CHAPTER SIX

HINDUISM AND STYLE

Style, which of course includes form, technique and language is obviously more than a mere garb for the thoughts of a writer or the thought-contents of his writings. In fact, it is the 'soul' of a literary composition. Style, in the words of Raji Narasimhan, "is the reflection of the inner mind. More. It is the inner mind trimmed and pared down to a cognisable dramatic statement to form the hub of the novel." Hence the sanctity of the Sabdabrahman.

When style is thus always important for any writer anywhere and a successful artist has to give a careful thought to it, perhaps very few are faced with the peculiar difficulties that confront an Indo-English novelist. Multidimensional problems often land the latter in an unenviable position and great mastery, skill and maturity are required to surmount the obstacles in his way.

Besides the strain of writing in an alien language, the Indian writer of English has to face scathing attacks from the champions of the mother-tongue who dub him as "a second class brother" or "a poor relation." It is often
asserted that India can have a great literature and one in which her spirit will find expression only in an Indian language. There are critics like Raji Narasimhan who declare: "Creative writing in English is not natural for an Indian. Smooth out every blemish ... the basic unnaturalness stays." But perhaps the worst problem facing an Indo-English writer is that of conveying the Hindu ethos, the Hindu racial habits or memories through a language that has developed in a totally "non-Hindu cultural complex." English is traditionally associated with a culture that is far removed from what has been termed as the "Eastern antiquity" and if we were to compare it with the Hindu cultural milieu, the two are as different from each other as black is from white or panther from the hind. And the task which is challenging enough for any Indo-English writer is doubly so for an Indo-English novelist as he has to establish contact with the "thought substance" and "the philosophic pulsations" of the Hindus not only through the medium of a foreign language but also through a genre of literature that owed its origin to the Western traditions of writing only.

It is a difficult situation by all standards and it would be interesting to see how Indian writers of the English novel have met it. Some degree of experimentation and original inventions were natural if the native cultural
concepts were to be aptly and successfully yoked to the foreign phonetics. So masterminds like Raja Rao turned into innovators and introduced into English fiction traditions that were undeniably Indian not only in sensibility but also in style — that is, in form, technique and language. They tried, with wonderful success at times, to create an authentically Indian style and form of writing in the fashion of great American and Irish writers of English who created their own dialects. In this they were inspired by a sense of pure realism rather than motivated by any sense of racial or religious fanaticism or goaded by any kind of nostalgia or sentimentalism. They meant to represent in English the 'feel' of Hindu life as it were, to represent the mental habits, the faiths, traditions and customs of a people whose "attitudes and responses" have been conditioned by native languages. Naturally the English language as also the novel form of the West had to be somewhat modified, moulded and adopted to the sensitivities and sensibilities of the Hindus before a lucid and convincing representation became possible. The writers of the Indo-English novel resort to numerous devices to achieve this end.
Raja Rao

The most important innovation in the field is perhaps the one related to the form of the novel. Though the novel in its present form is a Western contribution to literature, the Hindus in India have known the art of storytelling ever since the days of the Rig-Veda and the Upanishads. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, The Thirty Two Stories of the Throne Relating to King Vikramaditya and Dandi's Dasa-Kumara-Carita are some proofs of the Hindus' great gift of storytelling. Writers like Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose have turned to these works for inspiration in order to give a strikingly new form and structure to today's novel of the West. And they have succeeded in giving an Indian tone and colour to it by writing novels which are close to the Indian tradition of the Puranas, the Upanishads and folk epics.

Raja Rao's fiction is in conformity with his belief that "the Indian novel can only be epic in form and metaphysical in nature. It can only be story within story within story to
show all stories are parables.‖ His Kanthapura, in the
writer's own words, is a 'sthala-Purana' — a rich legendary
history of the village Kanthapura. Iyengar confirms the
'Pauranic' nature of the book describing it as 'Gandhi-Purana'
— that is, a legendary history of the Gandhi era: "... the
style of narration makes the book more a Gandhi-Purana than
a piece of mere fiction." The novel is crammed with a
large number of episodes in the form of the Ramayana, the
Mahabharata and the Puranas and is indeed, in the tradition
of the time-honoured Indian folk epics.

And if Kanthapura is a 'sthala-purana', The Serpent
and the Rope is verily a 'Mahapurana' or a major epic legend.
The Purana, an old Sanskrit form of literature to which the
novel seems to come closest, "was a unique blend of history,
literature, philosophy and religion, an encyclopaedic
presentation of the totality of human existence... In the
heterogeneous miscellany that the Purana was, there was room
for the treatment of all subjects under the sun, ranging
from art to science. In a similar way, Raja Rao's novel has
room for reflections on Nazism, Marxism, feminism, imperialism,
industrialization, culture, law, language and a host of other
subjects." With its wonderful width of sweep the novel is
"more than a miniature epic — it is almost encyclopaedic in
its scope."
Commenting on the form of *The Serpent and the Rope*, Raja Rao observes that the novel "is to be taken like all my writings as an attempt at a 'Pauranic' re-creation of Indian storytelling; that is to say, the story as story is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached (or which passes through) many other stories, fables and philosophical disquisitions, like a *mala*." Stories, fables and legends abound in the Puranas and *The Serpent and the Rope* has a full share of this literary device. Iyengar calls the book Raja Rao's "Mahabharata" and C.D. Narasimhaiah observes how "there are numerous beautiful 'stories' within the central story in the style of the *Mahabharata*." There is grandmother Lakshamma's story of the princess; then there are the stories of Bhagyanagar that was Hyderabad, of Lakpati of Lahore, of Iswara Bhatta and his family, of Radha Krishna and Lurvasa; of Jagannatha Bhatta and of Shajehan's daughter; of Tristan and Iseult, of Buddha and Vassita with her dead son in her arms, not to speak of Buddha riding in a chariot to a place of no return, leaving his wife and child behind, their shades hovering for ever in the background; of the poor Brahmin of Benares carrying his own dead child on his shoulder to float in the Ganga; of Kabir and Ramananda; Budumekaye and the Prince; of Yajnyavalkya and Maitreyi — each of the stories delightful, poignant and elevating, but having a value and a significance seen against the main theme of *The Serpent and the Rope*, itself a popular myth but most artistically elucidated in the course of the novel.
Besides the introduction of these Upakathas (subsidiary stories) in the main body of the novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* shares many other characteristic features of the *Puranas*. We have in it long poetic descriptions of nature and of holy places in the Sanskrit Classical tradition. There are "evocative pictures of Ganga: 'ever so knowing, so wise;' the Himalaya, 'like Lord Shiva himself, distant, inscrutable and yet very intimate there where you do not exist'.” Even a casual reader of *The Serpent and the Rope* is struck by the abundance of lyrical passages describing persons and places and pilgrimages and rivers — rivers like the Ganges or the Seine. Here, for example, is the description of Benares:

"Benares is eternal. There the dead do not die nor the living live. The dead come down to play on the banks of the Ganges, and the living who move about, and even offer rice balls to the manes, live in the illusion of a vast night and a bright city."  

In *The Serpent and the Rope* the Hindu religion and philosophy are treated elaborately and after the style of the *Puranas*. M.K. Naik observes: "Among the major topics dealt with in a *Mahapurana* was Mukti (final emancipation) and how to attain it — a subject which is at the heart of Raja Rao's novel also." The critic further points out how "the breathless garrulity and verbosity of the novel are
reminiscent of the Puranas which seem to go on and on in a seemingly never-ending stream."\(^\text{17}\)

Again, a novel after the Western tradition "invariably evokes in its first pages the spirit of a place or a time."\(^\text{18}\) Following this concept of the novel form, Ambedkar confines his novels to human beings and their relations with each other "in the warp and woof of the time."\(^\text{19}\) But in utter violation of this Western code of novel-writing, Raja Rao summons in the opening pages of *The Serpent and the Rope* "neither place nor time but something that transcends both — it is, what has made the great Indian tradition and sustained it through the vicissitudes of history: the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, the Gita, the great teachers and their lineage; and these again made alive to us by their modes of life, wandering to mountains and distant hermitages to see God 'face to face' ..."\(^\text{20}\)

Raja Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare* too, is in line with Hindu tradition. Iyengar writes:

If Kanthapura could be described as a Purana, as a Gandhi Purana, and *The Serpent and the Rope* as an epic, a mini-Mahabharata in the idiom of our age, then *The Cat and Shakespeare* is more like one of the longer Upanishads, part narrative, part speculation, and part dialogue or discussion. Here the description zigzags rather than progresses straight on, the speculation is not so much analytical as a series of spasmodic lightning flashes, and the dialogue is dialectical rather than an exchange of confidences:
'Where does water come from?'
'From the tap.'
'And the water in the tap?'
'From the lake.'
'And the water in the lake?'
'From the sky.'
'And the water in the sky?'
'From the ocean.'
'And the water in the ocean?'
'From the rivers.'
'And the river waters?'
'They make the lakes.'
'And the tap water?'
'Is river water.'
'And so?'
'Water comes from water.'

... Upanishadic illumination is a matter of lightning flashes, not the steady light of the day. Hence the shortness of The Cat and Shakespeare; hence too its impact on us, which is akin to a cloudy day rent by lightning.21

Raja Rao's novels are popularly charged with being too philosophical — hardly anything more than bare metaphysical and moral treatises, lacking in human interest. Spearheading this type of sharp criticism against Raja Rao's fiction, Mulk Raj Anand states:

After the first novel, however, he becomes an anti-novel novelist, self-consciously using the philosophical essay as part of the bardic recital form. ... Raja Rao growingly defies the novel form and uses it to preach, thus seeking to revive the Yoga Vasistha method, with its pale cast of thought, obviously brooding on human destiny and exhorting men and women to seek personal salvation, through the Vedantic ideal.22
One may, like C.D. Narasimhaiah, register reservations in regard to "the considerable chunks of metaphysical disquisition scattered throughout the work," which, though meant to illumine the main theme, are not 'organic' to the action of the story. The novel may not lose anything if we were to cut out bits like the following conversation between Rama and Madeleine:

"Can you understand that all things merge, all thoughts and perceptions, in knowledge? It is in knowledge that you know a thing, not in seeing or hearing."

"Yes."

"That is India. Jnanam is India."

"But that is the place of the Guru — of Buddha?"

"Well, for me India is the Guru of the world, or She is not India. The Sages have no history, no biography — who knows anything about a Yajnyavalkya or a Bharadavja? Nobody. ... We know more of King Harsha than we do of Sankara. India has, I always repeat, no history. To integrate India into history — is like trying to marry Madeleine. It may be sincere, but it is not history. History, if anything, is the acceptance of human sincerity. But Truth transcends sincerity; Truth is in sincerity and in insincerity — beyond both. And that again is India."24

One may not approve of passages that do not arise from the theme 'inevitably' and 'inexorably' and can, therefore, be cut out without injury to the main action. But to condemn Raja Rao's works in totality and dismiss them as
philosophy and metaphysics "parading as fiction" would obviously be less than fair.

Another charge levelled against the form of Raja Rao's novels is that they have a sprawling episodic form and are loose in structure. But one wonders if the charge can be really substantiated. The novels are, no doubt, saturated with stories, fables and legends, many of which appear as digressions at times, but obviously the novels are not episodic in nature — not even The Serpent and the Rope — and they cannot be seriously charged with being deficient in unity and form. On the other hand, a close analysis would reveal a remarkable structural unity in his fictional works. One may not say of the digressions in his novels what Sterne said about them in a different context: "Digressions incontestably are the sunshine; — they are the life, the soul of reading! — Take them out of this book, for instance, — you might as well as take the book along with them; — one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; — he steps forth like a bridegroom, — bids All-hail; brings in variety and forbids the appetite to fail." But one may well say with Ramesh Srivastava: "... the digressive and progressive movements of these works are like the zigzag movements of
a river, now turning one way, now the other, gleefully moving forward to its destination and are certainly natural, aesthetically more pleasing than a straight man-made canal from a given point to the other."

David Mc Cutchion points out that in Raja Rao's fiction "all the central concerns of the Western novel are absent — social relations, psychological motivation, characterisation, judgement, a passion for the concrete." But those critics who miss the well-developed Western-type plots in his works and charge him with being oblivious of form and structure, seem to forget that Raja Rao is a great literary pioneer who has originated a refreshingly fresh approach to the art of novel-writing: "Taking the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and Puranas with their interminable tales as models in which there is an unending stream of episodes breathlessly narrated, Raja Rao has evolved a form by fusing in the novel some techniques of the epic."

When we are looking for the central concerns of the Western novel in Raja Rao's novels, we in fact, are on a wrong track, looking for something that does not exist there. It may well remind us of the Indian parable about a blind man looking for a black cat in a pitch-dark room on a dark night and that, too, when the cat is not there even!
Just like Raja Rao, Sudhin N. Ghose has also been influenced in his writings by the Indian mode of storytelling. His image as a protagonist of the ancient Indian tradition has been projected so well that Anita Desai mentions Ghose "as a pointer" in the quest for an Indian literary tradition: "... the only whiffs, portents, straws in the wind I can detect so far are Mirad Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, G.V. Desani's *All about H.Hatterr* and perhaps, Sudhin Ghose's curious fantastic tales."²⁹ Shyamala A. Narayan writes: "Raja Rao has himself said that his novels are constructed like the Sanskrit epics, with a series of *Upakathas* connected to the main narrative like pearls on a string. Though there is no record of Ghose saying so, his work is guided by the same structural principles."³⁰

In the Indian epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas* and many other pieces of sophisticated Sanskrit prose literature, there is a free mingling of the past and
the present as also of the Divine, the semi-divine and the not so divine. There the "Gods, angels, men and animals, plants and rocks are for ever changing places in a bewildering fashion." In line with this ancient classical tradition "Sudhin Ghose refuses to accept any strict demarcation between the natural and the supernatural, between the world of humans and animals." Priam, the bulldog, and Sisi-Maker, the porpoise, are more friendly and considerate than any number of human beings. Moreover, in Ghose "Dreams and illusions are treated as seriously as day-to-day life. For Ghose dreams and visions are as real, as important in their influence on the hero's life, as occurrences on the physical plane. One never really knows where reality ends and illusion begins; ... perhaps it is this which makes A.R. Srinivasa Iyengar dismiss his work as 'phantasy'. One can hardly blame a foreigner like David McCutchion for misunderstanding Ghose's work, when the Indian critic talks of 'Oriental quaintness'."

As discussed above, in the classical Sanskrit writings, digressions were a favourite literary device. The poet or the writer there "freely leaves the main thread of narration to relate a story occasioned by some comment, or by the questions of some characters who are listening to the narrative; sometimes these digressions take the form of
sthala-puranas, when the poet or the writer for that matter pauses to recount the legendary history of some place he has mentioned in the main story. One finds that Ghose often adopts this technique ... Long digressions in the style of the Puranic Upakathas hold up the main narrative in the novels of Ghose ... no Western concepts of plot construction hamper him in the complex interweaving of stories, proverbs, incidents and songs." And Gazelles Leaping is full of proverbs told by a variety of characters. In Cradle of the Clouds there is a digression about Yama and his Black Log, the efficacy of mantras and the Panditjee's learned explanation. And then, in the Puranic tradition, of which Ghose is highly conscious, we have here the history of the City of Calcutta as a sthala-purana. In The Vermilion Boat, too, in the pattern of the Puranas, one incident leads to another, with a large number of flashbacks, which sometimes tend to hold up the narrative and The Flame of the Forest contains the important Nahush-myth from the Mahabharata.

Ghose introduced the poetic tradition of India into the Indo-English novel. Like Raja Rao and G.V.Desani he makes use of Sanskrit hymns and Indian devotional songs. But unlike Raja Rao who sometimes appears to be consciously
interested in bringing Sanskrit into a novel written in English, Ghose does not generally quote the original Sanskrit. Shyamala A. Narayan observes: "The Sanskrit ranges from stanzas of Jayadeva and maxims of Bhartrihari to verses from the Sakuntala, the Mahabharata ... all are woven into his novels. And he does this ... through beautiful English translations." 

Sudhin Ghose's deep faith in Indian tradition as also the form and technique of his novels, thus, bring him closest to Raja Rao. Shyamala A. Narayan rightly remarks: "It is significant that Meenakshi Mukherjee criticises Ghose for 'a refusal to control his material'; she has the very same criticism to make of Raja Rao's work also. This seeming confusion in the structure of the novels of both these novelists is accounted for by the fact that they do not go by the Western models of plot construction."

If Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose turn to the ancient Sanskrit tradition for guidance and inspiration, Anand, in conformity with his anti-traditional approach to things, looks that way for defiance and revolt:

I learned of the taboo in Sanskrit literature that no contemporary themes should be treated, and of Kalidasa's protest against this kind of traditionalism. I found confirmation for the revolt against the ancient dictum in Tagore's Gora which gave me heart. And though my
Sanskrit-knowing uncles were directing me to rewrite stories from the Mahabharata. I chose, instead, to write a new Mahabharata, if ever I could get the energy, the skill and the patience necessary to write an epic novel of India.

There could thus be no question of Anand attempting any conscious blending of the Western and Oriental forms as Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose do. His penchant for didacticism is no doubt a trait typical of much ancient Hindu storytelling, but certainly Anand does not take his cue from the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesh or the Jatakas. It would be much more reasonable to attribute the origin of this didactic strain to Anand's reformist zeal wrought about by the Western influences at work around him. Anti-tradition tirades are a favourite subject with Anand but they are not always artistically assimilated, and coupled with moralizing fits, they often mar the structural unity of his works. Direct statements on the plight of women in Indian society and the need for change expressed by Colonel Mahindra in Gauri are glaring examples of it. In M.K. Naik's words:

His art, however, suffers when his criticism of the Indian tradition and his championship of modernism develop a strident note or lead to direct preaching and sentimental outpourings.
At such moments, he is no longer a creative artist but a partisan shrilly talking to a brief; no longer a humanist writer with a vision but a tearful humanitarian slobbering over the objects of his mawkish pity. Commitment is a double-edged weapon. Wielded with absolute mastery and perfect control, it can be a veritable Excalibur; but let the control slacken and the sword can rise and slay the slayer. Mulk Raj Anand is not the only writer whose career illustrates the truth of this unwritten law of letters.38

TECHNIQUE

III

Images and Imagery

Images and metaphors are Raja Rao's natural mode of expression. However, he shies away from ready-made images and with his profound vision and perfect mastery of language, goes ahead "to create a vivid and eloquent imagery illuminating a whole cultural segment."39 As an illustration we may cite the story of the poor Brahmin who cannot afford a ceremonial cremation of his dead child: "So he takes the child, wraps him in the white of his shoulder-cloth, and muttering some mantra goes into the water, and lets the little one float down. 'Float down, float down, little one,
and we could not even give you a shawl and a pyre. Son, we could do so little for your short existence...’ It rains on the Ganges, a gentle murmuring rain, creating little circles like some flowers, and there is not even a tear in his eyes, for who can weep? Why weep and for so many dead?’

Here in one brief, "astonishingly appropriate image, Raja Rao, a great master of his art, successfully accommodates two Indias — the vulgar and sublime". Narasimhaiah comments:

The novelist who reflects a realistic situation does offer the unfortunate father the necessary strength of the spirit when by a sure stroke of genius the father is made to witness, 'circles like flowers' where the child's body was let into the water — so much of learned philosophy, metaphysics, epic and legend about life, death and immortality is captured in that astonishingly appropriate image, 'circles like flowers' witnessed by the father 'without a tear in his eyes'. Both the Indias /the vulgar and sublime/ are there before us and there is no attempt to suppress the one and project the other...

Long racial memories of the Hindus come alive in brief words and phrases when Raja Rao, with a perfect combination of 'vision and expression', steps behind words into pictograph territory as in the following: 'Mother Ganga surging out to purify mankind;' or "Brahmins of the four shoulders," signifying thereby a vivid and eloquent imagery of pall-bearers. Raja Rao says of Govindan Nair:
"He must twist a thing into its essence and spread it out. So that milk becomes cow's precious liquid or water the aqua of Ganges."\(^{43}\) Sure the character here is made in the image of his author who is capable of giving new dimensions to such commonplace words as 'milk' and 'water' by associating them with significantly evocative words like the 'cow' and the 'Ganges'.

Then there is the 'stock-imagery' in Raja Rao's works. Benares, the Himalayas, the Ganges, Siva and Parvathi are the words that conjure up to a Hindu images full of meaning and significance. As images and imagery are the natural products of a writer's 'vision and value-pattern', the use of these stock images in Raja Rao reflects the novelist's deep faith in his racial tradition and appeals to our deep sense of "beauty, spirituality and happiness."\(^{44}\)

However, this same imagery is less colourful and plentiful in Anand than in Raja Rao — a difference which can be easily explained in terms of the individual vision and the choice of the subject matter in the two novelists: "Raja Rao's vision is primarily imaginative and poetic and it naturally seeks expression in symbolic modes; Anand's humanism is rooted in the soil and demands faithfulness to the realities of the situation."\(^{45}\) As 'perspective' and 'cast of vision' are 'the fount of style', imagery in
Raja Rao, the metaphysical philosopher, is sweet, poetic and pleasant, whereas, in step with the harsh realism of his writings and his attitude of indignant hostility to Hinduism, imagery in Anand is wild and weird.

It would require a Mulk Raj Anand to associate, and persistently associate, the Hindu pantheon of gods with such horrible imagery as appears in his writings novel after novel. Whether it is sunshine or the evening hour of sunset, any hour is good enough to heap criticism on their heads: "And, under the intense heat he felt that he was being punished by God for his crime. So he accepted the torture as a healing process, allowing the air to go through him like the saw of Yama's demons in hell, slowly tearing him into two." in Private Life of an Indian Prince there figures the unusual imagery: "The sun had gone down and the sky was luminous as though we were going towards the regions of hell, where the blood of victims in the temple of Kali on Siva's hill, and their shrieks, were shooting up to the heavens, for the pink and orange streaks of pain limned the horizon." Even the rainfall that would herald good fortune and prosperity to the agricultural society of India does not summon a pleasant image: "... the hosts of the rain god Indra were battling against the skeleton-like
demons of drought and defeating them."

Perhaps never before have the Hindu theories of reincarnation or transmigration or karma-phal been treated to such wild, sensational and horrible images as we come upon in Confessions of a Lover. The protagonist in the novel thinks of Professor Henry's sermon on reincarnation and this "almost mechanically compelled a dream of the law of Karma, with myself as the hero: the jelly of my body-soul seemed to move through horrible transformations. I was a worm, crawling around an eggshell. The worm became a snake. An eagle picked it up and flew across the Swat hills behind Peshawar, throwing it half-eaten into my mother's kitchen. She ate it almost like Kali devouring flesh..."

Later, in the same novel we hear of the hero conceiving a poem "as my plunge into the ocean of hell of Yama, where I was travelling on a little boat, struggling to keep afloat against the stormy waves, the demons, the snakes, the sea-lions and all, hoping I would cross the ocean."

Imagery in Anita Desai's novels, where it touches the past tradition, is wild and strange, if not horrible, as in the works of Mulk Raj Anand: "But now — Fate — the word dropped into our midst, burningly mnemonic, subtle as a soundless ice-cube, overwhelming as lava." Or again:
"Its atmosphere was more like that of an expensive nursing-home for convalescents. So quiet was it that the very clock in the library seemed to move its hands with deferential slowness, like a funeral priest gesturing with sticks of incense and bowls of Ganges water." Maya's childhood visit to the temple and her encounter with the priest leave a permanent negative impact on her life and mind. So, the lingam appears, in retrospect, to be "painted a bright vicious red, as though plunged in sacrificial blood" and the eyes of the priest are remembered as "pale, opaque, morbid.""53

Imagery in Manohar Malgonkar too, as in the other writers discussed above, is a reflection of his attitude towards the Hindu culture and religion: "So the hundred priests must have been there, chanting slokas and making a din like monsoon frogs..."55 Obviously the imagery here betrays Malgonkar's own prejudice as "it is not likely that the devout Jana, with the Gayatri continuously on his lips, would think of the recital of mantras in terms of frogs' croakings."56
Simile and Metaphor

Perhaps no single literary device in the Indo-English novel owes so much to Hindu myth and philosophy as the simile and the metaphor. The use of Hindu mythology especially is widespread in drawing comparisons or painting different emotions. In this particular field an Anand, a Desai or Malgonkar are in the same boat as a Raja Rao or Bhabani Bhattacharya.

In Raja Rao we read of Grandfather Kittanna who

"had the shine of a Dharmaraja" and in Narayan, "Rosie was standing where I had left her with her hip slightly out, her arm akimbo. She was like one of those pillar-carvings in the temple."

Anand talks of Colonel Mahindra drinking "the poison of these words almost as the God Siva was once known to have done, with the consequence that his throat became blue and his face black." For romantic portrayals, too, Anand turns to the great lover-gods of the Hindus — that is, Radha and Krishna. The metaphor sounds blasphemous but we have it here in the words of Prince Victor: "You know Gangi can be
very playful. She would deliberately play hide and seek with me before yielding up to my embrace. Or she would coyly avert her face to evade my kisses to draw me on. There were times when I believed that the sports of Krishna and Radha would last for ever.  

Similes and metaphors in Bhabani Bhattacharya are related to Hinduism in two different ways: sometimes Hinduism goes abegging in search of a simile or a metaphor and at other times it is the Hindu world itself that provides a rich bunch of these similes and metaphors to enliven and enrich his writings. To Bhashkar (Shadow from Ladak) the Hindu taboos are "a cocoon" that imprison and fetter their own creator. On another occasion in the same novel we have a deeply impressed Bhashkar admiring Rupa's figure "chiseled in the ample way of Hindu sculpture."  

In more difficult situations the similes and metaphors take on a more violent colouring too. In He Who Rides a Tiger, the shocked crowd of Hindu devotees listening to Kalo's disclosure in the temple is compared to "a serpent being prodded awake after its long winter sleep." The story of disclosure progresses and "the serpent now fully awake was swaying its hood and its fangs were charged with venom."
The physical beauty of the ill-starred Brahmin girl, Sudha (Music for Mohini), beggars description. The puzzled barber-woman in Behula, wanting to describe it, turns to the rich world of Hindu mythology and a befitting simile is at hand: "Fresh blown lotuses die of shame! Even I, a woman and an old one, find myself gaping with wonder at such beauty. The very image of the young goddess, Uma, when she waked Siva out of a trance of meditation!"65

If it is Uma, the paragon of beauty, that Bhabani Bhattacharya refers to, Ghose turns to Lakshmi, the goddess of bounty and prosperity: "... there were the regular rectangular fields of ripening paddy, golden as the girdle of the goddess Lakshmi."66

Abhaya (The Princes) misses his father keenly and feels that the capital without Hiroji was "like a temple without a deity."67 In A Bend in the Ganges, Hitler is compared to Lord Vishnu himself: "The war had come closer; the picture of the saviour with his short moustache and staring eyes came into sharper focus, became transformed into that of some alien god who had come to liberate the oppressed, an avatar of Vishnu."68

The Devil's wind is rich in the use of such similes and metaphors. The range of sources tapped is vast and wide indeed. Champa has a figure "like Apsara — heavenly."69
Nana Saheb's wife, Kashi, looks like the great seductress Menaka "that the gods sent down from heaven to make great saints break their vows of celibacy." Nana Saheb uses the expression "The God who rides a buffalo" — which means lama, the God of Death, to describe Dalhousie. Again, the Dalhousies of the Company, we are told, were worse than the propitiable moon-eaters Rahu and Ketu as the former "never gave up what they had swallowed. Frayings, fasting, mourning meant nothing to them." And the twin murderous English officers, Neill and Renaud, suggest the names of twin mythological moon-eaters, Ahi and Mahi. To the deeply devout Nana Saheb the emerald called Shrimani "glowered like the blazing eye on Shiva's forehead," and describing his life of exile in Nepal he writes: "Eliza and I were like some symbolic couple, like Rama and Sita during their exile, finding total fulfilment in one another ... This surely was nirvana, a state of being freed from the coils of life."

In the farcical mock-heroic narrative Too Long in the West Nalini is told that her eyes are "as clear as hindu philosophy." And in Bye Bye Black bird we have it as: "Dammit, I had real tears pouring down my cheeks like the Ganga and the Jumna together." Even in Voices in the City, that novel of disintegration, we have unexpectedly
a reference to Hindu philosophy: "Gita Devi appeared now to Amia as the base of all Dharma's actions, the spread lotus that bore the weight of the god absorbed in his meditation and the spinning out of his karma."

Nor would G.V. Desani's *All about Hatterr* lag far behind: "While Charlie was doing his bit, I stood still, unable either to see the lion or the audience, and absolutely unmoved, like the god Shiva, the Static, the same He, the meditating lord of the Hindu savants and saints."

Humour and Irony

Fun, humour and lighthearted gaiety is a rather scarce commodity in the Indo-English novel and it is interesting to see how much of even this thin fare is dependent on typical Hindu sources. R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and G.V. Desani are the most conspicuous names in this context.

R.K. Narayan's *The Financial Expert* abounds in flashes
of brilliant and lively humour. A large part of this delightful humour springs from Margayya's plans and preparations to get rich a quick way. His meeting with the temple priest, the latter's prescriptions, Margayya's hopes and fears and his forty days' Laxmi-puja — the entire story is extremely absorbing and laughter-provoking. Just one instance of the writer's impish treatment of the subject is cited below.

One day the priest tells Margayya that the Goddess Sarswathi and the Goddess Laxmi were both fighting to lend him patronage and take him under their wings: "Margayya felt immensely powerful and important. He had never known that anybody cared for him... and now to think that two goddesses were fighting to confer their favours on him! He lifted his eyes, glanced at the brilliant stars in Heaven as if there, between the luminous walls, he would get a glimpse of the crowned Goddesses tearing at each other." 79

It is generally believed that "humour is a gift that flourishes in a native tongue but shrivels up with the touch of a foreign language." 80 But this is not so with Narayan. It is wonderful to see how pure comedy comes alive when Narayan touches the pages of sacred Mythology in Mr. Sampath.
The Sunrise Productions are shooting a picture on the Burning of the Kama. It gives Narayan a good chance to create humour at the expense of the so-called Shiva in the picture: "The visitors spread themselves around, and some said, pointing at a strong paunchy man: 'This is Shiva'. The paunchy man nodded agreeably as if godhead were conferred on him that instant." Later, when there is some quarrel over the issue of payment, we have a touch of the real burlesque:

'Why should you ask for extra pay, Mister? You must not,' said Sohan Lal.

'Why not? I'm labouring for it!' cried Shiva passionately. 'And I am entitled to it.'

'It is unthinkable!' cried Sampath and Sonu in one voice.

'Not unthinkable in her case, I suppose?' Shiva cried, pointing at Parvathi, sitting on her chair and fanning herself. 'Aren't you giving her five thousand extra? Do you think I don't know all that?' He came towards the producers menacingly...

'Give me my salary; I will go' said Shiva, descending from Kailas defiantly.

In The Vendor of Sweets, Jagan is indignant when he hears of Mali's plans to go to America to learn the art of storytelling: "Going there to learn storytelling! He should rather go to a village granny. ... Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his Ramayana?"
he asks with pugnacity. And to crown it all, there is this bit of conversation between Nataraj and the taxidermist Vasu who treats Lord Vishnu not as the Sustainer and Supporter of the universe, but as a mere younger brother, if not worse:

'You have no doubt excelled in giving it the right look, but, poor thing, it's dead. Don't you see that it is a garuda?'

'What if it is?'

'Don't you realize that it's sacred? That it's the messenger of God Vishnu?'

'I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet now and then.'

Although a very serious writer, Bhabani Bhattacharya is at the same time endowed with a rich sense of humour. In Music for Mohini Old Mother lashes out furiously at the parties that rejected Mohini as a match in marriage on lame grounds. She compares them to the tom cat who became an ascetic when he was too old and crippled to run after rats:

Fish he won't eat, nor meat, rid of greed and wed to religion,

Rosary on neck and begging bowl on paw, he makes a pilgrimage to Sri Brindavan!

Mohini's sense of humour does not desert her even
when she becomes the Lady of the Big House. She is caught in an awkward situation when the mother in the Big House wants her to get her nostril bored so that she can wear a precious diamond stud on it. Mohini is distressed. She wants to avoid it all but without an open revolt. She then thinks of a humorous but a typically Hindu way out: "You see, Mother," she spoke with quick invention, 'this nose is dedicated to Kali. As a child I used to catch cold too often and had breathing trouble, so Old Mother vowed away my nose to the goddess to win her protection. This nose in all my life may never be decked. Pity. Such a beautiful stone."66 The stroke of wit not only silences Jayadev's mother but also wins Mohini her approval and admiration.

Epics bring much-needed flash of humour to the 'novel of ideas' that Shadow from Ladakh is. The rain-drenched Sumita needs a change of clothes. But she has fractured her foot and is unable to move about freely. So Bhashkar comes to her with arms full of clothes:

"How could I know what you'd need? So I've brought you these." He indicated the white pile. 'You know the Ramayana story? Rama lay wounded on the battlefield, and Hanuman, the great monkey, was delegated to fetch certain herbs from a mountain where they grew. He couldn't recognise the right herbs; so he pulled up the mountain and carried it on his back to Rama. And now, this great monkey here...'87
The allusion is apt and amusing; only it was not Rama but his younger brother Lakshmana that lay wounded in the battlefield and required the herbal medicine to save his life. Bhashkar is a 'twelve-year-in-America man' indeed!

*So Many Hungers* is a novel full of deep pathos. A light note in a serious situation, however, is struck with the help of a mythological figure. Rahoul shares his wife's fear that she might die in childbirth: "He saw the pupils of her eyes dilate, stained with deepening dread, as though Yama had tramped out of the night and stood at her bedside, in his hand the soul-holding tube into which he slipped life-sparks as he collected them, bits of phosphorescence." It is interesting to see how Rahoul, a scientist himself, imagines Yama, the god of death, approaching his job and handling it in the outfit of a scientist and disposing it of like one too.

Bhabani Bhattacharya makes a telling use of irony in his writings. In *He Who Rides a Tiger* the heartless magistrate who asks Kalo at the trial why he should live at all is among the earliest of devout worshippers at the fake temple to touch Kalo's feet and implore his blessings. Another striking instance of irony is when grateful Viswanath, himself a blacksmith, tells Mangal
Adhikari/ Kalo, the blacksmith, disguised as a Brahmin:\n"So long as there are true-hearted Brahmins like you..."

Indeed in the bulk of the novel we have an undercurrent of irony running through the people's expression of faith in Kalo's Brahminism and the honour they shower on him:

Looking at him, the visitors knew why the god had favoured this Brahmin... This man, big and rough-built, had the rare gift of personality. He had strength. He had poise. He would uphold the temple and all it stood for. Those large fists of his, now humbly folded, could be aggressive, could defend. He was the man to help stem the tide of scepticism and irreligion which was rising everywhere. The god had chosen well.90

All about H. Hattert bubbles with fun and laughter throughout. Written in mock-heroic vein, the novel is saturated with humour, satire, digs and irony. Religion and transcendentalism, sages and seers, men and women, nothing is beyond the brush of this humorous painter, G.V. Desani. To cite just two examples:

According to the highest Oriental tradition, which I, and my disciples, humbly follow, all moral instruction should be given away to humanity free of any charge. Nevertheless, lips, however rosy, must be fed. It is a hard winter when wolf eats wolf. It is easier to shave an egg than to make a living as a teacher of ethico-moral messages, these days, least to say.91

And

Further, let me inform you, the modest Hindu lady is not intimate or demonstrative with her
husband in a gathering of people at all. She is not demonstrative in any circumstance unless it is on an occasion of her spouse's funeral.92

LANGUAGE

VI

Most of the Indo-English novelists have the same perfect command over the English language as the sophisticated native speakers of it. Raja Rao thinks that "English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up."93 R.K. Narayan, when questioned by William Walsh if he found it any strain to write in English, replied, "Until you mentioned another tongue I never had any idea that I was writing in another tongue. ... I am particularly fond of the language. I was never aware that I was using a different, a foreign language when I wrote in English, because it came to me very easily."94

Anand's comment on the Indian writing in English is: "It was the only language that came to hand in a difficult transitional period."95 According to his own confession, Bhabani Bhattacharya has "loved writing in English."96 And
writers like Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar and Santha Rama Rau write precise and transparent English. The problem of the Indian writer in English, thus, is not that of expressing himself in English. He has sufficient mastery over the language for the purpose. If Raja Rao then says in his foreword to Kanthapura that "the telling has not been easy" and Bhabani Bhattacharya terms the language-problem before an Indo-English novelist a "challenge", reference is to the peculiar problem of conveying "in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own." To use Bhabani Bhattacharya's expression, it is the problem of "expressing Indian life in the idiom of an alien language." Hence the need for new innovations in the language. To quote Raja Rao again:

We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore, has to be dialect, which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

The problem before the Indo-English novelist, thus, is to infuse the tone and tempo of the Indian, mainly the Hindu, life into an English expression: "Where the sensibility is different, the expression unless also different
from the English-English, the experience itself does not come through."  

The lead in the field once again goes to Raja Rao whose works have become 'the touchstone' for Indo-English creative writing. In C.L. Narasimhaiah's words: "While Raja Rao recaptures the magnificent mythical imagination of Indian antiquity successively in the three novels and short stories he has written to date he has at the same time, to use T.S. Eliot's words, 'altered' the 'expression' to accommodate a distinct, profoundly Indian 'sensibility'."  

One of the numerous devices employed by Raja Rao to adapt the English language to the Indian emotional makeup and sensibility is to transform it into Sanskritic English as it were. C. Nagarajan says: "Raja Rao's aim is to create a style which will reflect the rhythms and sensibilities of the Indian psyche, and since it is in Sanskrit that the Indian [a word very often interchangeable with the Hindu] mind has found its most consummate linguistic expression, he has tried to adapt his English style to the movement of a Sanskrit sentence."  

It is a difficult task that Raja Rao addresses himself to. Trying to infuse the rhythm of Sanskrit in English is not easy as one is an analytic language while
the other is a synthetic one. Yet we find that the writer has successfully "embedded" his English in Sanskrit as it were. Narasimhaiah's tribute to Raja Rao's achievement is: "Here is a major manifestation of the possibilities of a foreign language in the hands of a master, who, though not born to it, has acquired a rare inwardness which effects its own transformation as the caterpillar transforms itself into a butterfly."

The Serpent and the Rope is perhaps the writer's most conspicuous attempt at experimentation in language. The style of the novel is loaded with quotations, words and phrases from Sanskrit — in conformity with the intellectual, culture and philosophical ideas of the philosophical hero. Ramaswamy loves Sankra and his Nirvana Astaka and zestfully rolls Sanskrit verses off his tongue. The influence of Sanskrit, however, does not end with these direct quotes only. Raja Rao evolves a Sanskritic English having the richness and variety of the rhythms of Sanskrit. According to M.K. Naik here the writer is trying

to forge an English prose style based on an adaptation of ... Sanskrit rhythm to the needs of a narrative of modern life. Consider the following passage:
Love is ever so young, so elevating — like the flying buttresses of Notre-Dame, pure, leaping, coloured by the stained-glass windows of the apse. I could love, yes, I could. I was in love, yes, I loved. I knew love now, I spoke Savithri. Round as the rose of Notre-Dame was love. Colourful and violet as the rosace was love ... Love demands nothing, it says nothing, it knows nothing; it lives for itself, like the Seine does, for whom the buildings rising on either side and the parks and the Renault factory farther downstream make no difference. Who can take away love, who give it, who receive? I could not even say that I loved Savithri. It is just like saying 'I love myself' or 'Love loves Love.'

The swift — almost Mantric — tempo of the passage, the emphatically un-English syntax of 'Round as the rose of Notre-Dame was love', the exploitation of the music of the word 'love' by constant repetition of it, and the piling up of qualifying epithets in 'pure, leaping, coloured by the stained-glass windows' illustrate some of the features of this experiment in style.

As the theme of Illusion and Reality in the novel is a typical Hindu theme, in his language Raja Rao tries to attain the dignity and precision of the Sanskrit language. And his poetic prose with its lilt and rhythm of Sanskrit fully meets his demands, proving a wonderful medium for the communication of the author's thoughts and feelings, beliefs and convictions. Harish Raizada's summary assessment of Raja Rao's experiment in style in the novel is:

The style is marked by high seriousness befitting the Vedantic theme treated by the author. The quotations from Sanskrit, Kannada, Hindi and French verses are sprinkled here and there. The syntax and
accent of the English language are changed to lend it the beat and rhythms and the incantatory effect of the Sanskrit language. Aphorisms, paradoxes, clever inversions, and rhetorical expressions are very common in the novel as in the Vedic scriptures. To an alien critic like David McCutchion who is not familiar with the style in the Vedic texts, they might appear pretentious or irritating ('we often suspect Rama is in love with his own cleverness'), yet they are used to give 'the effect of epic language' and rouse 'the mind to a heightened state of participation' in the metaphysical reflections.106

The Cat and Shakespeare continues Raja Rao's process of experimentation with language and style. Here the writer's prose-style has the sound and structure of Sanskrit Poetics. In fact, one can understand the book in the right perspective only if one has first a true appreciation of the term Kavya in Sanskrit Poetics. Following the tradition of the Sanskrit Poetics, the author uses various images, myths and symbols and also resorts to a language that makes no distinction between prose and verse. Commenting on the ancient classical nature of the novel, Atma Ram Sharma remarks: "If the reader does not keep in mind the characteristics of Sanskrit 'kavya', he is at times puzzled. He shares the difficulty experienced by Ramakrishna Pai: 'I never could understand all that he meant. He always seemed to be pulling my leg'."107

Comrade Kirillov, which too rambles incessantly in the Pauranic style, abounds in quotations from Sanskrit and
is full of references to the myths and traditions of India. Some sentences have a "nice alliterative lilt and mantric quality." Then there is a frequent use of aphorisms and cryptograms in the novel in the fashion of Sanskrit literature.

Raja Rao thus is "as experimental with the language as with the form of his fiction." He has carried out original experiments with the English language, evolving "a new idiom by introducing the subtle tonal values and syntactical devices of Sanskrit into English." This most creative user of the English language among Indo-English novelists is also capable of making a whole culture come to life in one brief sentence. As Narasimhaiah puts it:

Consider that ill-formulated 'I go and come' smiles Shantha from the wall', because of the difficulty of finding the adequate English equivalent for the Indian gesture at parting: 'Goodbye', 'au revoir', 'so long' will not evoke the same sentiment or response. In its clumsiness ours can still evoke very fine sentiment, a widely shared superstition which suggests return, not parting for ever. And the rest of the sentence, 'Shantha smiles from the wall' intimates her shyness — 'she is four months carrying' — and her quiet regard for the husband. A whole culture comes to life in this and the next sentence, 'she, as it were, bows to me behind her back,' a contrast to the implicit alternative, 'kissing goodbye' in public.
Raja Rao thus fully justifies what Anthony Burgess in *The Novel Now* says: "We ought never to assume that the use of English implies an acceptance of British values or even British semantics."\(^{112}\)

Paying his tribute to Raja Rao, Iyengar says:
"Roughly contemporary with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao makes with them a remarkable triad, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist or in his enchanting prose style."\(^{113}\)

Referring to Raja Rao’s invention of a remarkable mode of expression, V.Y. Kantak writes: "Raja Rao’s language seems to spring from the Indian scene, the Indian manner of gesture and speech, absorbs it, and yet suffers no distortion. Word, phrase or sentence structure, the shifts and the modulations—all grow from that root. And it is English, chaste English, not borrowed and applied but taking the shape of the new material."\(^{114}\)

Though Manohar Malgonkar thinks that an Indian writer in English is "a bit of a fake, as though going about with a false caste-mark,"\(^{115}\) Narayan is perfectly his natural self when using the language. In his own way Narayan has "admirably succeeded in employing the English language as an appropriate medium of expressing his vision of life, his
typically Indian sensibility."¹¹⁶

Narayan's language has an unmistakable flavour of Indian speech about it. It is "a Bharat brand of English"¹¹⁷ eminently suited to Indian conditions. It enables Narayan to depict the Hindu India by giving "authentic description of its men and manners, its deep-rooted traditions, and its age-old customs," an India where "a fast heralds rain, a platitude passes for profundity and a fake Swami can summon the countrywide audience."¹¹⁸

Narayan in practice seems to be agreeing with what Raja Rao has suggested in the Foreword to Kanthapura: we should not write like the English or Americans. Talking about the Indian English in "Toasted English", Narayan writes:

English must adopt the complexion of our life and assimilate its idiom. I am not suggesting here a mongrelisation of the language. I am not recommending that we should go back to the days when we heard, particularly in the railways, 'Wer U goin, man?' Bharat English will respect the rules of law and maintain the dignity of grammar, but still have a Swadeshi stamp about it unmistakably, like the Madras handloom check shirt or the Thirupathi doll.¹¹⁹

Discussing the problem of an Indian writing in English, N.N. Kaul remarks: "The tone, manner, turn of phrase and allusions of the language in which they are spoken can hardly be transformed into the reality of another tongue."¹²⁰ Most
of the Indo-Anglian writers do not succeed in translating the racy idiom of the ordinary Indian into effective English. It is only a Narayan who has succeeded in using "the English language much as we used to wear dhotis manufactured in Lancashire."\textsuperscript{121}

Images of sordidness and spiritual disintegration abound in the novels of Anita Desai. But one of the most interesting features of her work is that "her characters in moments of crisis or bafflement recite or remember certain slokas from the Bhagavada Gita. In Cry, the Peacock, Gautama and Maya discuss the philosophical problems of attachment and detachment... Monisha in Voices in the City reads from the Gita — 'my book' she calls it — the words of the Lord to Arjuna. The verses quoted may be said to convey the theme of the novel."\textsuperscript{122}

In Malgonkar's The Princes, Hiroji quotes from the Gita in the critical final moments of his life. But these translated verses from the Gita do not have the "electric effect"\textsuperscript{123} they might have been meant to have. In fact, they sound more like a "dramatic prop" than an "organic outcrop of strong, core conceptions."\textsuperscript{124} Malgonkar fails to bring the ethos alive even through these sacred quotes from the Hindu scriptures by the Begwad King.
Writers like Raja Rao have consciously tried to evolve new forms and idioms suited to the Indian experience and background, but others, like Malgonkar, are more given to tradition and acceptability in the matter. They are content to exploit the form and language they have derived from the Western novels and put these to creative uses. But their prose, though lucid and transparent, lacks the luminous heights of Raja Rao and "the levels of consciousness" they convey are not so deep.

The language of Bhabani Bhattacharya could not remain untouched by the all-pervading Hindu note in his writings. The most glaring effect of it is on the vocabulary of his novels. Perhaps to keep intact the exact tone and shade of the culture depicted, he has incorporated in his writings a large number of Hindi words such as 'Bhagwan', 'Mantras', 'Puja', 'Tulsi', 'Puranas', 'Yoga' or 'Sati'. The writer has sometimes even brought in quite a few Sanskrit words and phrases like 'Om', 'Shanti-Shanti-Shanti' or 'Satyam,Sivam, Sundram'. Whatever the intent of the writer in introducing the Hindi or Sanskrit words and phrases, the effect is not a happy one. Rather, too liberal a sprinkling of Hindi or Sanskrit words in the course of an English novel sounds unnatural, if not jarring, even to the Indian ear and destroys, rather than enhances, the effect of verisimilitude.
The Indo-English novel, thus, though a part of the Western tradition of novel-writing, is yet different in some ways. It has its peculiarities both in subject and style. To be a successful Indian novel in English, it has to make the impact of the Hindu culture felt and the writer may bring about the effect through the thought-content as well as the form of the novel. Mrs. R.P. Jhabvala states:

The Indian novel cannot become a distinctive genre and its creators cannot be really true to their basic artistic instincts until they produce novels which would be bits of prose, poetry, anecdotes, lots of philosophizing and musing, an oblique kind of wit, and an ultimate self-surrender, a sinking back into formlessness, into eternity ... something like Indian Music.125

One may not fully agree with Mrs. Jhabvala but sure there is weight in what M.K. Naik says: "... fact remains that the techniques of the Indian writer in English must perforce differ, whether in patently obvious, or in subtle ways, from those employed by Western writers, just as his essentially Indian ethos must colour everything he writes, when he is not merely playing the sedulous ape to his Western masters but actually lives and acts as a kind of literary Adam in a new world of writing."126
References and Notes

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4 "In Defence of Indian Writing in English," p.6.

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59 *Gauri*, p. 163.
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