and leave an immediate impact upon readers who because of their previous knowledge of myths [and symbols] find their response enriched by an element of recognition."
References and Notes


7. Ibid., p. 279.

8. Ibid., pp. 281-82.


11. Ibid., p. 283.

12. Ibid., p. 296.


15 Indian Writing in English, p. 401.


17 The Serpent and the Rope, pp. 209 and 212.

18 Harish Raizada, "Point of View, Myth and Symbolism in Raja Rao's Novels," Perspectives on Raja Rao, p. 199.

19 Sensibility Under Stress, p. 87.

20 Ibid., p. 88.


22 Raja Rao, p. 117.

23 Indian Writing in English, p. 397.


25 Indian Writing in English, p. 407.

26 "Ancient Indian Philosophy and Raja Rao's Works," p. 27.

27 "Point of View, Myth and Symbolism in Raja Rao's Novels," p. 199.

28 Raja Rao, p. 155.

29 Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Tractor and the Plough," Considerations, p. 17.

31The Twice Born Fiction, p.158.

32"The Tractor and the Plough," p.117.


34Image of Woman, p.70.

35Mulk Raj Anand, p.94.

36Gauri, p.244.

37Preface to Sensibility Under Stress, p.5.

38Ibid., p.76.


41Indian Writing in English, p.382.


43Ibid., p.78.

44R.K.Narayan, p.103.

45Sensibility Under Stress, p.77.


47Precarious Innocence", p.6.

49. Quoted by Kalinnikova in "Indian Myths and Legends," p. 25.

50. Ibid., p. 23.


52. Quoted by Meenakshi Mukherjee in The Twice Born Fiction, p. 134.

53. Ibid., p. 139.

54. Indian Writing in English, p. 486.


56. The Twice Born Fiction, p. 156.

57. Ibid., p. 157.

58. Ibid., p. 86.

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61. Sensibility Under Stress, p. 112.

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63. Manohar Malgonkar, p. 119.

64. Sensibility Under Stress, p. 108.

65. Ibid., p. 109.
66 Ibid., p.109.
67 Ibid., p.109.
68 Ibid., p.110.
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71 The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai, p.59.
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73 Ibid., p.117.
74 Ibid., p.117.
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76 Indian Writing in English, p.322.
77 Image of Woman, p.92.
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79 The Serpent and the Rope, p.42.
80 All about H.Hatterr, p.130.
81 Image of Woman, p.86.
82 The Serpent and the Rope, p.25.
83 Ibid., p. 25.
84. Gauri, p.11.
85. Ibid., p.13.
86. Mulk Raj Anand, p.86.
One is not all free to write this or that. One does not choose one's subject. That is what the critics and the public do not understand. The secret of masterpieces lies in the concordance between the subject and the temperament of the author.

Flaubert.