CONCLUSION

The impact of Hinduism on the Indo-English novel has been a rewarding study, both interesting and instructive for a student of literature. Research in the field has led to some clear and convincing conclusions which, in brief, may be summed up as follows.

Hinduism has deeply influenced the writings of Indo-English novelists in more ways than one. Though most of these writers have been exposed to alien influences for a major part of their life, they have retained their essentially Indian identity and Hinduism, in one form or the other, is predominant in their writings. For love or hatred, praise or criticism, out of nostalgia or frustration, these writers turn to Hinduism, and the Hindu themes — social, moral or spiritual, dominate their novels in different colours, shapes and forms.

Castigation of the Hindu caste division is a central theme in many Indo-English novels of the period under study. Among those who have taken up cudgels against this social evil are Bhabani Bhattacharya and Mulk Raj Anand. He Who Rides a Tiger effectively brings out the gross
injustice, cruelty, hypocrisy and the resultant bitterness spelled out by the existing system through the tale of Kalo and his folk as also the story of Bitem's sister Purnima. The novel is nothing if not a story of revolt and revenge against the pseudo-religion of the Hindus presented in a dramatic and forceful way. But this tension between the "pure Hindus" and the so-called untouchables is not treated with equally good literary results in Mulk Raj Anand's The Road. The bare-as-bone, sketchy and even lustreless handling of the theme here leaves much to be desired and compares poorly with the writer's own earlier work on the subject — Untouchable. Another novel where the theme of caste-consciousness runs like an undercurrent is Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope. It has even been suggested that Rama's Brahmanic egoism is the unqualified attitude of the book. One distinguishing feature of the book, however, is that the theme here moves on a philosophical and emotional plane rather than on a social, or even a formally religious one.

The joint family system is another typical Hindu institution touched upon in the books under discussion. Novels have been written on the joint family motif, with
writers finding it interesting to dwell on the beauty and burden of this aspect of the Hindu life. The sweet sustaining strength of the joint family system forms the subjectmatter of Music for Mohini whereas Malgonkar, treating the story of the scions of a 'Big House' in A Bend in the Ganges, finds his material in the excitement of clash temperaments involved in the system. Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve is a fine and convincing portrayal of this familiar Indian institution that has survived the onslaughts of various political and cultural invasions as also many social, economic and psychological strains. The sweet strength of family-ties is an important theme in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope too, but it is even more significant in the writings of R.K.Narayan. The most notable example of this can be found in The Financial Expert where Margayya and his brother, though for most part 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.

In this age of science and technology, there is still a palpable section of Hindu society that hopelessly clings to the ancient faith in stars, horoscopes and the writing on the brow. Maya, the young heroine of Cry, the Peacock, is haunted by the prophecy of the priest in the temple.
Over the whole narrative hovers an oppressive sense of fatality. 'Fate' is a word of great thematic significance in novels like Nectar in a Sieve, So Many Hungers and All about Hatterr too. It almost appears as a character in these 'Hindu' novels, though not with the force and intensity that it assumes in a novel by Hardy. We do not witness here the struggle of mankind with Destiny on the grand scale of the Hardy-world, but Fate remains here a malignant invisible 'presence' all right.

The Hindus are pacifists and nonviolence is a basic tenet of the Hindu philosophy. Bhabani Bhattacharya upholds this creed of nonviolence with undivided loyalty in Shadow from Ladakh. But as the protagonist Satyajit is a rather weak character, the treatment of the theme is not sufficiently compelling.

The argument is painstakingly taken up at some serious length in B.Rajan's The Dark Lancer. The writer, in the course of the novel, by showing the triumph of the spirit of nonviolence, indicates his preferences and shows clearly which way his leanings lie. But it does not mean that his commitment to the cause is total and absolute. There are points in the novel that suggest that his support to the cause is qualified.
The theme is taken up in the typical Narayanesque style — that is, without violent passions, in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Sriram is there in the Gandhian camp not so much out of loyalty to the principle of nonviolence or even out of loyalty to the architect of that principle, but out of a sense of loyalty to his prospective bride, Bharati.

In *A Bend in the Ganges*, Malgonkar, probing the ideology of nonviolence, unmistakably throws his weight on the side of Debi Dayal and his group of young freedom-fighters who believe: "The creed of nonviolence is a naked insult to the land of Shivaji and Akbar and Ranjit." At the very outset, the dice is heavily loaded against the creed of nonviolence and it has rightly pointed out that the writer has allowed himself to be swayed too much by his personal prejudices and has not given the theme a free and fair chance to develop.

There is a refreshingly new look at the subject in Sudhin N. Ghose's *And Gazelles Leaping*, though here, as in *So Many Hungers*, it is only a secondary theme.

Asceticism, self-control and their extreme form — celibacy are an important ideal in the Hindu set of values.
but they could hardly be expected to form a popular subject matter for a novel. To Bhabani Bhattacharya goes the distinction of making them the central subject in his novel *Shadow from Ladakh*. Life of asceticism and continence versus life of self-gratification and indulgence is the theme at the heart of the novel and in this spiritual conflict spread over a major portion of the book, the anti-ascetic note of the writer is only too loud throughout. The writer's presentation of the theme leaves much to be desired. Bhabani Bhattacharya seems to lack a clear vision of the two different planes of existence — the higher and the lower, the spiritual and the sensuous. He starts by eulogizing one but ends up by upholding the other! He seems to confuse the ideal with the common, the exceptional with the average. The novel seems to start with a bang and end in a whimper. It all seems to be a story of much ado about nothing. No wonder the writer has been described as a novelist with "flattened sensibility."²

From asceticism to detachment is but one step forward in the 'Pilgrim's Progress' and characters in the Indo-English novel often pause to think over, discuss and comment on this milestone in the spiritual journey onwards. It is surprising to see how often Indo-English novelists
have turned to the source of this vital philosophical ideal — the Bhagavada Gita. Writers as far apart in their approach as Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand refer to the Book alike and interestingly enough, the younger generation writers quote at least as profusely from the Gita as the old generation ones did. The main motif in these allusions is that of detachment or non-attachment — the central philosophy of the Book Divine.

In B.Rajan's The Dark Lancer, Krishanan, the protagonist, wades his way to calm and serenity — synonyms for detachment we may say — through a flood of tears. Gautama's long expositions of the philosophy of detachment in Cry, the Peacock are not purely ornamental. They are of great functional value as they have direct relevance to the action of the story. Gautama's detachment is one of the reasons for Maya's decision to kill her husband — the result of a dreadful logic but in harmony with the mad world of her psyche. Anita Desai carries over this philosophical world of attachment and detachment to her next novel Voices in the City too. Nirode tries to mould his life on the principle of a detached acceptance of life, though with very poor results.

That does not exhaust the list of our ideal-seekers
in the field. In Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*, it is 'detachment', 'detachment' all the way through. The Gita's keyword 'detachment' is the most important single word in the book and it forms the very basis of the whole story, though it is a most exploited word and treated more as a vulgar coward's refuge by Sindi than as a symbol of great moral strength. Babu, June and the child in her womb have to die and Sindi himself has to traverse a long and painful way before he realizes the great truth about himself and about detachment.

Jagan in R.K.Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* is another character trying to mould himself on the lines of the detached, ideal man of the Gita. Looked at from Nayantara Sahgal's viewpoint, however, "Non-attachment cannot be the aim of everyman at every phase of life — it is only the final stage in the development of a man." So the narrator in *A Time to be Happy* is an elderly man who comes close to the ideal of detachment, while the young hero Sanad Shivpal is shown to be very much involved with emotions and worldly ties.

But perhaps the Brahminical spiritual vision — a metaphysical search for the Ultimate in life — is the most typical Hindu theme taken up in these novels. Though he was
anticipated in these metaphysical searchings by Sudhin Ghose, whose tetralogy has been described as "a twentieth century Pilgrim's Progress," the credit for placing this transcendental theme on the map of world literature goes to Baja Rao. 'A metaphysical question and a metaphysical solution' is a good summing up of The Serpent and the Rope which is nothing but a thesis on Hinduism. And where this novel is a metaphysical contemplation on life as experienced by a sensitive Hindu intellectual, Rama, and expressed in Advaitic terms of the serpent and the rope, central symbols for Illusion and Reality respectively, The Cat and Shakespeare is a metaphysical comedy, "a thunderous affirmation of life in Hindu terms where life is the merging of the self into the self, the paradoxical victory through surrender." Devoid of any touch of sympathy, Aulck Raj Anand's presentation of the theme becomes crude, at places even downright vulgar. His handling of the subject is in sharp contrast to Raja Rao's, whose attitude towards it verges on crazy admiration. G.V. Desani, however, approaches this highly subtle and solemn subject in his usual mock-heroic style and under his perverse manner he makes Natterr utter "the same metaphysical conundrums as Ramaswamy."
We have seen how the writers of the Indo-English novel have drawn extensively on the inexhaustible storehouse of Hindu lore and life. They have explored, critically analyzed and coherently presented the conflicts and clashes, the howls of rage, the bitter cries of frustration, and the serenely calm messages of sustaining truth that characterize Hindu society and Hinduism today.

The utter dependence of these novels on characteristic Hindu themes is at once the strength and weakness of these writings. When it brings to these literary creations the strength of verisimilitude, of firsthand knowledge and conviction, it sometimes tends to make the subject matter too trite and commonplace. Familiarity breeds contempt and quite often these novels run the risk of looking too familiar, even stale. They may sometimes, no doubt, claim credit for bringing the sublime and the selected to the man in the street, but they may also sometimes justifiably invite the charge of taking the most ordinary, even vulgar, to the pages of what could have been first-rate literature.

As the Indo-English novel deals in the main with life in Hindu society, naturally it is Hindu characters that mostly fill the canvas here. The story or the plot mostly revolves round them and their beliefs and convictions. We
meet here the "true Hindus" — sensitive intelligent souls who have rejected the husk but owe deep allegiance to the kernel of their ancient religion. In sharp contrast to them are the "pure Hindus" who mistake the trappings for the essence. They swear by Hinduism and meticulously observe the rites and rituals enjoined upon by this religion but refute the essence of Hinduism in live practice. Then there is still another class of people that may be termed "Hindus" neither in outward demeanour nor in mental makeup but in name only.

The characters in the Indo-English novel may be classified in still another way. We meet here the Westernized nonconformists, the "Harrow-on-the-Hooghly" types who are highly diluted, if not adulterated, specimens of Hinduism. Then there are the violent iconoclasts who want to shatter everything around them. Still another category is that of "mature compromisers" who want to retain much that is glorious and grand in India's past but do not hesitate to shake off the dead wood of India's past.

Staunch Hindus, the orthodox types, ascetics or holy men who have finally renounced the world and donned the symbolic saffron garb are the other characters who find a due representation in the Indo-English novel, which is
but a replica of the Indian, mainly Hindu, life.

In this rich pattern we find the symbolic characters or the allegorical figures. There are then the hypocritical as also the highly disciplined men; the mystical and spiritualized personalities who have found in Hinduism the sheet-anchor of their life as also those who suffer from an utter lack of moorings. The Hindu world reflected in the Indo-English fiction, thus, provides a good chance for a lover and critic of Hinduism to scan and review the glory as well as the degradation of this ancient religion. However, one cannot help wishing that the characters here were less of stock-figures and more of individuals. That would give a new dimension to the already growing, maturing art of characterization in these novels.

There are recurring allusions to Hindu myths and symbols in Raja Rao and in many other writers who are not so well conversant with the Hindu lore. They add much to the literary worth of these novels, sometimes making them masterpieces in their own right. But at the same time it cannot be denied that they make an obscure book still more obscure. They demand much mental exercise from the reader and make heavy claims on his perceptive powers.

Allusions to characters from the Ramayana and the
Mahabharata are frequent in Indo-English novels and women characters there often resemble Sita, Savithri or Shakuntala in their suffering and forbearance. Mulk Raj Anand, however, with his progressive attitude, refuses to accept the old ideals of patient suffering and dumb tolerance and in Gauri firmly rejects the old ideal represented in the Sita-myth. He would have his heroine challenge all wrongs, hold her head high in dignity and freedom and walk out of her conservative stifling world, never caring to cast a wistful, longing look behind.

Raji Narasimhan is of the conviction that a major work in Indo-English fiction cannot be attempted only on the basis of a conventional realistic approach. According to her that "approach gains credence only when the mystic element of the sensibility is alive... the creative task is to go farther than allowing the senses and faculties to be influenced by new philosophies. It has to relate and combine the new with the already present, to work out a new compound — it is indeed the old, old concept of synthesis that the present situation points up to." It is exactly such a happy synthesis that we come upon in Narayan's masterpiece The Man-eater of Malgudi, a novel moulded on the pattern of 'a tale from the Puranas.'
Another writer to weave and closely integrate the Hindu myths and symbols into the very texture of his writings is Sudhin N. Ghose, like Raja Rao, sometimes he makes them the base of his writings and sometimes he employs them as mere digressions in his narratives. Then there are important Indo-English novelists who employ the Hindu myths and symbols only incidentally—just to illuminate certain situations or characters. Round the Hindu myths we thus find woven some of the most touching pages of "haunting beauty" in the Indo-English novel. Even the distancing caused by English does not water down the note of intimacy in these writings.

When it comes to the shaping of the literary genius of the Indo-English novelists, we find that Hinduism is the most formative single influence in many a case. But happily, when these writers are ardent admirers of Hinduism, their approach to the Hindu religion and philosophy is broad and wide in its sweep. It is equally deep. Products of a democratic, rational setup, they do not let the hypocrisies and feudal tendencies of the Hindu religion go unchallenged. Even when they find their muse most responsive to the Hindu spiritual notes and their attitude towards Hinduism is one of strong approval, even deep reverence, they have a word of condemnation for the
demagogues who exploit traditionalism.

The illustrious R.K. Narayan is a non-committal writer. He conveys no overwhelming moral convictions in his writings. He is not passionately concerned with any spiritual or moral ideal and he does not speak from the pulpit of spiritual contemplation as Raja Rao does. Still, his adherence to the great Indian traditions is reflected in the world-view he expresses through his novels. But as Narayan’s genius is essentially comedic, even the great Hindu ideal of "Virakata" (a detached man) or "Sthitaprajna" (a person in a state of perfect balance or poise) is viewed by Narayan in terms of comedy.

At the polar end of the "literary orientalism" of writers like Raja Rao, Ghose and Narayan are the writers of harshly realistic fiction like Mulk Raj Anand. They are the iconoclasts who castigate the accepted Hindu code of values in most uncompromising terms and criticise almost all that Hindu religion and Hindu philosophy stand for. In writers like Anita Desai we come upon a veiled as well as direct criticism of Hindu society and religion. These novelists obviously do not have any love for the Indian culture and the past for them is nothing better than a "faded memory" only.
The Indo-English novelists have thus evolved a genre of literature whose 'soul' and sensibility is truly Indian, even Hindu, in colour and thought. But they have not stopped at that. They have evolved a 'body', a form, an expression and an imagery to clothe this Hindu sensibility.

The most important innovation in the style part is perhaps related to the form of the novel. Writers like Raja Rao and Sudhin N.Ghose have adapted this Western genre of literature to the ancient Sanskrit method of Pauranic stories. Raja Rao's fiction especially is in conformity with his belief that "the Indian novel can only be epic in form and metaphysical in nature." 12

Sanskrit, the great treasure-house of Hindu values and way of life, has left its mark not only on the form and technique of the Indo-English novel, but also on its language and idiom. The problem before the Indo-English novelist is to project the tone and tempo of Indian life through the English language. Where the sensibility is different, the expression also has to be different. Otherwise, the experience itself does not come through. So the Indian writers of English novel have tried to alter the 'expression' to accommodate a distinct, profoundly Indian sensibility.
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. Both the thought-content and the technique here reflect the deep impact that Hindu culture has made on these novels. In subject matter, in the mode of storytelling, in their images and imagery, in similes and metaphors, in humour and irony, as also in the language-part, the Indo-English novelists have borrowed copiously from the ancient Hindu literature, thus giving their writings a unique flavour and colouring of their own.
References and Notes

1. A Bend in the Ganges, p.75.
2. Sensibility Under Stress, p.117.
5. Uma Pariyemswaran, p.160.
7. From Fear Set Free, p.78.
9. Ibid., p.117.
12. Introduction to Perspectives on Raja Rao, p.XLI.