Great writers are "not mere photographers, turning a
gaping lens uncritically upon life" and producing a mere
documentary copy of what falls within their purview. Rather,
they are great artists who watch the vast panorama of life
and after percolating their experiences through their
imagination, temperament and value-vision, bring out
something which is uniquely their own. The world outside
thus provides them only with the 'external data', but it
is their vision, their value-pattern which determines the
"subsequent final version of it."

This vision, this value-pattern is perhaps the single
most important factor that goes into the making of a writer's
art. And a strand of special significance in this pattern is
the writer's attitude to the religion and philosophy of his
race, the cultural traditions of his country. How does he
feel about it all? Does he harbour an attitude of cold
indifference, mad hatred or crazy admiration? Does he
approach the ancient traditions with a sensibility dull and
flat or intense and sensitive? These are vital questions and
on answers to them may depend not only the nature of his
themes and subject matter but also the technique, diction and structure of a novelist. The point may also determine and dictate the depth and breadth of his art.

And this applies to the author of the Indo-English novel too. His attitude to the Hindu philosophy and the traditional culture of his country is an all-important question here. Does he acquiesce and affirm or react and revolt? Does he compromise and concede or condemn and criticise? Do we have here an attitude of ready acceptance, of total rejection or one of healthy fusion and synthesis? And then, does the writer talk about it all in a tone of gentle persuasion or angry conviction? Is it all presented in a quiet, unfanatical way or dipped in venomous gall?

The questions are, of course, all answered in varied ways, depending on from what angle a writer chooses to look at this prism of religion.

Raja Rao, Sudhin N.Ghose

When we talk of Hindu philosophy in the Indo-English novel, the name that naturally comes first to our minds is
that of Raja Rao. Born in a South Indian Brahmin family, he got an early grounding in the ancient Upanishadic lore and felt that his quest in life was over after he met the sage Atmanand Guru in 1943 and found answers to all his questions at his feet. Comparing Raja Rao with an acknowledged master of the Far Eastern novel — Maugham of The Razor's Edge and The Saint — we may well say with Sadhan Kumar Ghosh: "While Maugham is seeking, Raja Rao believes he has found all the answers — in Vedanta, of course."

Though an expatriate for forty years, Raja Rao has kept himself wonderfully anchored to his Eastern moorings. His stay abroad has not severed his roots in the land and religion of his birth. In fact, it has accentuated his Vedantic faith. And Raja Rao gives a free rein to his love of Vedanta in his most mature work The Serpent and the Rope. The hero Ramaswamy here is an alter-ego of the author himself and the novel presents the authentic Vedantic vision based on the traditions of the philosophic India of the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, the Gita, Yagnavalkya, Sankra, Madhava and their descendants who left hearth and river-side fields and wandered to distant mountains and hermitages to see God "face to face". In fact, India as the land of Vedantic wisdom has been called "the hero of the book."
While every serious novel, no doubt, contains some sort of philosophy of life in the popular sense, some novels are specifically philosophical. They are a category by themselves and it is under this heading that we may count Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* — "the single greatest attempt at philosophical fiction in the English language this side of the Suez." Autobiographical in nature, the novel voices Raja Rao's deeply felt convictions through the protagonist Ramaswamy. The latter's outpourings on God, Cosmos, Guru, Death, Love and human relationships are an endorsement of what the writer himself believes. The tone of narration in the book is more than one of "sympathy and approval"; it is enthusiastic, if not aggressively fanatic. The voice behind is unmistakable.

Raja Rao's approach to Hindu philosophy is broad and wide in its sweep. It is equally deep too. Piercing the outer crust of vulgarity, he goes straight to the heart of this most ancient of all religions and looking therein, he is struck by its liberal catholicism and marvellous resilience. When Rama protested against performing certain ceremonies for his dead father, his grandfather readily absolved him of the responsibility: "God is not hidden in a formula, nor is affection confined to funeral ceremonies. Be what you are." Rama 'almost touched his feet', hearing
the words of his grandfather, so noble, so humble. "This sophisticated response," Narasimhaiah comments, "which at one level is belied by our meaningless ritualism is, at another level, a tribute to what Jawahar Lal Nehru called 'the culture of the masses' — who are heard articulating at marketplaces such wisdom as will do credit to the philosophers of Europe."⁷

Interpreted at one level, Ramaswamy and Madeleine represent the modern man and woman, "groping their way, while caught up in the endless flux of life."⁸ Raja Rao seems to suggest that all the predicament, sorrow and suffering of the modern man — whether he belongs to the East like Ramaswamy or to the West like Madeleine — may be traced to his "essentially egoistic" temper. The way out of this "egocentric predicament", as pointed out by The Serpent and the Rope, is "India's way, the essential Indian way."⁹ In the Indian tradition "the chief end of the individual is transcendence of the petty self by means of a recognition of the principle of the Absolute that upholds the universe."¹⁰ Once we reach the goal and realize that we had been standing in the rope but crying the serpent, all misery ends. We know the world for what it is really worth — not real except in the way that illusions are while they last. And we come peacefully out of this
travail, "the labyrinthine maya of phenomenal existence."¹¹

Once we understand that "the world is a fib, is a city seen in a mirror, it matters not whom you marry — Subramanya Sastri or stump Pratap..."¹² The problem of human relationships stands resolved. Even Death ceases to have any terror at this level of existence: "In Benares one knows death is as illusory as the mist in the morning."¹³

To reach that state of spiritual fulfilment, however, as Raja Rao knows from personal experience, one must first be initiated by a perfect Master. The end of Rama's quest at the feet of his Guru is in keeping with the age-old spiritual tradition of India which gives the Guru the highest place in Man's quest for Truth: " 'If you would know the Eternal, humbly approach a Guru devoted to Brahman', says the Mundaka Upanishad ... for religion is a practical science to which neither books nor scriptures can be a complete guide. The aspirant must, therefore, associate himself with one who is competent and holy, who has demonstrated the truths of religion in his own life, and who can therefore initiate the disciple into secrets of spiritual fulfilment."¹⁴

The traditional metaphysics of India is concerned more with the deeper sensibilities of life than with the flux of the phenomenal life outside. True to tradition, in
Raja Rao the external actualities of life, though not completely ignored, provide only a superficial background for the enactment of the more profound drama of the spirit. Though he is not completely oblivious of the tangible reality around, there is no doubt that Raja Rao's real concern is with the metaphysical being of Man. It is thus that of the more than four hundred pages of The Serpent and the Rope, "few are narrative, most are meditation — an unhurrying philosophical soliloquy on the nature of reality: serpent or rope." David Mc Cutchion affirms: "... its sensibility and values are uncompromisingly Indian absorbing all experience from the point of one who seeks Brahman... Rama is a Vedantin. Wherever he may be — in Madras, Aix-en-Provence, Pau or Bangalore — his thoughts are outside space and time." 

Mulk Raj Anand may be concerned with "Doing and Suffering" in the external world but Raja Rao, more in line with the traditional philosophic thought of the Hindus, is not much interested in the world where men and women fight and drink and make love. Anand may fume and fret over the Hindu customs that tyrannize and torture, but Raja Rao's forte is the transcendental realm of spiritual wisdom that can set it all at naught without causing any vibrations in the solid world of matter and flesh.
Though Raja Rao's literary genius is shaped by many influences, the most formative among them, we see, is certainly the Vedanta. The rich cultural and philosophical heritage of India is the fountainhead of his creative impulse: "We in India need but to recognise our inheritance. Let us never forget Bhartrihari." The theme of Illusion and Reality and the philosophy of Advaita, so close to Raja Rao's heart, are, however, treated in a more mundane context in his metaphysical comedy The Cat and Shakespeare. Govindan Nair emerges here "as a nutty, down-to-earth philosopher — a 'saint' for all seasons." For him, as for Raja Rao, "submission is all." The novel is an assertion of the Visistadvaita of Ramanuja, a celebrated Hindu Philosopher.

Like The Serpent and the Bope, Comrade Kirillov, too, has been called a spiritual autobiography of the author. There seems to be a close resemblance between the hero Kirillov and the novelist in their spiritual quest for truth. The writer's love of Vedanta and the Hindu India shines bright even in this novel with its dominant communistic theme.

But it does not mean that the writer lets hypocrisies of the Hindu religion go unnoticed. Though Benares stirs Raja Rao to ecstasy, reminding him that on the banks of the
Ganges the Upanishadic sages had discussed the roots of human understanding four or five thousand years ago and though the Gayatri Mantra is more than an incantation to him, Raja Rao is not blind to the darker aspects of Hinduism. His outbursts against the Brahmins occur in many places in The Serpent and the Rope. In the words of C.D. Narasimhaiah: "The novelist, himself a Brahmin, is nevertheless sick of the 'Sacred Brahmins', (the irony of the adjective is not missed) that wail for alms: 'I would rather have thrown the rupees to the begging monkeys than to the Brahmins' who 'do three funerals a day', while their 'belchings and rounded bellies' belie it all, for 'just fifty silver rupees made everything holy'.”

Raja Rao's most unequivocal condemnation of the Brahmins who repudiate Brahman occurs towards the end of the novel. In his own words: "The Brahmins sold India through the backdoor — remember Devagiri — and the Muslims came in through the front. Purnayya sold the secrets of Tippu Sultan and the British entered through the main gateway of Seringpatam. Truth that is without courage can only be the virtue of slave or widow.”

In The Cat and Shakespeare too, we hear that Bhoothalinga Iyer, though a Brahmin, "can no more understand truth than the buffalo can see a straight line." Narasimhaiah comments:
"... for all the profound regard he has for the vital tradition as shaped by the Vedas and Upanishads, it is obvious that Raja Rao is not tied to it. He scoffs at the superstition and the unthinking derivativeness of the present-day Brahmin."21

When discussing the symbol of building new houses in The Cat and Shakespeare, Narasimhiah writes: "In Brahmin streets near the temple there are such lovely dilapidated structures; why not build them anew? This is how the novelist seeks to give meaning to the dilapidated house that modern India is — our inheritance from the Vedic past now in dilapidated state and needing repair, revitalization, even as the Church is in Eliot's The Rock."22

"The proper stuff of fiction," said Virginia Woolf, "does not exist, everything is the proper stuff of fiction."23 But perhaps even this "everything" of the great novelist could not have included metaphysics in its range. To fictionalize metaphysical experience sounds like attempting the impossible: "... after all we cannot live transcendentally, so how can there be a transcendental novel? It would merely be silence."24 Yet Raja Rao, sharing the metaphysical beliefs in their deepest depths, has done the job in a masterly way. To conclude the argument in the words of Mc Cutchion:
The Serpent and the tope certainly shows one path the 'truly Indian novel' may take; it enables us to experience an authentically Indian mind ... and remains a never-failing source of mantras:
There never was time, there never was history, there never was anything but Shivoham - Shivoham:
I am the absolute.25

Sudin N. Ghose, though not of the same stature as Raja Rao, comes nearest to him in his attitude to Hindu philosophy and ideology. What Iyengar says of Raja Rao may be said of Sudhin Ghose too: "... his heart is effectively tethered to his immutable ancient moorings with the strong invisible strings of his traditional Hindu culture."26 No doubt, like Raja Rao, Ghose has a word of condemnation for the demagogues who exploit traditionalism and in The Vermilion Page we have Comrade Dynamiter's sharp taunt: "A profitable religion never lacks proselytes. Prem Swami's disciples are like the Quakers in England: they are pacifists because they can make more money in peace-time than in times of war. Their religion is money-making..."27 But like Raja Rao's hero, Rama, everytime and everywhere, Ghose "is of India, the Mother's son, and nothing can alter the fact."28 In this context it is significant to examine how his tetralogy, a sustained work of nearly a decade, concludes.

Balaram, the protagonist, "meets Mynah and becomes a flute accompanist to her songs. He becomes a pilgrim
along with her and together they wander from place to place singing the praise of Krishna, and learning 'other forms of wisdom' that reveal one's affinity with the universe." The hero thus leaves his worldly concerns behind and sets out to find "affinity with the universe", realizing that his salvation could come only through his own tradition.

Mrs. Mukherjee observes: "Sudhin Ghose had lived abroad for a long time and he was in England at the time of writing of these novels. Therefore, it is specially interesting to note that like the heroes of two other expatriate Indian writers, Raja Rao and B. Rajan, Sudhin Ghose's hero is also made to turn ultimately to a spiritual source of strength."30

As Ghose finds his literary muse responsive to the same spiritual notes that we hear in Raja Rao, like the latter he finds a big gulf dividing him from the more practical novelist Mulk Raj Anand:

To name the contrasting attitudes of Ghose and Anand as action vs inaction may be a little facile but we certainly see that action in the shape of practical work does not enjoy the same exalted position in Ghose's novels as it does in Anand's. Mr. Charles Anstruther, a British character in Flame of the Forest, comments about Myna, 'Why does she gad about? Why does she not settle down and do some practical work?' The narrator is exasperated at the irrelevance of such queries: 'Some practical work! It was this
practical work that haunted Charlie like a demon. Like Ek Nambur, he wanted India to be modernized, a rival to Russia and America. There is very little doubt that that is what Anand too would like India to be. Hence the unbridgeable gap between their visions.31

Like Raja Rao, Ghose's attitude towards the Hindu vision of life is an attitude of strong approval — even reverence. This is reflected both in the theme and technique of his writings. In the course of a discussion, Ghose had once remarked that "most of the Indian writers writing in English are in revolt against traditional Hinduism ... they believe that they have got a mission that a novel's function should be seeing through society. ... They are more or less writing a social criticism of Hindu society."32 Commenting on these observations of the novelist, Iyengar writes:

Quite obviously, Sudhin Ghose's fiction is an attempt to redress the balance in this respect. In an interview that Malcolm Muggeridge gave... he is reported to have said: 'India is dear to me by virtue of its sheer refusal to come into the twentieth century. The only thing that has saved you is poverty. You do not have glossy magazines, American TV — I just hate the stuff'. It is somewhat in the same spirit that Sudhin Ghose has made Balaram castigate our 'cultivated people' who think it 'superstitious or undignified to take any interest in Indian myths and cults'.33
R.K.Narayan

Very different in approach and method, lacking his "proclamatory tone" but sharing "a sub-stratum of affinity" with Raja Rao, is R.K.Narayan, another illustrious writer of the Indo-English novel. If Raja Rao, serious and 'melancholic', cannot leave aside the question of why and wherefore of Hindu philosophy even temporarily and has spun out the most metaphysical novels in Indo-English literature, R.K.Narayan, calm and 'comedic', perfectly relaxed and "utterly at ease with his milieu," has turned out the most "orthodox Hindu novels." Commenting on this streak of Indian tradition in his writing, E.J. Kalinnikova writes:

If we look through the history of Indian literature we can see that Kalidasa and Mirabai, Aurobindo Ghosh and Sarojini Naidu, Tagore and Premchand, M.K. Anand and Raja Rao, and others were among writers and poets who were inspired by the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and who used some episodes from these poems in their work. This group of representatives of different epochs and literary trends was joined by one more writer — R.K.Narayan.

Not overtly mystic, nor vociferously metaphysical, Narayan brings to his work the supreme detachment of the
Hindu mind. Fever and fret of the world around is not reflected in his writings. Foibles and flaws are there in plenty. Evil and evil-doers are present, no doubt. But there is nothing really to worry about. Narayan does not dismiss it all as mere illusion as his great contemporary Raja Rao does. But he is also not upset by the painful spectacle that the world around may have to present. It is because he knows something that is at least as good as, if not better than, the abstract metaphysics of Raja Rao. He knows that the world, as it is, has a most perfect design. It has got a perfect state of balance today, had it always and will sure maintain the balance in future too. As he puts it in Mr. Sampath: "... things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrong-doers just as there are people who deserved wrong deeds, just as many policemen to bring them to their senses, if possible, and just as many wrong-doers again to keep the policemen employed, and so on and on in an infinite, concentric circle." An unruffled calm born of a perfect faith in the Design — Narayan nowhere cares to talk about the Designer — is a unique quality that our novelist brings to his writings in English.

Ramaswamy (The Serpent and the Rope) thinks that "all we do is really superstition," and he talks of the world as "a city lit in a mirror." What is marriage,
love or even Death as seen from this Eastern anchorage?
The same transcendental note, "unbound by spatial or temporal limits," is audible in the 'sombre' reflections of Srinivas: "The whole of eternity stretched ahead of one; there was plenty of time to shake off all follies. Madness or sanity, suffering or happiness seemed all the same ... It didn't make the slightest difference in the long run — in the rush of eternity nothing mattered."

Narayan's adherence to the great Indian traditions is reflected in the world-view he expresses through his novels. As his genius is essentially comedic, "the great Hindu ideal of the 'virakta' or 'Sthitaprajna' is viewed by Narayan in terms of comedy. Beneath the surface of flashing light comedy, it is profound art, representing the values and traditions of a great culture."

From The Bachelor of Arts to The Painter of Signs, the theme of detachment is worked out with "subtle nuances of distinction, and Narayan's heroes from Chandran to Raman strive in their individual ways and in varying degrees to achieve a state of detachment from the temptations and illusions of life."
The most conspicuous among them is Jag an, the title character in The Vendor of Sweets.

In The Vendor of Sweets, a novel deeply rooted in the Indian soil and mode of existence, we witness the charming
spectacle of what Warren French describes as "the subtle charting of a movement towards tranquility." Some critics have, no doubt, expressed cynicism about the nature of Jagan's renunciation and found it ambiguous in nature.

H.M. Williams writes:

When Mali is in trouble with the police, Jagan disburses enough money to help him escape the consequence of his folly, but resolves to become detached from life from then on. ('Leave me out of it completely; forget me and I'll go away...') Now at last he decides to abandon his life as a businessman to become a spiritual seeker, perhaps a Sanyasi. Yet he retains his cheque-book, a not unimportant link with the world ('a compact way of carrying things') and something to fall back on.

Iyengar observes:

There is almost an inner revolution in the sweet-vendor, something akin to a religious conversion; and even as Raju is reborn, even as Natraj emerges the stronger after his battle of survival with Vasu, Jagan too begins a new life ... the termination of the series of 'repetitions performed for sixty years' might prove for Jagan the start of a new life of study and contemplation in the quietude of the forest ... But not until Jagan sees the Goddess in the stone, or at least sees her come out of the stone, will he acquire the ultimate courage to give up even his present discreet reliance on his cheque-book. In this novel, as in its immediate predecessors, Faith is arrested at the brink, and like Narayan's heroes we too are left in ambiguities and uncertainties.

But is it really a wavering faith, an ambiguous attitude to renunciation that we witness in the novel?
Macdonald seems much nearer the truth when he suggests: "The continuum of Jagan's consciousness progresses then from the obsession with human desires to humanity in retreat and contemplation, to the soul in the stillness of an historic perspective, and finally to the art which is itself potentially capable of perfection. One can almost read the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali as a gloss to Jagan's progress." 49

That Malgudi has earned the title of "a microcosm of 'Hindu' India" 50 shows that there is a close affinity between the author and his fictional world. With his moorings in the Southern Brahmanic tradition like Raja Rao, Narayan can produce literature only with Hindu characters in prominence. Commenting on this aspect of The Vendor of Sweets, Macdonald writes:

In its tone of acceptance of all things as aspects of the divine emanation, The Vendor of Sweets is an orthodox Hindu novel... The Gita and the Puranas are always referred to as guides to action; temples and sacrifices and traditional rites of marriage, birth, and death give order and a collective sense to the life in Malgudi. The gods are consulted for guidance in behaviour, or for curing barrenness, or just to illustrate a point. The important thing here is not that the virtues of the gods are being praised, but that the imaginative orientation of the characters is strongly rooted in the Hindu traditions. The
off-hand use of the tradition, in fact, reveals how much the life of Malgudi is permeated by Hindu practice and thought.

The Man-eater of Malgudi, too, clearly expresses Narayan's cultural heritage. The writer provides here a symbolism which has deep roots in India's past. The image of Vasu based on the principle of "Evil must destroy itself" is expressed in the well-known Indian legend about Bhasmasura. It is an adaptation of an old, puranic story. Vasu, 'a modern rakshasa', erupts into the little world of Malgudi causing panic and creating chaos all around. We know that neither Nataraj nor any one else of the Malgudi characters is competent to deal with a situation like this. But the near desperate conditions leave Narayan cool and undisturbed. Why, we have it from tradition that "Evil, though it may get a free run in the world, will ultimately destroy itself."

And the run of the novel justifies this Hindu faith in the moral order of the universe. Vasu's "act of self-destruction is symbolic of the triumph of good over evil. The cosmos prevails over the powers of chaos. Nataraj's problem is solved by the inexorable moral law" that had taken care of Ravana, Mahishasura or Bhasmasura in earlier ages. Raji Narasimhan says of Narayan:

No one is more convinced of the doom ordained for his villains, amounting to a very Indian, ingrained belief in the ultimate prevailing of the good over the bad.
Bolstering the banter, the tragi-comic nuances and the portents of stark disaster is a sensibility rivetted in traditional attitudes. This rivetting is really the *raison d'être* of the work. It is also the catalytic, activating agent of the creative muse of Narayan. Take that away and the whole structure falls apart, or it develops cracks.\(^5\)

R.K. Narayan believes: "Traditionally, India is the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. The values remain the same in every village, town or city."\(^5\) No wonder then that the ancient Indian epics and mythology count for so much in his writings. His delvings into the archetypal myths and characters of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* have been commented upon by more than one critic. Edwin Gerow's contention is: "... he \(^7\) cannot be understood without reference to that traditional philosophical and metaphysical universe of discourse which has underlain Indian belles lettres since its emergence in the late Epic period."\(^5\) Noticing how important the element in Narayan's art is, H.M. Williams observes:

Indian epics and folk-lore are constantly referred to in the Malgudi cycle in order to deepen our awareness of the timelessness of Malgudi. Did not Rama's feet pass that way in epic times? (Mr. Sampath). Did not the Goddess, Parvathi, jump into the fire and produce the river Malgudi? (The Guide). ...Even the fantastically comic film produced by the egregious Mr. Sampath is centred on the burning of Kama, the
God of love, by the Lord Shiva's third eye, though not before Ravi has been consumed to lunacy by love of the glamorous actress; and even the profitable pornographic manuscript handed over to the financial expert, Margayya, by Dr. Pal derived heavily no doubt from the noble and ancient Śr̥ma Sūtra, the pillow-reading of many a raja and rani of the heroic ages. In fact Malgudi is a microcosm of "Hindu" India. The later books do more however, than refer to the Indian past; they bring characters and stories from Indian epic literature alive in modern up-to-date Malgudi... The houris, the libidinous apsaras, reappear as Dr. Pal's brace of whores in The Financial Expert, as Rosie, the dancer in The Guide, and as Rangi and other 'public ladies' who serve Vasu's lust in The Man-eater of Malgudi. This same Vasu is none other than one of the predatory rakshasas, many-headed giants, 'psychopathic' killers of the epics... The old battle of hero versus demon is on again... 

In his interview with Ved Mehta, Narayan says: "To be a good writer anywhere, you must have roots — both in religion and in family. I have these things." And sure, the centre of Narayan's world of values as of his fictional world is the family. Sundaram remarks: "Though the joint family is breaking up all over India, the sense of kinship is strong in a Narayan novel. The most notable example of this is in The Financial Expert where Margayya and his brother, though for most of the time not on speaking terms, are yet next-door neighbours sharing a well, and in moments of special joy or sorrow simply cannot do without each other." Narayan is indeed a traditionalist, an
Though a citizen of the ultramodern world/skyscrapers and space-travel, Narayan cannot bring himself to discredit astrological predictions and horoscope-readings, a faith deeply entrenched in the hearts of orthodox Hindus since times immemorial. And his unfortunate personal experiences have a lot to do with this state of affairs.

Narayan fell in love with Raja and wanted to marry her but the horoscopes did not match. Sundaram relates how the astrologer on the girl-side "was positive that Narayan would prove a polygamist or a widower; the stars had determined that he should not be happy with just a wife. But the love-lorn young man was not to be put off so easily. He got an astrologer of his own who, 'at the sight of rupees,' went into ecstasies over Narayan's horoscope."

An accomplished debater, he defeated the other Pandit and the marriage was performed without any further hitch or obstacle. But "the warnings clearly given and deliberately defied, and the way stars worked out their malice are things Narayan cannot forget and keeps referring to in his works again and again." 61

Hence in his writings whenever a horoscope is mentioned or a horoscope is read, "Narayan would seem to
suggest that all this is not old wives' superstitions. The forty days' worship of Lakshmi bore fruit: Margayya from a poor, despised small-scale money-lender rose to giddy heights of opulence and influence. The astrologer who said that Brinda's horoscope did not match Balu's was not wrong in his prediction: within a few months of her marriage Brinda had cause to rue it. In The Man-eater of Malgudi, the day fixed for the temple-ceremony "after a careful consultation of the almanac was the second among three possible dates: good, not-so-good and half-good. Not-so-good might mean no more than a minor mishap — 'a stubbed toe, or the milk kept for coffee turning sour,' but there it was and one should be prepared for it. All the worry that Nataraj and his friends underwent apprehending what Vasu might be up to would no doubt come under 'minor mishap'. The stars never lie to Narayan!"

Edwin Gerow regards Narayan as "a rather unique figure in modern Indian letters ... because of his unflinchingly traditional outlook." William Walsh is of the opinion: "The acceptance of life which his art expresses has no doubt a root in the national condition. One feels that a more than individual sensibility, more than simply personal categories and feelings are operating under the surface." The reflections in his writings, however,
unlike in Raja Rao's, are not 'rapt' or 'mystic' but altogether 'homely' and 'human'. Also, in contrast to Raja Rao, with Narayan "sensibility passes into articulation in a smooth, natural glide."66

Narayan, we thus see, is a typically orthodox Hindu writer. He is in the tradition of the best Indian writers of the past who had "an immense perspective." He accepts the Hindu world-view and brings to his work the cool detachment of a great saint or seer. In his orthodox Hindu approach to things "there is still that non-aligned human centre which refuses to be committed to anything in the world of illusion, because absolute commitment or orthodoxy in human society makes sincerity in the spiritual realms false, as being too strongly identified with Maya."67 Like Jagan, a character created close to his own image, Narayan "has found a unique tranquility in his own garden of meditation,"68 and remains a symbol of "quiet hands in a gesturing civilization and laconic speech in a chattering world."69
Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand, third member of the celebrated triad, however, stands in sharp contrast to Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. Whereas Rao and Narayan have genuine admiration for the Hindu view of life and derive their inspiration from it, Anand is a great critic of almost all that Hindu religion and philosophy stand for and the Hindu social institutions especially come in for a bitter attack at his hands. His harshly realistic fiction is thus at the polar end of the "literary orientalism" of writers like Raja Rao, Ghose and Narayan.

Educated in the British Indian schools, at an early age Anand "acquired a bias against all indigenous customs and grew up hating everything Indian." The Indian religious thought as assessed by him was a poor business: "There seemed no escape for man according to the exalted, yet somewhat pedantic Vedantic ideal. And as for the religion based on it, there was required an ultimate surrender of reason to faith and mystical intuition as well as to the pernicious caste organisation." He himself affirms: "I am
not Raja Rao. Nor am I R.K.Narayan. I see divinity in each object, each flower, each animal, each human being, and I am looking for the quick as the mystics look for illumination."^13

Anand rejects the traditional attitude of India towards man because this attitude is essentially "non-human, super-human."^74 Hence Balaram Gupta's remark: "The moot point to be noted about Anand is that he has always firmly believed in the role of a writer as essentially a crusader in the cause of humanity: no hotch-potch of Vedantism, no hazy mysticism, but an inalienable faith in man."^75

The central concern of Anand's philosophy and fiction is 'la condition humaine' and he hates Hindu religion for creating customs, beliefs and rituals which divide man from man. It is thus that crusade against casteism became a chief motivating force behind his writings. The Road (as earlier Untouchable) highlights the age-old injustice perpetrated by traditional Hindu society upon a whole class of people within its fold. With a genuine feeling for the deprived section of Hindu society that is dubbed as untouchable, Anand refers with approval to Jawahar Lal Nehru's shifting of emphasis from the old religions and faiths to "Destination Man".76

Anand mocks at the hypocrisy and hollowness of Hindu religion and its curse of "pollution by touch" which baffles
all reason, sensibility and good sense. His viewpoint has, therefore, naturally come to be anti-Brahmin. Whether it is Gauri or Confessions of a Lover, Brahmins are always referred to as "Brahmin dogs". The protagonist in Confessions of a Lover even goes as far as to say: "I feel at times I want to murder all the Brahmins for their crimes."77 Not difficult to judge who is the real speaker here when we know that Anand's characters copiously demonstrate the nature and pitch of the novelist's personal philosophy and bias.

It is in the same spirit of protest that in Gauri he raises his voice against the present position of woman in Hindu society. The Hindus have sometimes exalted woman as a goddess, but generally she is treated as a slave. The spectacle makes Anand sad and the result is Gauri, a novel that Anand himself describes as a "sad" book. The present fills him with despair and if there is a glimmer of hope for a better order, it is a hope held out by the modern Western trends that support the "ideal of woman as the equal of man, complete by herself."78

Anand's attitude to God as well as the Hindu gods and goddesses is most unorthodox. He rejects the idea of absolute God as this cryptic remark indicates: "God has been dead a long time. Men are gods, or can become gods."79 If
God is a fabrication, the Hindu gods and goddesses for him are the last word on cruelty and tyranny. There could not be a greater castigation of these traditionally accepted divinities than in the following descriptions in The Road:

The flames still leapt to the sky from the huts, crackling and sparkling, and dark at the ends, reducing everything to ashes. Kali Mai was angry, because this hour of sundown was the time, when she should be coming, in the cool dusk to light a saucer-lamp at the mother's feet; and she had been late today and for many days. So Kali had made a huge lamp from the huts to light her way to the heavens.

Laxmi begged Mother Kali to save their homesteads from the leaping fires:

But, from the black smoke wraiths, into which the goddess seemed to have been transformed, dancing and flying towards the heavens above the skies, she was answering back:

'I will burn you all up as I have singed those birds. You must suffer for defying the twice-born! and I will consume you, until your souls descend from the ashes to the bowels of the earth, there to undergo the just punishment for the misdeeds of your son and the other boys. And when you have suffered enough, been bitten by scorpions and snakes, tortured with red-hot irons by the demons and crushed in oil-mills, I will come like a dark angel and beckon your souls to rise like ghosts, who will become jinns, to wander around the village, bereft and hungry and accursed for ever. ...'81

The divine Tulsi plant is looked upon as a symbol of God and almost universally worshipped in the Hindu homes since times immemorial. Ramaswamy (The Serpent and the Rope)
missed offering its sacred leaves to Lord Shiva in his self-made temple in France. In *A Silence of Desire*, it stands as a symbol of hope, faith and good cheer. In *Behula* we see Mohini kneeling before it, knowing that the frail plant with its brown, sweet-scented leaves is an emblem "vested with a mystic value, ... moving the mind towards self-suggestion, so that the inner eye should strip the veil of appearances and look beyond." The same Tulsi plant, however, has a very different connotation in Anand's novel *Gauri*. Its association in the heroine's mind is not with sanctity but with lasciviousness. It reminds her of depravity and debauchery:

Gauri had been contemplating the sacred Tulsi plant which hung on the balcony and which Seth Jai Ram Dass had so devoutly watered. Her head was filled with the fumes of fever and, in the vague ecstasy she heard echoes of the pious mention of the name of God. And the memory came back to her of the approach which Pandit Bhola Nath had made to her when she was a little girl and had gone to give him offerings for her mother. Since then the garb of religiosity had always seemed to her a cover for sexual desire.

Priests in Anand's novels are always the people with a vested interest who resist change or progress. They make people fatalists and extort money from them. They practise impiety and lechery in their own lives while exhort others to be pious and God-fearing. Suraj Mani, the
The Hindu philosophy has generally been associated with fatalism and determinism but Anand's nonconformist heroes would rather opt for the more modern Western concept of "free will" and "action". They refuse to accept filth and drought and misery in their lives as inevitable and believe that they can control nature for man's benefit. To quote Mrs. Mukherjee:

'The seasons will be changed by man. There will be water from the wells, with electric pumps... and medicines will renew the earth', proclaims Gauri towards the end of The Old Woman and the Cow. If the majority of the villagers in Anand's world share the traditional fatalism about nature's cruelty to man, his protagonists stand out as rebels and visionaries who believe in the prospect of improvement. They suffer because they cannot accept and be resigned, yet often find themselves unable to act.84

In the matter of religion Anand has always protested against the Hindu faith in mystic origins and the Hindu habit of myth-making because he saw the core problem of India to be the crushing weight of the allegedly "'dead myth' of 'neo-Hinduism' and Vedantic Absolutism..."85 He believes:"The heart and mind of contemporary man is therefore, moved by other causalities than salvation."86 Saros Cowasjee in his introduction to The Private Life of an Indian Prince mentions the fact of Anand "being hailed
as the first writer to have dispelled the myth built around
the Indian character: the myth about 'contentment' in the
midst of poverty, 'mystical silence', 'spiritual attainments',
etc. \(^87\)

On the whole, Anand in his novels places greater
emphasis on the need to revolt against the decayed aspects
of the Indian tradition than on the acceptance and upholding
of the finer elements of it. This is not a very balanced
view of things and has often invited the charge that in
Anand's novels, we find more of the "dirty drains" of India
than of her finer elements and nobler aspects. As M.K. Naik
observes: "Anand has often tended to underestimate the
Indian tradition, especially in its spiritual aspect. In
novel after novel, religion is depicted as an affair of
hypocrisy and outmoded taboos and avaricious and gluttonous
priests only. Most of his heroes revel in blasphemy..."\(^88\)
To quote Anand himself: "Of course, in my novels, Caliban
looks into the mirror more often than Ariel. I have a
penchant to notice awkward facts."\(^89\) But then perhaps it
would not be very fair to blame him for this very special
trait in his writing. Perhaps we could, with Naik, say in
his defence: "At an impressionable age he had become aware
of the religious hypocrisy and bigotry in Indian society and
of its injustices thriving on anachronistic practices such
as untouchability, on feudalism and economic exploitation of the have-nots by the haves. This awareness was sure to make him a militant of the baser elements in the Indian tradition.\textsuperscript{90}

Anand has often been charged with being alienated from the traditional framework of values. It has been suggested that "while rejecting the superstitions and the narrowness, he has also cut himself off from the strength-giving continuity of a culture."\textsuperscript{91} In this context it would be interesting to see what Mrs. Mukherjee observes:

Anand is free from what the Bengali critic and writer Annanda Sankar Roy has called the East-Past complex and there is no nostalgia or sentimentality in his attitude towards Indian traditions. If the rejection of the superstitions and narrowness of traditional life involves the loss of the strength that a continuity of culture provides, it is for Anand a deliberate choice. He substitutes the international doctrine of socialism for the myth of the race, but this is preceded by an exposure to a number of view-points...\textsuperscript{92}

IV

Bhabani Bhattacharya

In his attitude towards Hindu religion and philosophy, Bhabani Bhattacharya stands somewhere midway between Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. While he lacks the ardour of
the former for the great Indian traditions, he does not share the latter's enthusiasm for its total rejection and replacement. His vision is that of a humane, rational, even radical Hindu who would change much that goes by the name of Hinduism but at the same time retain much that is precious in it.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is too painfully conscious of the rot that has set in in the Hindu religion and its various practices and observances. Generally it is dead ritualism and the wide-flung cobweb of superstitious faith that pass for religion with the teeming millions as also the so-called elite of the Hindu society. *He Who Rides a Tiger* illustrates how "faith in miracles and credulity do not belong entirely to the past or to the villages."  

The fake-temple story reveals how all that goes by the name of religion is often sheer sham: "Kalo had thought over a curious contradiction of the times: while men died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindliness dried up, religion was more in demand. It was only the outward form of religion, the shell of ritual, empty within." Through various episodes in the novel the writer gives us glimpses into the selfish motives of the worshippers who are so cruel and hard-hearted, so blinded by fanaticism and narrow selfish
interests that they would rather give a milk-bath to an idol in a temple than food to the starving and the dying. Is it religion or a mockery of it only?

Bhabani Bhattacharya shares with Anand his hatred for an established social order which labels men as superior and inferior by virtue of the accident of their birth only. He is highly vocal in his denunciation of the Hindu caste-system. He Who Rides a Tiger is a monumental work on the subject. In this novel of protest the writer is clearly on the side of rebels like Kalo and Biten. Bhattacharya seems to enjoy every bit of Kalo's disclosure at the end of the novel. Like Kalo himself he seems to be happy to make the proud high caste people eat the dust. The writer does not seem to be far behind when the low caste people in the crowd shout: "As if God were Brahmin by caste! As if chamars must not earn merit lest they go to heaven and jostle shoulders with the caste folks! ... He has taught them a lesson they will hold in their bellies." The final denouement shows his sympathy unequivocally. Kalo was not torn limb to limb as might have been expected; rather he was cheered and greeted: "'Victory to our brother!' It was now a war cry."96

In his attitude towards the Hindu gods and goddesses, Bhattacharya is again in the same camp with Mulk Raj Anand. The miserable plight of the famine-stricken people in Bengal
seems to have sapped all faith out of him and shaken his belief in their sense of justice, fair play and mercy. "Fate knows no mercy," he seems to cry with the dying destitutes in Calcutta. Similarly, he seems to join issue with the flower-woman in the temple premises, who looking at the starved Onu wonders: "The goddess in the stone image had no pity for such guileless ones who had done no wrong, harmed nobody?" In the writer's view humanism and divinity are incompatible and his plea clearly is for the human as against the stony divinity upheld by the Hindus.

The writer is equally sceptic about the so-called Hindu 'God Men'. His hatred for these frauds in robes of renunciation is reflected in the simile he uses to describe the movements of Bhairabi: "Her movements were like those of a hunting dog. Suddenly, she whirled and hurried out of the gate as if she had picked up the scent she wanted, and crossed the road to Lekha's door."

On the question of sex, Bhattacharya does not share the traditional cultural ethos either. Asceticism is a trait of Hindu character generally, but Bhattacharya considers such arid puritanism to be something anti-life. In their writings both Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan reflect a nuance of cultural ethos:
When Jagan, in *The Vendor of Sweets*, moans about the sweat and fever of sex,

>'He felt fatigued by all the apparatus of sex, its promise and its futility, the sadness and the sweat at the end of it all...'

he is not very far in spirit from the cynicism about sex that Ramaswamy — the fatigue in the midst of abundance — feels in his intensest moments with Madeleine:

>'awkward and unashamed, as soon as Madeleine and I came back to our room,... how I pressed Madeleine to myself, how I forced her to undress, and how without sweetness or word of murmur I took her...'

Bhabani Bhattacharya's approach on the issue is different, however. Both in *Music for Mohini* and in *Shadow from Ladakh* he launches a vigorous campaign against what he considers to be anti-life tendencies and forces in the traditional Indian way of life. Looking upon celibacy as an unhealthy mode of life, he pleads, like his master Tagore, for a full and joyous life. Chandrasekharan observes: "Since in the novel Sumita gives up her asceticism and since even on her second visit to the same temple her reaction is the normal reaction of a young, healthy girl, we may safely draw the inference that in this particular case Bhaskar is the author's mouthpiece." When both Satyajit and Sumita reject the life of the spirit in favour of the life of the senses, the writer is happy because they have, in his opinion, at last
abandoned the sterile path of repression and negation and entered 'the portals of life'.

The voice of protest is thus clearly audible in the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya. The writer favours a radical change in some Hindu institutions. The young reformist group in Behula would work to bring about widow-remarriages and prevention of child-marriages. They would fight to break down the barriers of caste. As Jayadev tells Mohini, "We're fighting ignorance and superstition, aren't we? We're fighting the false clayfoot gods. They've had their day and now they must quit, ..." Like his father-in-law who mocks at the practice of consulting "horoscopes in this age of microscopes", he, too, refuses to pay heed to astrology. He is not intimidated by the prediction of his death at the age of twenty-eight and he asks Mohini not to be unnerved by it. After his intervention at the temple, he boldly faces his mother and tells her: "We are not slaves of the stars. There is no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs." 103

All this, however, does not mean that Bhabani Bhattacharya is an iconoclast who wants to destroy everything in the old order. He has the vision to see the soul of goodness in Hindu religion and philosophy and regards much in it as holy and sacred, though he seems to suggest that we should read the
ancient thought in today's light and give no quarter to superstition and meaningless ritual. When Jayadev (Music for Mohini) gets wind of the proposed sacrifice in the temple of the virgin goddess, he is deeply disturbed: "What, he wondered, had happened to the ancient quest of the Hindus, the quest for Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram — Truth, Goodwill and Beauty? The core, the spiritual content had been choked by centuries of evil overgrowth. Misguided faith burned like a great lamp of oil that gave little light but a great deal of smoke. It was this smoke which was pouring over India, this smoke which made the Big House stifling." According to Iyengar, "Jayadev reached the temple of the virgin goddess in time to stop the ceremonial offering of blood. The mother-son confrontation is the climatic point in the novel, but Jayadev wins, and the ghosts of the past reluctantly recede." 

All the past is by no means a dead weight that must be disposed of somehow. Bhattacharya appreciates the service of the professional storyteller who goes round the villages giving lucid and colourful expositions of stories from the Puranas and other sources. These performances aided by music and wit keep our legendary lore alive and help to reinforce religious faith. Ceremonies also have their value to his mind. For instance, the ceremony of a sister anointing her
brother or brothers, as an incident in the novel Music for Mohini illustrates, gives colour to life and evokes tender fraternal feeling.

There is a core of conservatism in Bhabani Bhattacharya. On the issue of woman-emancipation his approach is not that of a radical feminist. He is conscious of the fact that the Hindu woman has an 'ancient hunger' to offer worship to the husband. Marriage changes a girl's attitude fundamentally; she no longer desires to live for herself and is willing to make the necessary sacrifices and adjustments that her situation demands. This is precisely what the heroine does in Music for Mohini. The following comment made by the author while describing the wedding ceremony has no trace of disapproval: "A hundred thousand Hindu maids each bridal day of the year give their hearts to their unknown husbands, asking nothing in return but approval."106

The writer's attitude as reflected in So Many Hungers and in Shadow from Ladakh shows him to be a great admirer of the Hindu doctrine of nonviolence. Not only that there is no note of disapproval in his words or comments regarding the subject, his support for it is implied in his admiration for, even identification with the characters who expound and propagate it.
Bhabani Bhattacharya, we thus see, keeps his vision clear of any bias or prejudice and his approach to Hindu religion and philosophy is well-balanced. With all his admiration for it, he is neither unduly enamoured of it, nor, all his criticism of sham and orthodoxy notwithstanding, can he be called allergic to it. Jayadev, harping on the Maitreyi-Yagnyavalkya theme and missing the bounteous past, is, no doubt, Bhabani Bhattacharya himself. But at the same time the writer exposes the hollow and weak points of the past tradition mercilessly. Obviously, he recommends a happy synthesis of the ancient spiritual traditions of Hindu India with the world-shaking discoveries and inventions and liberal catholicism of the West so that we may have 'a better tomorrow'.

V

Nayantara Sahgal

Nayantara Sahgal seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards her parental creed. It is what may be described as a 'love-hate' relationship. She is bitterly critical of certain weaknesses of her people and censures them in bristling terms. Yet she often refers to Hindu society in terms of not only
tolerance but even endearment. Her attitude towards Hinduism, in brief, may be summed up in the words: "You could not accept Hinduism in its entirety without harbouring ignorance and superstition too. You could not wholly reject it without destroying part of yourself, for it was the story of India." Again, the author herself seems to speak through the narrator in *Time to be Happy*:

We are a people who worship idols. Never forget that. The song and dance come easily to us. The yearning to worship passionately, even flamboyantly, is in our bones. Have you ever noticed how a lover behaves? Sometimes he is elated, sometimes unaccountably depressed, often unreasonable. He is a man of unpredictable moods. Like him, we swing from opposite to opposite in a manner that surprises even ourselves. We are deeply religious, yet no country has made such a travesty of religion. We are spiritual, yet worldly. We have created beauty in all its forms, in art, in philosophy, in literature, to rank with the world's greatest, yet we tolerate the most appalling squalor about us. 

In her approach to religion and philosophy, Mrs. Sahgal is a liberal free-thinker and not a tradition-bound orthodox figure. Perhaps her training and background made it inevitable that she should be immune to any kind of blind conformism. The Hindu faith in blind destiny, the Hindu spirit of passive resignation to things and happenings, the Hindu tendency to ignore the individual in favour of the universal, the present in favour of the eternal, the Hindu
habit of making a virtue of renunciation, of living a life "bound by rules, ritual, arithmetic" and the Hindu caste-divisions are some of the important points where Hinduism comes in for sharp criticism in her writings. The various characters who voice these sentiments are often the spokesmen of the writer herself. Mrs. Sahgal's Western education and background are clearly reflected in the scarcely camouflaged autobiographies that her novels are.

Nayantara Sahgal's strongest protest against Hindu practices is voiced in her challenge to the position of male superiority in Hindu society. The female in her novels is always "an emancipation-seeking dependent creature." Both A Day in Shadow and Storm in Chandigarh are novels of protest against the traditional Hindu attitude towards woman. Raj in the former and Vishal Dubey in the latter plainly represent the author when they express indignity at the bestial treatment meted out to woman by the chauvinistic, domineering male. The writer is disgusted to see how the Hindu society shows an utter lack of sympathy for women and in her novels the dice is heavily loaded against the Hindu tradition, sentiment and practice. Divorce is no more an anathema but it has its difficulties. Simrit finds it hard to move about in the husband-centered society she has forsaken
and the persons she is introduced to at a party, after her divorce, study her solicitously, "as if divorce were a disease that left pock-marks."\textsuperscript{110}

However, even though the writer is sharply critical of certain Hindu practices, there is enough in her novels to show her great admiration for the rich heritage of Hindu religion and culture. Devi can never forget the cry of the peasants and farmers "as it reached us across the fields — 'Sita Ram' — drawn out like streamers in the wind, half sung, half called. It was so antique and so thrilling the way it seemed to rise up out of the soil."\textsuperscript{111} There is an unmistakable loving note in Devi's description of it all just as there is a clear note of admiration and pride in Rishad's line of thinking when he remembers how the \textit{Ramayana} had gone South. A legend had travelled, making India one enduring cultural unity from the Himalayas to the sea. And again it had crossed the Vindyas in the person of Shankracharya. The writer goes eloquent, almost poetic, when writing about Lord Krishna — the most romantic of our divine incarnations. Again, it is with great feeling that she describes the magical effect that the reading aloud or acting out of the \textit{Ramayana} had on the simple village-folk of India.

Nayantara Sahgal thus condemns certain aspects of Hinduism for being dangerously misleading, but she also
has a soft corner for her ancestral creed. Her attitude and reaction thus depend on as to what aspect of Hindu philosophy or Hindu society falls within her purview at a particular moment. When pundits, the age-old custodians of Hinduism, arouse no feeling of love or respect in her heart, she is all praise for the temple sculpture of India and finds it "robust enough evidence of our fundamental joie de vivre."\footnote{112} We may well sum up her views on the subject in the words of Jasbir Jain:

\begin{quote}
Nayantara's criticism of Hinduism is in no way irreligious or vituperative. She does not consider religion to be dispensable for it provides a significant base for progress ... Nevertheless she is quite right in her regret that the vast spiritual resources of Hinduism are being frittered away by a superficial adherence to rituals and religious orthodoxy. Hinduism must... shed its purely religious role in order to become a living tradition.\footnote{113}
\end{quote}

VI

Kamala Markandaya and Other Novelists

Kamala Markandaya is neither a rigid traditionalist nor a blind critic of Hinduism or Hindu society. She tries to strike a balance between the good and the bad here and has,
on the whole, a positive view of Hinduism — more than a genially tolerant view only. Beneath the surface pessimism and despair of Hindu society, Markandaya points to "an undercurrent of optimism and confidence in the Indian character."

To continue the argument in K.R. Chandrasekharan's words: "Nectar in a Sieve is a tragic story presenting to us the themes of suffering, starvation and death, but the story ends on a positive note of quiet strength and resolution. ... In the light of this fortitude one may indeed ask, 'O Death, where is thy sting? Where is thy victory, O Grave?'" Val and again Val's mother in Possession demonstrate the same strength of character in the face of worst trials and temptations. The same calm strength of character is seen in Dandekar's wife Sarojini (A Silence of Desire) too.

Kamala Markandaya's attitude towards the holy men of India, however, remains "complex and elusive." In both Possession and A Silence of Desire, which have these holy men as their central figures, the author scrupulously avoids taking sides with either faith or scepticism. This is very different from Anand's most unambiguous stand about the holy men he creates. His righteous indignation against the pseudo-spiritual men of Hinduism is too pronounced to go unnoticed.
Manohar Malgonkar does not seem to favour formal religion and is generally critical of professionals in the field. The British Public School code of conduct constitutes the norm in his novels and his attitude towards all traditional values is at best a "defensive attitude." He completely withholds sympathy from all the characters who are not "rich and well-born" or do not share the British Public School virtues. Such characters never become fully realized and remain either entirely comic or merely unreal. Naturally there is not much to expect from him so far as attitude towards the Indian — or the Hindu for that matter — value-system is concerned.

Desani, in Raji Narasimhan's words, "is not xenophobically attached to the East. His infatuation is a very personal infatuation, devoid of cultural celebrativeness and the grandiose."

Anita Desai, a younger member of the group, does not seem to have any love for the Indian culture either. The past is a "faded memory" for her and this "sense of remoteness from tradition" is fairly pronounced in her writings.

In Cry, the Peacock the author's approach to the theme of ideal existence remains essentially ambiguous. Gautama comes very close to the traditional Hindu ideal of
life, "but since the novel is narrated from the point of view of Maya, the ideal itself seems to be challenged. Gautama's aspiration to stability and calm appears to her to be a negation of life in all its vivid aspects. The fact that ultimately Maya turns insane and kills her husband may contain an indirect comment on their different values of life."  

In *Voices in the City* Anita Desai seems to suggest in very clear terms that "the East is invincible, intractable and frightening. The proposition runs through the narrative, centring in various situations and characters."  

Nirod, the protagonist in the novel, is no better than a rootless atheist. His view of life has nothing positive to offer:  

Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant, equally worthless. Would he one day, he wondered, walk to the temple at the edge of this void... The question had no substance, for Nirod knew he would never approach a god housed in a temple bustling with libidinous priests, vendors of garlands and plaster images, and women perspiring with piety. That odour of hair-oil, joss sticks and decaying flowers, the odour of worship, made his stomach heave.

There is a questioning of the basic philosophy of Hinduism in words such as: "Traceless, meaningless, uninvolved — does this not amount to non-existence, please?" To Amla the sacred conch-bell 'honks' and that too,
'ominously' and to her the little brass bells in the Puja-hour sound 'unharmonious'. And when "the ominous noises of the call to prayer came to an end, and the recitation began, low and urgent,... Amla and Dharma listened dumbly to prayers that were meaningless to them."125

A veiled as well as an overt criticism of Hindu philosophy is thus easily discernible in the novels of Anita Desai. All the leading characters in Voices in The City hate Hindu religion. They passionately discuss issues like conformity and rebellion, attachment and detachment and the writer's sympathies with the anti-traditionalists seep through the descriptions at more than one point in the novel.

Different writers of the Indo-English novel have thus fused and integrated different viewpoints about the Hindu philosophy and religion into their writings. How artistically they have woven them into their novels, whether they project their attitudes obtrusively or unobtrusively, clearly, convincingly, forcefully, or weakly and inarticulately only, depends, of course, on their stature and strength as master-writers, on their hold and grip on the art of novel-writing itself!
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121The Twice Born Fiction, p. 101.
122Sensibility Under Stress, p. 23.
123Voices in the City, p. 63.
124Ibid., p. 140.
125Ibid., p. 229.
Unless word becomes 'mantra',
no writer is a writer and no reader
a reader.

Raja Rao