INTRODUCTION

When the crosscurrents of life brought the Indian and the English together, it was natural that the two should have acted and interacted with each other. Starting with the economic and the political partnership between the two, the connection later spread to cultural and religious levels too. And out of this accident of history was born what we today know by the name of the Indo-English novel.

Originating and later flourishing in India, the Indo-English novel, as could be anticipated, strongly came under the influence of Hinduism, the main religion of the land. Though it dates back to an immemorial past, Hinduism still remains a living religion and continues to interest and influence, mould and shape, a large mass of humanity with amazing intensity. No representative writer or artist in India could really afford to ignore it.

This compelling interest in Hinduism is not due to its numerical strength alone. Perhaps its real appeal lies in its rich variety that covers within its range everything—from the most abstract metaphysics to the most ordinary mundane affairs. There is almost nothing under the sun which is beyond the pale of Hinduism. It has most definite views.
to offer on how an individual may bring about a consummate flowering of his personality. With equal ease and facility it holds out the panacea for all social and economic ills. To ensure a harmonious working at all levels it suggests a division of life into four Ashramas (periods), of society into four Varnas (castes), and a hierarchical pattern at home with respect for elders ingrained deep in all hearts. Perhaps nothing could be more fascinating than a study of the rich diversity and variety, colour and beauty that go under the heading of Hinduism. It is not surprising then that writers of the Indo-English novel have drawn richly from this perennial source of strength and vitality. They have turned to it, sometimes by force of habit, but more often as conscious committed artists.

Many writers of the English novel in India freely imbibed European culture for a major part of their lives. But it is interesting to note that in spite of this strong alien influence, they have not been finally and decisively alienated from India. Many of them even have a firsthand knowledge of Sanskrit literature, Hindu scriptures, mythology and folklore and project this Hindu background quite palpably in their writings.

The impact of Hinduism on this genre of Indo-English writings is by no means confined to a small group of novelists
who are deeply immersed in Hindu tradition. Even those writers of Indo-English novel who were initiated early into the Anglicized world of British India and have only a superficial knowledge of Hindu scriptures, customs and traditions have not been able to wean themselves away from Hinduism completely. Their ancestral religion clings to them in a hundred ways and a streak of Hinduism runs clear through their pages. We thus find that in the realm of the Indo-English novel, the Hindu note may be more prominent in some novelists and less so in others; it may be an all-absorbing passion with one and a mere passing reference in the works of the other; it may be a positive assertion here and a negative factor there, but it is always there no doubt, very much there — solid and real. The gale of Western influences might have loosened the Hindu moorings of these writers — as it certainly has done in some cases — but it has failed to break them loose from the shore effectively. First love with Raja Rao, Hinduism commands only an intuitive sympathy with Kamala Markandaya; it arouses an immature nostalgia in Santha Rama Rau and works up a detached, cerebral attitude in Rajan; it is meted out a light, facetious treatment at the hands of R.K. Narayan and treated in a mock-heroic tone in the works of G.V. Desani. Mulk Raj Anand approaches it in a 'militant attitude' and Bhabani Bhattacharya swings from utter impatience to ardent admiration. It is only a 'faded memory' for Anita Desai but is life and
breath for Sudhin N. Ghose. Nayantara Sahgal often dips her pen in bitter gall when referring to Hinduism while Manohar Malgonkar gives a cold shoulder to the formal religion of the Pundits and professionals. But whatever its shades and nuances, its forms and dimensions in their writings, Hinduism asserts a lasting influence on the majority of these writers of the Indo-English novel. Even when deeply soaked in Western colouring, they have not been able to shake off Hinduism from their minds and consequently from their writings either.

There is a school of critics that condemns this tradition of 'Indianness' and believes that the prominent Hindu note in these novels is damaging to them. These critics feel that this lingering, sterile tradition blights even major talent. In their opinion this national quintessence, this peculiar, essentially Indian touch, is a negative influence on these books. They are convinced that this eccentricity, or freakish originality, stifles the expression of the deeper human perceptions which the novel has traditionally sought to represent. Brunton, writing about The Serpent and the Rope, remarks: "The repetitions of Benares, Himalaya and Ganges, Siva and Parvathi, tiger and cobra, are too insistent not to be conscious fabrications, the wistful symbols of Raja Rao striving to discover Indianness." ¹

In sharp contrast stands the other group of critics, like Ruth P. Jhabvala, that recognizes the need and importance
of having a distinctive genre of Indo-English novel. Raji Narasimhan asserts that the only great Indo-English novel could be a novel about Hinduism, a novel on Hinduism. She holds that "the real Indo-English novel had to be a novel on Hinduism as India had nothing better to offer to its writers for their theme."²

But whatever be the critical opinion, the fact is that the Hindu note in the Indo-English novel has come to stay. Nor are our novelists an isolated community for bringing in this religious strain in their writings. Many mainstream Christian novelists have done the same too. With consummate skill George Eliot has incorporated the "essence" of Christianity into her world of fiction. Butler's satire relies primarily on a negative criticism of the Church and society. His *The Way of All Flesh* is a religious novel that investigates the workings of a faith which allows for change as well as permanence, death as well as immortality. Catholic belief and practices are an important strand in novels by Evelyn Waugh. In Charles Kingsley we find an interpretation of Christianity as applied to social questions. Graham Greene, to use John Wain's terms, "writes beautifully constructed tales in which he places his characters exactly halfway between two powerful magnets, one religious, the other sexual, and then has them perform a series of gyrations expressive of indecision and anguish — gyrations
which, though highly predictable, are fascinating to read about. Thus when we say that the Indo-English novelists have portrayed in their writings the social, moral and spiritual background of their native society and that the Hindu ethos appears not only in their themes, ideas and philosophies, but also in their language, style and description, it is not something spectacularly singular. Rather, this Hindu touch in the Indian novel, even though it is written in English, may even be termed a natural phenomenon to some extent.

II

We find that the continuous flow of Hindu consciousness runs through the Indo-English novel in various garbs: exposition of the Hindu philosophy of life — worldly or otherworldly; frequent allusions to Hindu mythology and legend which to this day remain an inseparable part of our everyday life and delineation of Hindu characters or description of Hindu customs, traditions and manners. Hinduism may form a soft soothing undercurrent in the writings of one group of novelists and may be no more than a tool of light satire and irony for the other, but its presence is felt in almost all the important Indo-English novels of the period under discussion. My reading of the important representative novels of the last three decades
thus left me convinced that there was enough scope to take up research-work on the subject: 'Hinduism and the Indo-English novel — 1947-77'.

How far has Hinduism influenced these writings? In what form and from what point of view has it been treated in these novels? How far does it influence the vision of the artist? How far does it affect plot-construction, characterization, style and dialogue in these novels? What, in other words, are the dimensions of Hinduism in the important Indo-English novels of the period under study and what contribution does it make to their theme and technique? Does it make them superior or inferior to the general run of English novel? Is it a sterile tradition that blights major talent or does it give a new strength and maturity to these writings? Finding a satisfactory answer to all these queries is the object of the study undertaken here.

Assuming that my reader is not very well conversant with Hinduism, I will start with a brief introduction to its fundamentals, obviously confining myself to the area of study here. And as the treatment of Hinduism in these pages moves at vastly different levels and the doctrine comes up here in different hues and colours, the thesis has been divided into different chapters dealing with the impact of Hinduism on the various aspects of these novels — that is, their theme, characterization, language, technique and the philosophy of life projected through
them. To make a coherent pattern — both thematic and artistic —
out of the rich sprinkling of Hinduism over the thousands of pages
of the Indo-English novel of the period (1947-77) is the intended
objective of the proposed thesis.
References and Notes


2 Interview with the author on March 11, 1980.

In my opinion the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all-embracing inclusiveness. What the divine author of the Mahābhārata said of the great creation is equally true of Hinduism. What of substance is contained in any other religion is always to be found in Hinduism. And what is not contained in it is insubstantial or unnecessary.

M.K. Gandhi