CHAPTER TWO
HINDUISM AND THEMES

Robert Liddell holds, "The novelist generally wants to write about his own country, mental, social or geographical, and no other is equally interesting to him." With slight modification we may apply the same dictum to the Indian writers of the English novel. Though most of them have been exposed to the alien influences for a major part of their life, they have retained their essentially Indian identity and Hinduism — both in theory as well as in practice — remains their first love in the realm of writing. Out of love or hatred, nostalgia or frustration, these writers turn to Hinduism and Hindu themes dominate their novels in different colours, shapes and forms. Since a total coverage of all the Hindu themes of the period under reference is impracticable, I will take up a representative sampling of the same for a critical examination in the following pages of my study.

The system of caste division, it seems, has been there almost ever since the inception of Hindu society. Whatever the central motive behind its original introduction, in course of time it came to mean that a Brahmin was by birth and divine right — not by profession or self-elevation — at the head of all creatures. Over the centuries grew the utterly irrational
belief that "the distinction of caste and the inherent superiority of one caste over the three others was as much a law of nature and a matter of divine appointment, as the creation of separate classes of animals, with unsurmountable differences of physical constitution, such as elephants, lions, horses and dogs." As time passed, this belief in the intrinsic superiority or inferiority of a peculiar caste came to be the worst tool of oppression and repression. Absolute supremacy over the ages made the Brahmin conceited and insensitive, resulting in a painful imbalance in the social setup. The whole thing led to a long chain of action and reaction that brought heartburning, misery and suffering in their trail.

In this age of natural justice and democracy, the enlightened and liberal writer of the Indo-English novel refused to accept this pernicious system. He raised his voice of protest, even violent revolt, against this bane of Hindu society. A persistent crusade against it is thus a favourite theme with our novelists. Writers as far apart in their approach as Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, as different in taste as Manohar Malgonkar and Bhabani Bhattacharya, have alike shown preoccupation with the subject in their writings.

The joint family system or the strength of family ties is another typical Hindu institution touched upon in the novels under discussion. Very different from the family-pattern of
the West, where youth is independent and age indifferent, is
the intimate mode of the Hindu family life "where every gesture,
idiosyncracy or mole-mark was traced back to some cousin, aunt
or grandfather; where there were such subtle understandings of
half-said things, of acts that were respected or condemned
according to the degree of stature, age or sex of one
another. ..." Hindu family life gives one "a feeling of
complex oneness, from which one could never get out save by
death, and even after that one could get into it again in the
next life, and so on till the wheel of existence was ended."^1
The experience is characteristic of our society and writers
like Bhabani Bhattacharya who aim at "expressing Indian life
in the idiom of an alien language"^2 have found it interesting
to dwell on the beauty and burden of this aspect of Hindu life.

In this age of cutthroat competition, of a craving for
quick results and skyrocketing ambitions, of great technical
achievement and of equally great moral retrogression, the old
scale of values stands topsy-turvyed. The accepted code of
conduct has been challenged in almost all the societies of the
world. And in step with the air around, here in India too, the
age-old moral principle of nonviolence has come in for a fresh
appraisal. Has this canon of ancient Hindu law any relevance
in this age of nuclear weapons? If so, is it to be adopted
as a political weapon, a tool of expediency only, or is it to
be accepted as a philosophy, a principle, a way of life itself? Gandhi's policy of nonviolent resistance to evil on an unprecedented scale in the pre-independence days and the challenge to national integrity in the form of Chinese aggression in the post-independence era precipitated the matters, compelling intellectuals to sit up and do some serious thinking on the issue. The subject, thus given a new urgency by certain national and international developments, figures in many an Indo-English novel. The prominent among them will be taken up for discussion in the following pages.

Faith in the fates above continues to hold its sway on the majority of the Hindus even today. Surprising as it may seem, even in this scientific age the Hindu mind is greatly exercised by the doctrine of predestination — of things being controlled by an Invisible Power beyond our control. So, those who have even a nodding acquaintance with Hindu society would accept without demur the all-too-frequent references to the writing on the brow in the pages of these Indo-English novels.

Fate appears as a character in these 'Hindu' novels though not with the force and intensity of a Hardy novel. We do not witness here the struggle of mankind with Destiny on the grand scale of the Hardy-world but Fate remains a malignant, invisible 'Presence' all right. It generally acts as an abstract, invisible 'outsider' rather than as a personified 'insider'.
incarnated as a natural force, as some inner weakness of character or as chance or love as David Cecil traced it in the illustrious Wessex land.

Asceticism, self-control and its extreme form celibacy are an important ideal in the Hindu set of values. Since times immemorial right up to the modern days, the Hindu has clearly protested against the tyranny of the senses, boldly declaring that the true measure of man's greatness is not his capacity "to do clever conjurer's tricks or dream hysteric dreams, but it is to remain pure from lust and resentment, passion and desire." As the ideal has eternally held a special fascination for the Hindus, no wonder we frequently come upon it in the reality-based Indo-English novel. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee: "The ideal of asceticism runs through Indo-Anglian fiction as a recurrent and compulsive motif. Even writers who are seemingly indifferent to the spiritual aspects of life have not been able to ignore it altogether because this is a pervasive cultural ideal in India."

It does not mean that the subject is easy to deal with. In some instances the writer's "un-Indian" sensibility or his shallow knowledge of the ideal make his treatment of the theme trite and superficial. In quite a few others we find that caught on the seesaw of modernity and antiquity, the writer feels giddy. The Hindu ideal of self-denial and self-restraint
fascinates him but his long association with Western thought
draws him irresistibly to a free, full-blooded and more
uninhibited mode of life. He starts by glorifying one but
ends up by throwing his weight on the side of the other. This
lack of a clear vision and a firm stand on the issues involved
cannot but affect his art adversely. The outcome often is a
weak, purposeless novel which has no driving force, passion or
intensity in it. The reader ends up in a muddle as he finds
the writer's own vision both confused and confusing in the
extreme.

It is interesting to see how often Indo-English novelists,
whether writing on a religious subject or a secular one,
have quoted from or referred to the Bhagavada Gita — that
perennial storehouse of Hindu wisdom. Almost no great writer
seems to miss referring to this most important single scripture
of the Hindus. Non-attachment or detachment — that all important
message of the Gita, especially, is a theme close to the heart
of our old as well as the younger generation of writers. They
have not only not touched the subject superficially but have
even dwelt fairly long on it, sometimes raising it to the status
of the central theme of the book. E.M. Forster observes: "The
Hindu is concerned not with conduct, but with vision. He has a
constant sense of the unseen — of the powers around if he is
a peasant, of the powers behind if he is a philosopher, and he
feels that this tangible world, with its chatter of right and wrong, subserves the intangible." It is this love for the unseen and the intangible that leads to the Hindu interest in metaphysical truth as contrasted with the Westerner's interest in moral truth and is again responsible for the rise of what has come to be known as the "quest novel" in Indo-English literature.

As chief obsession of the Hindu is with some form of "non-existent existence," mysticism, Advaita —the philosophy of non-dualism, immortality of the soul and the theory of Great Illusion are perhaps nowhere so much a part of the mental makeup as here in the Hindu society of India. These are the subjects, however, that could hardly be expected to form the content-matter of a novel as they partook of the nature of the transcendental and in David McCutcheon's words, "how can there be a transcendental novel? it would merely be silence." Yet the Indo-English novelists have attempted the apparently impossible. Writer after writer has tried to weave these topics into the thematic patterns of his novels, sometimes producing in the process what may be called "really philosophic" novels.

"'I want to be a pilgrim', says the narrator at the end of the fourth novel /The Flame of the Forest/. This pilgrimage, the quest for the Absolute, is a central preoccupation of the best Indian-English fiction." Continuing Shyamala A. Narayan's
argument we may point out that this quest has appeared in writers as divergent as Sudhin N. Ghose, Raja Rao and G.V. Desani. Sudhin N. Ghose presents the subject enjoyably in the form of a fantasy and has a distinctive style that is characteristically his own; Raja Rao couches the theme in philosophic seriousness whereas the protagonist "going from one charlatan to another in All about Hatterr conceals the same quest under a farcical veneer."\textsuperscript{11}

I

Casteism

Among the novels where Hinduism forms the warp and woof of their thematic structure is Bhabani Bhattacharya's \textit{He Who Rides a Tiger}. True to his belief that a writer's purpose should be to depict the truth as he sees it, the writer here takes in hand the portrayal of our caste-ridden, ritual-infested, religio-maniac Hindu society. The novel just could not have existed in its present form without the typical social order of the Hindu society as also the typical mental attitude that Hinduism brings to its children.

\textit{He Who Rides a Tiger} is the story of a blacksmith, a person at a very low rung of the Hindu social divisions. He dreams of higher and better things in life but without any
chance of fulfilment of his dreams till he decides to dupe the society that has treated him so cruelly. He decides to pay the high caste people back in their own coin and carves a future for himself and his young daughter by playing with the superstitions and falsely religious sentiments of the so-called custodians of Hinduism. He plays the game with a vengeance and gets the success of a determined fighter. He has his revenge when those who had been riding their high horses only sometime back come cringing to his feet. At last when his soul is sick of the hypocrisy involved, he chooses to wind up the game and finishes the play of his own free will.

Castigation of the Hindu caste division is obviously the central theme in the novel. The writer effectively brings home the gross injustice, cruelty, hypocrisy and resultant bitterness spelled by the existing system through this tale of Kalo and his folk. Nor is that all. The story of Purnima, Biten's sister, is a most painful commentary on this gnawing evil of Hindu society. At its monstrous touch we find doting parents being turned into rough brutes in no time. An honourable proposal for marriage from Basav, a non-Brahmin, leaves the old people so frustrated that they rush their daughter into marriage with a widower — a man with a sagging chin and grey hair who is a father, even a grandfather already. So blind and devastating is the force of their religious belief that under its spell they, who could have given their all to make their
daughter happy, do not hesitate to condemn her to a living
death. At the petrifying touch of what goes by the name of
Hindu caste divisions, a life that could have been lived so
happily, could have bloomed into perfect love, joy and beauty,
stands dwarfed and twisted and even ends prematurely in suicide
by drowning. What condemnation of this perversion could be
sufficiently adequate?

The theme of caste division is harped on repeatedly
throughout the novel. There is hardly any important turn in
the story where the factor is not brought in for overt or covert
comments. Kalo is in prison. He has been consigned to that
hellish place by a callous society for a trivial slip, if at
all it was so. He is in dire need of money and there is no
chance that even after his release he would be able to earn an
honest living. He can have no letter of reference or word of
recommendation from any respectable person, so necessary for
service anywhere. He has no funds to set up an independent
business of his own. He seems to have reached the dead end of
the road. Suddenly Biten comes up with the proposal that he
should play the Brahmin-priest of a fake temple in order to
earn some desperately needed money. Kalo is at first scandalized.
"'I?" Kalo's voice rang with utter incredulity. 'Twice-born'?" He
had never doubted the Brahmin's superior status as God's
chosen and could not easily grasp the planned magic-trick
of B-10 "to make a milch-cow of people who have large funds of faith as well as cash." He feels unhappy.

It was, however, not long before the seeds of revolt were sown in Kalo's soul. When he saw men, women and children dying like animals tethered to poles and forgotten, all his faith was knocked out of him. The sight of the funeral procession of a rich Brahmin sharply contrasted with the inglorious end of the nameless, poor, ignorant, low caste people proved the last straw that broke the camel's back. In his desperation and bitterness he turned to the magic-trick suggested by B-10 earlier. Here was a way not simply to make a living but also to settle accounts with the "Pure Hindus." "They hit us where it hurts badly — in the pit of the belly. We've got to hit back," Kalo ruminates.

The novel is nothing if not a story of revolt and revenge against the pseudo religion of the Hindus. The revolt is spearheaded by Kalo, the blacksmith, and Biten, the Brahmin, both of whom symbolize the enlightened section of Hindu society. Kalo breaks down caste-barriers and exposes their falseness. More than once in the novel he has a laugh at those "creatures bloated with caste pride" whom he had fooled so successfully. As about Biten, he renounces his Brahminhood once for all. He would rather risk losing the girl he loves than show any leniency in his crusade against this curse of Hindu
It goes to the credit of Bhattacharya that he has achieved his purpose of exposing and denouncing the evil of casteism with good literary results. As there is a perfect harmony between the temper of the writer and the subject matter of the book, there are no jarring notes, no aberrated threads for us to smoothen out. The story of Kalo’s sweet revenge on the people who had lorded it over being puffed up with ‘caste and cash’ and of Biten’s revolutionary fervour against the inhuman callousness of our existing setup appeals to us both morally and aesthetically. To cite Chandrasekharan’s testimony on the subject: “Bhattacharya shows good artistic judgement in avoiding explicit fulminations against the caste system and by exposing and ridiculing it in a dramatic manner.”

Bhattacharya takes up cudgels against the Hindu caste division in his other novels too, though not on that scale. In Shadow from Ladakh he points out that caste had no meaning in Tagore’s Santiniketan. Satyajit and Suruchi did not belong to the same caste but in Santiniketan it did not matter. Again the writer’s own sympathies with the low caste Jhanak are too
obvious when he remarks: "Restless and flighty, she turned her eyes mostly to youths whose forebears had sat high on the caste pedestal; there was perhaps an atavistic urge in her, a desire to be avenged on the men of the past who had upheld the social divisions. Easy to see that, easy to sympathize; how could the downtrodden be washed of their centuries-old hatred in the space of a decade?"^17

Protest against change in *Music for Mohini* comes only from young Heera Lal or the immature rustic pupils of Mohini. They are all mere kids who are yet to be trained in the school of life and moulded in the furnace of experience. Ignorance is their chief fault and no doubt they will soon be chastened into the right sorts.

Another novel of the period that deals seriously with this tension-theme between the "Pure Hindu" and the so-called untouchables is Mulk Raj Anand's *The Road*. We have here the usual sad spectacle of the caste Hindus wanting to keep the Harijans* suppressed as ever, the eternal prejudice against the latter's entry into temples and an insurmountable inhibition against the touch that pollutes. This hostile attitude of the caste Hindus is stiffened further and a new dimension added to their religious prejudice against the Harijans when an

*Gandhi's loving name for the so-called untouchables. The word literally means 'men of God' but is now popularly used for the low caste people in Hindu society.
element of economic competition enters the fray. The high caste Hindus resent the untouchables getting money by breaking stone for road-building. Moreover, the idea of pooling their labour with the low caste is too much for them to swallow.

The quarrel grows; the two warring camps assume menacing postures by turns till we are witnesses to a man-made holocaust in the village. The untouchables have their home and hearth reduced to cinders as a result of arson indulged in by Sajnu and his friends. The prejudice in old hearts dies hard, but when it lingers, Anand does not lose hope. As a concession to realism, he works out no sensational or sweeping victory for the underdogs so close to his heart; yet the rumblings of a new era are already in the air. Bhikhu, the young Harijan protagonist, refuses to take things lying down. Being more enlightened than Kalo, he needs no mentor like Biten to arouse and awaken him. His retort to his mother's fond hopes is: "We have done plenty good deeds in our life, but no merit has accrued. ... and I have not seen God around these parts for a long time." No miracle is wrought and no change of heart brought about in the rotten ranks of the backward-looking caste Hindus, but Anand ends his book on an optimistic note:

He wiped the smear of blood from his torn lip, turned round deliberately, swallowed his spittle and walked out of the hall. He did not go towards home. Instinctively he went in the direction of the road he had helped to build. And in his soul he took the
That Bhikhu's chosen road leads to Delhi, the capital of free India, is symbolically significant. Our young hero is heading in a direction that will lead him to what we hope is the seat of new light and new promise, the birthplace of a new age where the dead burdens of the past would be shaken off and a new plunge taken forward on the march to equality, liberty and fraternity.

Living up to his reputation of producing "a literature of protest," Anand uses his art here to denounce an aspect of traditional Hindu society which deserves outright condemnation. But unfortunately his presentation of the thesis leaves much to be desired. His treatment of the theme is sketchy and even lustreless as compared to his earlier work on the subject — Untouchable — which "poured out like hot lava from the volcano of my crazed imagination." The Road lacks not only "the first, fine ... rapture" of Untouchable but also the force and drama of He Who Rides a Tiger. The story has for its background "a world where the traditional, the transitional and the modern battle for supremacy," a world where though "the old taboos have hardly slackened their hold on the minds of the people,... ne
factors such as increased governmental initiative to give a new deal to the untouchables, the changes effected in the village economy by rapid industrialisation and increased job opportunities outside agriculture have certainly brought a new hope to the outcastes. Now that things are changing for the better, Naik rightly points out that the writer could easily have indicated a positive course of action to end what E.M. Forster describes as the "hideous nightmare" of Hindu society. But what we have is an ending as weak and unimpressive as the rest of the novel. Though "the road to Delhi which Bhikhu takes to at the end of The Road is indeed the road of Destiny," to quote Naik again, "unfortunately, this finale which should have come as a fitting symbolic climax to the narrative loses all its artistic power as the superstructure of this long short story is too flimsy to bear the weight of an effective symbolic finale."

Though caste-prejudice is an important issue in Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes and The Devil's Wind, the novel where the development of the story is greatly influenced by it is the writer's A Bend in the Ganges. The explosive situation in the Big House becomes all the more explosive because Aji, whom Dada marries against the wishes of the family, was of a low caste. Even when the erring son is forgiven to smother scandal and admitted back to the fold of the family, women of the house
continue to treat the lady as an outcaste. Aji is not permitted to enter the family prayer-room. Even the cotton wicks prepared by her for the oil-flame lamp in the prayer-room are rejected by her sister-in-law. That was the point which later spelt ruin for the Big House. Dada rebelled against this treatment of his wife but there was no question of compromise: "the family-shrine could not be desecrated by a girl from the weaver's caste, a girl who had left her home to live in sin." And "it was Brahmin orthodoxy against a woman's vanity; stone against stone. There was no room for compromise." Dada left home in a flurry, a step which later cost the family so dear. With greater flexibility in the orthodox attitude, the whole tragedy of Gian and his family might have been averted.

This caste-consciousness runs like an undercurrent in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope, though here the theme moves more on a philosophical and emotional plane than on a social or even a formally religious one. "I was born a Brahmin" is the opening sentence of the novel. And all through, never for a moment does Rama forget this Brahmin blood in his veins. Whether he is talking of himself or his grandfather, of Madeleine or Europe, of the concrete or the abstract, his Brahminic supremacy is never out of his mind. His obsession with his Brahminism or the 'Brahminic autocracy' earns him the title of "European Brahmin." T.L. Brunton rightly feels: "Rama's Brahmanic egoism is the unqualified attitude of the book ..."
The Serpent and the Rope is the story of Rama's marriage and a slow disintegration of that marriage with Madeleine. What does his Brahminhood have to do with it all? It would be an interesting study to trace the answer.

Why does Madeleine marry Ramaswamy in the first instance? C.D. Narasimhaiah's reply is: "Because he represented a country and a cause — he was an Indian and a Brahmin" (stress my own). Rama continues to wear the aura of Brahminism even after the marriage:

"Touch, as I have said, was always distasteful to her, so she liked the untouching Carthars, she loved their celibacy. She implored me to practise the ascetic Brahmacharya of my ancestors and I was too proud a Brahmin to feel defeated."

Madeleine does all in her power to imbibe the Brahminic standards of her husband and play the wife true to his Brahminic traditions:

"I said an awkward 'Thank you', and she went on: 'Take the new towels I bought today. I bought a dozen so that your Brahminism, renewed and affirmed, can wash itself as often as it likes. Meanwhile your Brahmin wife will cook you your rice.'"

But it is all love's labour lost. The charisma does not work. And why? On Rama's own admission: "Had I been less of a Brahmin, I might have known more of 'love'." When the final break comes, there is no doubt that it is because Rama was
It is difficult to accept Harish Raizada's contention that the separation between the two is not due to Rama's Brahminism or the consequent cultural alienation between the two. The critic is of the view that estrangement between Rama and Madeleine is caused by "the incompatibility of their temperaments. Rama is meditative and serious. Abstract ideas matter more to him than the tangible objects of life. Madeleine, on the other hand, is not metaphysical but practical and decisive in her ways." The missing link in the argument is the close connection between temperament and training. What Raizada fails to see is that it is Rama's Brahminic training, his Hinduistic cultural background, that make him metaphysical, give him his love of the abstract and even make him incompetent to handle things in a hard practical way. Madeleine's pragmatic Western training, on the other hand, gives her love of the concrete and makes her so incisively practical and competent. If the marriage is wrecked on the rock of temperamental incompatibility, it is an incompatibility born of cultural antithesis precipitated by Rama's inflated pride in his caste and race.

II

Joint Family System

The joint family system, as it has been practised and perpetuated by the Hindus since times immemorial, is the core
of Music for Mohini. The novel is the story of an ancient rich Brahmin family of Bengal, the Big House of Behula. The objective of the writer here seems to be to bring out the complexity of human relationships that the joint family system breeds. He exposes the evil of blind orthodoxy and at the same time sets the glory of ancient Hindu tradition in its right perspective. A good knowledge of the Hindu family-pattern and Hindu ethos is necessary for a full appreciation and thorough enjoyment of the novel. Detach the story from the patriarchal, hierarchical pattern of Hindu family life and the whole structure would come down crumbling like a house of cards. If, like an Englishman, or a West-oriented modern young man, Jayadev, on his marriage, were to take his bride and set up an independent establishment free from any cumbersome obligations to the past and equally blind to its great splendour and beauty, the novel in its present form just could not have existed. Once this world of difference between the family life of the Hindu and of the people in English-speaking lands is known to us, we will find nothing strange, sensational or unconvincing about the events or their sequence in the novel. Rather, we could then easily trace an organic development in them.

Mohini, a young city-bred sophisticated girl, gets married to a scion of an ancient Brahmin family and goes to her new home — the Big House in Behula — to live the traditional life of a Hindu wife. She enters the Big House as a full-blooded,
light-hearted, enchanting bride but is swept into maturity soon after, longing for an heir to the family who will be (as shown by the horoscope) a means of saving the life of her husband. and, more important still, an instrument to carry on the tradition of the Big House. A few notes of dissidence notwithstanding, she adjusts and adapts herself to the point of obeying even the most absurd injunctions of her mother-in-law.

Kamala Markanday's *Nectar in a Sieve* is primarily a tale of rural life in South India. This story of "the faceless peasant" of India has for its background "the muddied ocean of poverty and misery." Out of this apparently hopeless reservoir of poison is churned the nectar of love and faith, only if it is, as Srinivasa Iyengar exclaims, "nectar in a sieve!"

Rukmani learns of her husband's infidelity with Kunthi. It is a terrible shock, but she understands and forgives the errant Nathan. The strength of her love sees her through the crisis. Ira's sacrificial going on the streets to save the family from starvation is another measure of the strength of these family ties. At the end when the widowed, forlorn Rukmani returns to her village (to the welcome of her son and daughter), she does not forget to bring with her Puli, their adopted son. We may be sure that their journeyings at last over, the two will live in peace and comfort in the haven of a family where
the young are trained "to love, honour and succour their father and mother, to submit themselves to all their governors, teachers, pastors and masters and to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters." \(^{38}\)

_Nectar in a Sieve_ is thus a fine and convincing portrayal of a familiar Indian institution that has survived the onslaughts of various political and cultural invasions as also many social, economic and psychological strains. This sweet strength of family ties is an important theme in Raja Rao's _The Serpent and the Rope_ as also in many other less significant fictional creations of this period. But there is another side to the coin too. It is not always all quiet on the family front! Sweet sustaining strength is only one of the motivations provided by the joint family motif. There are writers who "find their material in the excitement, strength and the clash of temperaments involved. ..." \(^{39}\) Manohar Malgonkar's _A Bend in the Ganges_ is an example in hand.

As in _Music for Mohini_, here too, in the early chapters of _A Bend in the Ganges_, we have the story of the scions of a 'Big House' but they lack the aura of glory and greatness that hallows the Big House in Behula. It is a House divided against itself and torn infernally. In fact, when the story opens, the Big House is already a split phenomenon and what we follow are only "the fortunes of two closely related families, those of
the Big House and those of the Little House (they might be the Kauravas and the Pandavas of the obscure village, Kanshet); Vishnu-dutt of the Big House kills Hari of the Little House, and Hari’s brother, Gian, kills Vishnu-dutt using the same axe. Gian is duly sentenced to transportation for life, and sent to the Andamans.

The keynote of the novel, of course, is the story of India’s struggle for freedom and the terrible bloodshed in the wake of the partition of the country. Tuned to a lower key and confined to the early part of the book, however, is this story of caste-prejudice leading to family feud, suspicion, rivalry, hatred, vindictiveness and murder. It adds social drama to the political and philosophical dimensions of the novel. An independent unit in itself, this secondary plot nevertheless helps to throw into relief a major theme of the novel—namely, violence versus nonviolence. It may even be viewed as the advance micro-tragedy foreshadowing the macro-tragedy on a national scale in the year of the partition and thus serves an important artistic as well as thematic purpose in the novel.

Coming to the old guard, we find that the theme of family affinity and affiliations stands out best in the writings of R.K.Narayan. P.S.Sundaram testifies:
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.42

III

Fate

References to Fate and its accompanying paraphernalia of stars, horoscopes, etc., are made not only by minor characters like Velan in *The Guide* or the village chief in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* or casually in passing as by Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, but also by major characters in major novels of these decades and in all seriousness too. *Cry, the Peacock* is in the main the story of horoscope-reading and fate and stars only. It is the reading of the horoscope by the temple-priest leading to his prophecy about her fate, the writing in her hand, that conditions the attitude of the main character and ends up in the final tragedy of the novel. How terribly Fate haunts and obsesses Maya may be seen from these brief lines spoken by her in a moment of despair and passion:

God ! God ! I cried, and sat up in terror. There was no clash and clamour after that. I was aware of
a great, dead silence in which my eyes opened to a
vision that appeared through the curtains of the
years, one by one falling back till I saw again
that shadow. A black and evil shadow. Its name
was not that of a demon in a Kathakali dance
drama, nor was it one of the limpid appellations
of the moon. It was, I remembered it now, Fate.

Over the whole narrative "there hovers an uncannily
oppressive sense of fatality." Maya sees all her delights
tainted with its venomous touch. "Fatality — fate. Fate —
fatality." It runs like a refrain through the novel. The
prophecy about the writing on the brow had cast its shadow
like a net across Maya as she "fled down the corridor of years."
There was no escape from it for her, try and struggle however
hard she might. In a violent outburst she cries out pitifully,
pathetically:

And I knew I should never again sleep in peace.
For, God, now I was caught in the net of the
inescapable, and where lay the possibility of
mercy, of release? This net was no hallucination,
no. In the daytime, amidst companions, I could
force myself into believing that it was only a
nightmare, no more. But, in the night, under the
stark gaze of the moon, in that waiting silence,
my memories came to life, were so vivid, so
detailed, I knew them to be real, too real...
God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I will
never sleep again. There is no rest anymore —
only death and waiting.

Fate is thus a word of great thematic significance in
_Cry, the Peacock_, a word "burningly mnemonic, subtle as a
soundless ice-cube, overwhelming as lava." Invisible Fate
combined with the invisible forces of insanity mark out the heroine of the novel for a traumatic experience and fill the reader with a strange disquiet. With bated breath we watch the neurotic Maya hurl down her husband into death "in a blinding moment of unbearable agony. She has proved the albino astrologer right, and has become the instrument of her own crazy destiny."

Almost everybody in *So Many Hungers* has something to say about Fate. Right from Kajoli and her mother down to the brothel woman, they have something or the other to thank their stars for or to curse them about. The young girls, the grown-up women, the well-fed soldier, the starving destitutes, the noble mother, the unscrupulous brothel agent — all alike see the hand of Fate behind what they have to suffer or experience. Though Fate seems to smile on some as a benign deity, generally its role here — as in the tragic world of Hardy — is that of a cruel merciless Being only. A starving destitute at the relief-centre run by Rahoul was over-joyed at the prospect of being served with rice. For five days he had not had a morsel to eat and now thinking of his approaching good luck, tears of joy coursed down his hollow cheeks. But, "Fate, ironic, denied him his last mouthful of rice. As food came into sight, ready to be served, the man shuddered with an excitement... and slumped on his side, dead." Towards the close of the novel, we see Kajoli resolving
to take up cudgels against Fate to whom, she feels, she has yielded without a struggle. She awakens to the ignominy of such a surrender by one whose father and brother had been such good fighters in their time. Her decision to challenge Fate not only brings out the inner glory of her character but also imbues the novel with a new message of strength and hope in the face of a disastrous catastrophe.

One notable point about the Fate motif in the novel is that the educated, enlightened characters do not at all refer to this dark force or its omnipotent existence. Faith in this relentless all-controlling Power is a legacy of the past, the dead past, only, so that all references to it — barring the writer’s own comment — come from the illiterate, uneducated members of our 'dramatis personae'.

In All about H. Hatterr we have a full-length chapter in honour of Fate: "Salute the 'Kismet'!". The chapter opens with the query: "Is there anything in this here 'Kismet' notion? If destiny should commit a feller to the wrong woman, can anything prevent it happening?" Then follows a long commentary on the PERSUMPTION enunciated by Hatterr on his own:

'Kismet', i.e., fate — if at all anything, and as potent as suspected for centuries — is a dam' baffling thing!

It defies a feller's rational: his entire conception as to his soma, pneuma, and psyche! It was 'kismet', pure and simple — or what do you think?
I married a woman like the Kiss-curl, waxed and all, because it was fate (as it were)! 52

The subject of Fate is thus treated and handled in a variety of ways in the Indo-English novels. The most common mode, however, is not the appearance of Fate direct on the scene of action but a depiction of the attitude of various characters towards this supposedly all-powerful force and a discussion or commentary thereon. We thus find that the decree of the goddess is accepted in a spirit of utter resignation in one place and with a good deal of fuming and fretting in the other; some accost it in a spirit of revolt and others take it in a light, jocular mood. In a rough summing up of the different notes in the field we may well say that it is awe in Anita Desai, irony in Bhabani Bhattacharya, a mock-comic vein in G.V. Desani and a violent challenge and eternal criticism in B.Rajan and Nayantara Sahgal that mark the treatment of the theme in these writers.

IV

Nonviolence

India is the only country to have fought a war of independence against the colonial rulers in a nonviolent way. This nonviolence in politics in the Hindu-dominated India is
no mere chance or coincidence. *Ahimsa* or nonviolence is a supreme law governing the conduct of a Hindu and Gandhi's policy of nonviolent resistance to evil undoubtedly owed its origin to this tenet of Hindu philosophy. Bhabani Bhattacharya makes conscious and repeated references to this aspect of India's struggle for freedom in his novel *So Many Hungers*.

In his parting message to the village-folk, Devata (*So Many Hungers*), their chief leader, tells them to shun the evil of violence — in action if not in thought itself. They do their best to live up to his teachings and if in a fit of anger they make a moral slip, sadness lies heavy on their hearts. Kishore tells Rahoul in the course of the latter's visit to the village, "Devata has laid the *ahimsa* spell on Baruni. The people burnt down a dak-ghar in the heat of great anger, and then they remembered his teaching and the anger cooled off." When the British were involved in a life and death struggle with the Japanese, the Indian nationalists would not do anything to harass them. They just "would not hurt Britain in the grave hour of trial. That would not be *ahimsa* — true nonviolence. The national movement had more morality than strategy."

Nonviolence in thought, word and deed was the avowed creed of the people in Gandhigram, the Gandhian village which symbolized spirit, "the spirit of man striving to transcend the physical." A firm but peaceful resistance to evil, stern
refusal to bow before vice and an equally strong resolve never
to retaliate was an important ingredient of its philosophy. In
far-off South Africa Gandhi had first discovered the
wonder-weapon of peaceful resistance to evil. Back home in
India it had become a means of mass upheavals; Gandhi's
nonviolent resistance "had blunted the sharp weapons of the
world's mightiest empire." Satyajit had seen and lived with
Gandhi. Both consciously and unconsciously, he had imbibed
the teachings of the great prophet of the Age. Also, in his
village, as in all others, he had seen every ritual — at birth,
mariage, funeral — ending with the words proclaimed by Vedic
sages three thousand years ago: "Peace and peace and always
peace." How could he falsify the traditions — both the
immediate and the traditional ones? Naturally, therefore, when
the Chinese attacked India, heading a peace-mission to the
disputed regions in Ladakh was his spontaneous as well as
considered solution to the fiery problem. Unmindful of the
raining bullets, they would enter the thick of the battle with
the demand for peace as their only weapon and faith in the
spirit of man as their only shield. Satyajit decided on a moral
solution to a military problem because with Gandhi he had come
to believe: "No power on earth can stand before the march of a
peaceful, determined, and God-fearing people. Nonviolence is
more powerful than all the armaments in the world." Like a
true Hindu, he had faith in the essential divinity of man. God dwells in the Chinese as in all others and through his peace-march Satyajit aimed at rousing the God in them. He had tremendous faith in the typical Hindu method of meeting brute force with soul-force and unequivocally subscribed to the Gandhian doctrine: "You cannot cast out Satan by Satan, you cannot end violence by more violence."^58

Bhabani Bhattacharya's own viewpoint on the subject is unambiguous. The doctrine of nonviolence is expounded and upheld with undivided loyalty. The writer obviously favours its practice as a creed and not only as an instrument — a material means like the bullet only. There is enough in the novel to warrant this inference. There is no significant note of dissidence, no critic or opponent of Satyajit — not to speak of any of his camp followers, who has a word of censure for it. Some may have doubts about its practicability in the mechanical world of today but there is none to fight it openly. Even Bhashkar, who had earlier dismissed Satyajit's faith in nonviolence as a kind of sentimentality only, is at least partially converted to his philosophy. He decides to achieve his objective of destroying Gandhigram by peaceful penetration. Meadow House is conceived with the objective: "A conquest by nonviolence."^59

Though the theme is presented with perfect clarity and without any distracting deviations, one cannot help feeling
that the presentation lacks force and effect. Satyajit, the chief spokesman here, is rather a weak character, to say the least. Though Bhabani Bhattacharya sets out with great fanfare to model him after the Father of the Nation, what he actually succeeds in producing is a milksop rather than a hero with any metallic force in him. All his professions to the contrary notwithstanding, his faith in nonviolence, as demonstrated in actual life, is lukewarm at best. The Government of India agrees to give a green signal to his peace-mission in Ladakh provided he can make it broad-based enough. So Satyajit sends out a call for volunteers to join the proposed Peace-Brigade to Ladakh. The appeal misfires and Satyajit feels quite lost. All his power had to be based on the combined power of thousands. When there is no response from the masses, his enthusiasm cools down. He has no will to go it alone: "But what good would it be if he acted single-handed?" He needs props as though the intrinsic worth of his ideal is not enough to sustain and support him. When these artificial aids fail, he stands crippled. He never had much faith in the material outcome of his mission and lack of public response dulls its idealistic sheen too. He is unwilling to make a symbolic gesture even. Imagine a Gandhi writing off a campaign for want of sufficient public support! Obviously, Satyajit is much a man of/smaller dimensions. How, then, could he be expected
to galvanize a nation into action or leave an indelible 
imprint on the pages of history or of literature for that 
matter?

Another novel where the argument is painstakingly 
taken up at some serious length is B.Rajan's The Dark Dancer. 
To Kamala nonviolence is something more than a mere political 
weapon. It was "not simply a technique but an invoking of 
qualities instinctive in her nature. You did not oppose your 
enemy. You did not even consider him as such. You accepted 
him, but without surrender, completely without compromise, so 
that acceptance was a mirror pitiless and intact, held up 
remorselessly to the Gorgon's head."61 Krishnan is no such 
staunch believer in the principle of nonviolence, yet in his 
encounter with the Muslim disguised as a Brahmin, he acts in 
the true nonviolent tradition. He does everything in his power 
to save the treacherous Muslim who had earlier wanted to make 
a mincemeat of Krishnan. And the dying Muslim's last words 
"Shiva be with you,"62 a conciliation held out, indicate 
Gandhi's change of heart worked out in live practice. The 
Hindu faith in nonviolence stands vindicated. The writer, by 
showing this triumph of the spirit of nonviolence, indicates 
his preferences and shows which way his leanings lie.

But it does not mean that the writer's commitment to 
the cause is absolute and unqualified. Later in the novel when
Kamala makes the supreme sacrifice of her life to quell the orgy of violence, Balachandra seems to think that it was stretching nonviolence too far. Enough is enough, he seems to say. At least part of him speaks through M.O. when the latter addresses Krishnan on his recovery:

'What stopped it? Communal frenzy?' he asked Krishnan triumphantly. 'It wasn't Kamala's principles. It was the crowd's violence, the thing she had fought against and which she died uselessly trying to prevent. She never taught them anything. All she succeeded in doing was to die. ... Her death wasn't different from any other, except that, being avoidable, it was even more futile and senseless. Put it among your cobwebs and set fire to it. Kamala never did anything but die. It's all that can be done by any death.'

Earlier, we have a spark of spirit, rejecting all pacifist theories of nonviolence, from Krishnan himself: "But I can fight too when what I love is murdered." But then, let us not forget that Krishnan has suffered a maddening blow and the words may have come more from sorrow than conviction. In such an hour of catastrophe it would not be easy for any man to keep his nerve and talk sense, unless he has the stature of a prophet himself.

Any serious story of India's freedom-struggle could not but hobnob with the theme of nonviolence, but obviously it is not first love with B. Rajan. The writer does not bring to it the passion and ardour of a committed writer though
undeniably his finest achievement in the novel is Kamala who incarnates in her person the nonviolence of the strong and the heroic. She has the courage of her conviction and has aptly been described as "Shakti in her essential strength and unfailing gift of compassion and understanding."

The question of nonviolent resistance to the English is taken up in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, but it is taken up in the typical Narayanesque style — that is, without violent passions. In the fight for freedom Bharati is irrevocably pledged to the Gandhian path of nonviolence and as Srimad is wedded to her (mentally for the present!), there is no question of his changing loyalties either. He is there in the 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!

Violence versus nonviolence — the controversy appears again in Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*. The writer, probing the ideology of *Ahimsa* or nonviolence, unmistakably throws his weight on the side of Debi Dayal and his group of young freedom-fighters who believe that "the creed of nonviolence is a naked insult to the land of Shivaji and Akbar and Ranjit." In a critical assessment of the novel G.S. Amur feels 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:
It is intended to be a political and philosophical allegory as well. Through Gian, Malgonkar attempts to discredit the values of nonviolence and truth as incompatible with the facts of life and this is where the mischief occurs. Debi Dayal has the making of a hero and turns out to be an effective instrument of violence. Gian, weak and unheroic, can only be an ironic symbol of nonviolence. Thus, nonviolence is discredited even before the novelistic exploration begins by its identification with weakness and cowardice. Malgonkar is hardly objective and fair-minded in his choice of symbols and has allowed himself to be influenced by his own personal convictions. This greatly damages the allegorical value of \textit{A Bend in the Ganges} and makes it unreliable as a study of the ideology of nonviolence or of its operation on men. Nonviolence does not have to be necessarily a superficial influence and does not have to go only with the weak. In fact, it demands and sometimes gets a greater heroism than violence itself, as the Mahatma in this country and Martin Luther King in America demonstrated in their own lives.\footnote{67}

However, one gets "a refreshingly new look"\footnote{68} at the creed of nonviolence in Sudhin N. Ghose's \textit{And Gazelles Leaping}. It is, as Shyamala A. Narayan puts it,

the severely practical view of life, the consideration of charity from the point of view of its human relevance, ... an aspect of the Indian tradition which is new not only to the foreigner but to the less informed Indian:

... the frame-maker asked, 'Was it right to kill so many for the sake of one?'

"The answer is equally clear", affirmed the schoolmaster, as he began adjusting his hookah. "Vermin cannot be placed on the same footing as men. You are a human being and the enemies of the human race are your enemies. He who puts vermins on the same level as men will reduce himself
eventually to the status of vermin, and teach himself to be uncharitable to Man...!

'Destroy that vermin', the holy man insisted, 'for the sake of charity. Man has been asked to bear witness to the Truth. And he who allows a fellow-man to be imperilled for the sake of a snake is a trickster of false arguments, a reasoner of half-truths, and a worshipper of Mara, the Demon of Darkness. Destroy the weeds in your garden otherwise the flowers will never bloom in it. He is a poor gardener who tends the weeds with the same care as his flowering plants'.

Asceticism

Ascetics, saints, monks, holy men — fake or genuine — are a common enough sight in the Indo-Anglian fiction but there are very few novels that take up the philosophy of asceticism in the sense of celibacy or continence as the central or even a secondary theme for exposition. Two significant exceptions are Bhabani Bhattacharya's Shadow from Ladakh and G.V. Desani's All about H.Hatterr. As might be expected, the former deals with the theme in earnest seriousness and the latter, a highly individual novel, treats it with rare flippancy. Juxtaposition of the two should make an interesting study in contrast.

Asceticism and continence versus self-gratification and indulgence is the theme at the heart of Shadow from Ladakh.
It is meant to be the story of a 'path-finder' who simply cannot be counted as one of the many. Satyajit, the great hero of Gandhigram, aims at embodying in his person the great ideal of asceticism and continence — an offshoot, of course, of the grand old trunk of Hinduism. He pledges himself to a life of chastity and purity — both in thought and deed — for how could a man given to the tyranny of the flesh be expected to find the time, strength and energy to lead a nation to the highest spiritual summits? The decision was not easy to take and it hurt Satyajit badly but he decided to fight his way to the top, earnestly seeking, even begging for Suruchi's help in his new struggle. Suruchi is wretched and unable to reconcile herself to his new line of thinking. But even in her misery she could see the grandeur of his standpoint and "stared, fascinated, at the man striving to build himself after the image of greatness."70

Sumita is Satyajit's second self, made in the image of her father. Trained and tutored at Satyajit's hands, she develops a natural taste for austere and ascetic living. She wore no gold or silver on her person as there was no room for costly jewellery in Gandhigram. Wrapped in asceticism from top to toe-nail, she seemed to radiate 'Satyajitism' — a but thinly disguised nomenclature for Hinduism. We hear her chanting verses from the Upanishads and the Gita in unison
with her father. Intelligent, brave, highly patriotic and
dedicated, she would not let any diversion distract her from
the chosen path — not even marriage. She tells her mother:
"In this country every girl gets married — there is hardly
any exception. What if I don't follow the set path? What if I
prefer to be different? ... I have chosen my way. I am old
enough to know my mind. I don't have to seek the great glory
that belongs to one hundred million housewives."71

This particular mode of life recommended and practised
in Gandhigram was not meant to be a passive virtue. Positive
self-conquest and not escape into the emptiness of the jungle,
or a mere passive withdrawal from sex-life, was the core of
Brahmacharya propounded in this hermitage. And this sublimation
of instincts aimed not at winning vulgar acclamation but
achieving higher things of life. The inmates of the village
were exposed to self-discipline and training very early in
life so that they could grow into worthy soldiers of this
spiritland called Gandhigram.

These denizens of the spiritland, these prospective
heralds of a spiritual revolution as also their philosophy
of self-discipline, self-restraint and self-denial are
subjected to a ruthless assault from some important characters
in the novel. Suruchi, in an impulsive moment, agrees to toe
her husband's line in leading a life of abstinence but she
is never really won over to this aspect of his philosophy.
Satyajit's decision spells long years of mental torture for her. She is passionately bitter with her husband for starving the woman in her and accuses him of being too much of an egoist to understand things rightly. She is distressed to see their only daughter Sumita take after her father exactly. She feels that suppression or repression twists young minds out of shape and declares: "An ascetic woman is a contradiction in terms."72

Bireshwar, a close friend of Satyajit, has no patience with this ascetic approach either. He hates the sight of Sumita in white clothes, her drab garb of austerity, and hopes that one day she would be rescued by something more elemental than Satyajitism. He laughs at Satyajit's cramping unnatural attitude to life and dismisses it as plain nonsense.

Bhashkar, the Chief Engineer from Steeltown, is equally critical of this ascetic way of life. He thinks that Sumita with the ultra-ascetic note in her life was an abnormality. So, to quote from the original: "He would like her to reach into broad sunlight, away from the light that radiated from her father and enveloped her in its unhealthy glow. Unhealthy, for it would not let her be fulfilled as a woman — she should have a friend strong enough to release her from the cocoon of taboos she had built around herself; soon the fine-spun case would be too strong, and the full-grown moth, powerless to break loose, would be suffocated."73
In this spiritual conflict spread over a major portion of the book, it is not difficult to see that the writer is obviously out of sympathy with Satyajit and his daughter. His anti-ascetic note is only too pronounced throughout. This is made doubly clear when both Satyajit and Sumita, working under various external and internal pressures, are finally brought round to their opponents' point of view. Towards the close they are not struggling, tragic, or even pathetic figures, swept off their feet and carried along the vortex of instinctive life in spite of themselves. Rather, they look grateful to have been awakened to the full glory of a 'natural', 'normal' life and seem eager to make up for their past lapses with a vehemence. Before the curtain rings down, we have Satyajit wondering: "Was her Suruchi's hair still as long and beautiful as in those days? He would like to make sure; he would like to see her hair unbound, flowing down from back to the waist and beyond." Suruchi seemed to be "leading him forward to Santiniketan, to the point where his life with her had started."

His thoughts are no more preoccupied with the supreme task of spiritual transformation of his people; he is no more bothered about nonviolence, peace-marches or the Gandhian philosophy of self-conquest and self-discipline. Instead, with a sudden power Suruchi overwhelmed him and he is seen "half dreaming of a new life that she alone would fill." After he broke the
fast, Satyajit felt that Suruchi was an urge for him to live, relive, and not on the Gandhian plane.

Equally ruthless is the end of Sumita's earlier aspirations in the field. One touch of 'the terrific wave' and she is swept away on its crest — but not helpless or struggling even. Contact with Bhashkar roused the woman in her and that was the end of her life of dedication. We are supposed to rejoice (with her) that she was at last a 'normal' girl seeking the life of a 'normal' girl anywhere on earth.

But by now we are too puzzled to rejoice or think or do anything of the sort. Was Satyajit of the earlier part, struggling and striving to build himself into the ascetic image of the Father of the Nation, a nincompoop only who needed a libertine like Bireshwar to bring him to his senses? Was Sumita of the earlier chapters an ignorant booby too, who was an ascetic only by chance and not by choice, who never slipped because she never had a chance to slip? Who ever heard of a spiritual prophet, after hard, long years of painful trudging along the ascent to greatness, yearning to go back to the starting point? To stumble and fall sometimes is natural enough. But surely a hero with any mettle in him would rise, pick up the banner and proceed ahead with a full-throated cry of 'Excelsior'? Who ever heard of a leader, after a slip along the carefully chosen path, lying low in the dust, singing the
glories of a fall? Satyajit and Sumita exulting at the prospect of a return to the sensuous plane is a false note indeed, if the writer had ever intended them to be anything more than mere commoners affecting the airs of a hero or frogs trying to bloat themselves into the size of a bull.

Going through the novel one wonders if the writer has totally forgotten his original design of casting Satyajit and Sumita into heroic moulds and creating out of them figures that would chart new paths in the chaotic world around. In these two we were promised characters that would be the salt of the earth and not lose the lustre of their greatness just because they happened to be in the minority of two. And what do we actually get? Pale figures that are as different from the herds in the street as pilchards are from herrings! We cannot help exclaiming with Antony:

0, what a fall was there, my countrymen!??

Imagine an aspiring Vivekanand rushing into the arms of a woman in search of peace, comfort and security !. Imagine a Maharashi Raman turning to the cage of flesh to draw strength from! The blasphemy of it! Nature, we know, holds man to earth by the chain of sex. But, then, we also know that there are men who refuse to be earth-bound. They live on earth but are not of the earth. And who can deny that such dedicated souls are the hope of humanity — always and everywhere? What could a mature
writer like Bhabani Bhattacharya mean by desecration of them and their ideology? Is he so sure that catering to the 'normal' human urges is the highest destiny that man may aspire to? Obviously, the writer's vision is warped. He makes the serious mistake of mixing up the two different planes of existence — the higher and the lower, the spiritual and the sensuous — and he confuses the ideal with the common, the exceptional with the average.

If the castigation of Satyajit and Sumita and their philosophy of asceticism had come from Suruchi, Bireshwar and Bhashkar only, it would not have mattered much. Bireshwar had been guilty of sexual lapses in Cambridge but never had any qualms on that score. For Bhashkar wine and woman denote nothing worse than "zest for living". Suruchi, even after a lapse of twenty years, is still sorry for her unborn sons — Ajoy and Sanjoy — with not a glimpse into that plane of existence where all the children of the world are your own. Here are men who — whatever their social or intellectual calibre — are mere spiritual pigmies. If they, mere infants in the world of the spirit, sit on judgement and condemn those whom Bhabani Bhattacharya had meticulously been trying to build up into the image of 'God's Men', there would have been nothing serious or disturbing about it. What makes a mess of the whole thing is the writer's implicit and explicit support
of their stand. With Satyajit and Sumita yearning to join the ranks of the 'normal' people, we are at the end exactly where we were in the beginning. It is difficult to agree with Chandrasekharan that what the writer has achieved by this movement and counter-movement in the opposite direction — the movement in Suruchi from "freshness and spontaneity towards asceticism" and in Sumita "from asceticism cheerfully accepted towards fullness of life and freedom" is "a subtle balancing of effects." We had rather call it a tale of much ado about nothing or a story starting with a bang and ending in a whimper! No wonder that Raji Narasimhan dubs Bhabani Bhattacharya as a writer of "flattened sensibility."

This otherwise solemn subject is treated with wild gusto in the inimitable style of G.V. Desani. How do we react to these rhapsodies about chastity and celibacy in All about H.Hatterr? Of course in the same way as we do to the rest of the book. In Srinivasa Iyengar's words: "The oddest odds and ends of scholarship, the dizziest flights of fancy or poetry and the craftiest juggleries in idiom and phrasing often mingle to throw the reader's equanimity out of gear." To quote just two passages:

Concubinage and legitimate sex is absolutely forbidden to spiritual gentlemen. In fact, such men are no longer human. They are higher. I say, they are the nearest approximation to the Greek psyche, the Hindu atma, the Christian soul, the Muslim ruha, and there is a Hebrew conception as
well. I humbly agree with St. Matt. XIX, 12, There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Sex is very impure, please. ... Hence the last sadhana.82

"The utter unmentionable urge", he said to the disciple, 'assails only the votaries of the flower-clad Kama, to wit, the god of Desire. We two be belonging to the haloed celibacy class! Rejoice, therefore!'

'Oh, speak of cupidity, sire! Oh, have mercy upon my unworthy ears!'

'I command thee, boy, desist! Extinguish the fires of passion with meditation!'

'Meditation, didst say? It is so extraordinary difficult to meditate! It is so extraordinary difficult to extinguish the fires! Within the gaze-range of the velvet-black eyes of a desirable wench, thou knowest, the exigency of the vows of a he-nun like the present speaker are but a heap of ash, ash! mere residue of a corpse, a cadaver! dead-past, past the funeral rites!'

'Whist! Thou defilest my thoughts, also! Thy corrupt cupidity, I vow, shall yield thee nothing, nothing, save the non-existent ram's milk! In the female lies degradation. I say, save thyself from amorous temptation!'

'Oh, master, the sweetness of an eager emergency embrace with one's beloved! Ah, like loving vine, ivy, ivy! clinging tenderly to a sapling evergreen! The skirts, master! The saris, swami! Oh, excellency, the whispered love! Ah, me!'

'Speak not of sensuality in the presence of the Sage of Rangoon, son of a dog!'
"Father! for offending thee, may I never see another day dawn!"

Detachment

From asceticism to detachment is one step forward in the "pilgrim's progress" and Indo-English fictional figures often pause to think over, discuss and comment on this milestone in the spiritual journey onwards. It is surprising to see how often the Indo-anglian novelists have turned to the spring-source of this vital philosophical ideal — the Bhagavad 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, writers of the younger generation quote at least as profusely from the Gita as those of the older generation. The main motif in these holy allusions is that of detachment or non-attachment — the central philosophy of the Book Divine.

In B.Rajan's The Dark Dancer, Krishnan, the protagonist, wades his way to calm and serenity through a flood of tears. On Meenakshi Mukherjee's testimony:
When after the death of his wife, his desire, passion, quest for happiness and concern for belonging are all left behind, he emerges a freer and more detached man. This newly acquired non-attachment adds a new dimension to his realization of self which is beyond the limited concept of happiness. He no longer worries about his identity or his goal in life. A new equanimity replaces the previous tension and pangs of adjustment. The quotation from the Bhagavada Gita that appears on the last page of the novel is not without some significance:

He who seeks freedom
Thrusts fear aside
Thrusts aside anger
and puts off desire;
Truly that man
Is made free forever.

The detached man from the Gita, to quote from the same source again, "is not necessarily a man who has renounced the world. He could very well be a man living among the temptations of life, and doing many things that ordinary men do, and still be different internally." This Perfect Man of Hindu culture figures frequently in the Indo-anglian novel and we find both simple, illiterate characters as well as posh, sophisticated intellectuals subscribing to this cultural ideal of the country. Gautama (Cry, the Peacock) is a remote, detached bureaucrat who tries to soothe his high-strung, rather neurotic wife with quotations from the Bhagavada Gita. He explains to her the
popular Hindu ideal perhaps in the hope of one day winning her over to a practice of it: "That is the end of our philosophical aspirations — to exist like a lily upon water, rooted in water, yet with its petals dry, untouched by it, the lamp placed in a windless corner unflickering, the tortoise with its limbs withdrawn from the external world — oh, the entire cult of symbols that we have for this ideal existence."^86

Gautama's long expositions of the philosophy of detachment are not a purely ornamental phenomenon. 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. In a sharp contrast of temperaments we find Maya's love of life clashing with Gautama's philosophical detachment. As B. Ramachandra Rao suggests: "The demented Maya's logic which makes her kill her husband persuades her that a man who does not care for life, 'who dreaded passion' and who was detached would not miss life. Hence, killing him, Maya reasons, would not be a crime but a favour."^87

It is a dreadful logic but in harmony with the mad world of Maya's psyche. The author's own approach to this theme of ideal existence is "essentially ambiguous". As argued out by Meenakshi Mukherjee: "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."

Anita Desai carries over this philosophical problem of attachment and detachment to her next novel, *Voices in the City*, too. Going beyond mere passionate discussions, Nirode tries to mould his life on the principle of a detached acceptance of life. 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. *Bhagavada Gita* 's key word 'detachment' forms the very basis of the whole story.

Sindi Oberoi is a man lost in the labyrinth of modern civilization. He is a quack-religio who tries hard to develop the equipoise and balance of a Perfect Man of the *Gita* by practising 'detachment'. But obviously he starts his journey at the wrong end. Detachment, to be worth anything, has to start with oneself, but in Sindhi Oberoi's case it is just the reverse: "I had learnt to be detached from the world, not from myself," he himself admits.

Detachment, which requires the greatest moral strength to practise it, is treated as a vulgar, cowardly refuge by Sindi. He has no qualms about having open sex with June but
would not marry her because he is keen to live the life of detachment! No wonder detachment, which is supposed to remove the cobwebs of passion and attachment, acts as a blinding agent for him. He fails to see the truth under his very nose — his sin in living with June as he does also Babu's misery at the suspicion that June might be carrying on with another man. Babu, June and the child in her womb have to die and Sindi himself traverse a long and painful journey before he realizes the great truth both about himself and about detachment: "I had presumed that I could extricate her [June] from the web of her own action; that I could make her happy by simply standing still and letting her use me whichever way she wished. Nothing could have been farther from the idea of detachment. That was a fatal presumption."90

Sindi first interpreted detachment to mean 'inaction'. Slowly he realized: "Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that."91 And at last, when like Rajan's protagonist, Krishnan, discussed earlier, Sindi learns the truth the hard way, his vision clears:

That spring in New York I wandered about on the chequerboard of despair and hope. For the first time I became aware of the despair that had so long enveloped my being like a fish is surrounded by water. And, like a fish, I had always been unaware of it. I saw myself as I
had always been. An uprooted young man living
in the latter half of the twentieth century
who had become detached from everything except
myself! Where Kathy and Anna had taught me to
be detached from others, June's death finally
broke my attachment to myself. It was here that
my hope lay.92

Nayantara Sahgal's approach is different. Looked at
from her viewpoint, "Non-attachment cannot be the aim of
everyman at every phase of life — it is only the final
stage in the development of an individual."93 Therefore, 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. It is true that the narrator's "detachment
never becomes the central focus of the novel, but the author
tends to regard the narrator's attitude to life as harmonious,
because he has achieved what should be the ideal at his time
of life."94

R.K.Narayan, among the old guards, has tapped the
potentialities of the theme in a light-hearted, ironic
manner in The Vendor of Sweets. Jagan, the hero of the story,
refers to the Gita as his constant "guide to action" and
professes to live by general ideals enunciated in that Holy
Book. In the novel we have him reading the Gita consistently
"except for the time when the letters from America become
his scripture." His love for the Gita is again placed in "comic juxtaposition" to 'free cash', when we are told: "In his shop Jagan by turns reads the Bhagavada Gita and keeps a sharp look out for the cash receipts which he will count and stack away in the loft at home, the 'free cash' as he calls it, which will appear neither on his books nor the Income Tax returns." 

By the end of the novel this much-belaboured father is already a disillusioned man who concludes: "The best thing to do is to quit this brave new world — but, as Mr. Walsh observes acutely, he takes his cheque book with him!"

On the last page of the book we have Jagan leaving "the attachments of sense for the comparative isolation of the Sanyasi," Jagan"going into the Vanaprasthashram shaking himself free of his son and other relatives," Jagan proposing to live his life in this world "with some measure of tranquillity, by shaking off emotion when emotion has become false in substance and fettering in effect." And all the time Narayan tells his tale tongue in cheek which earns his hero the unenviable compliment: "Much of Jagan's pietism is humbug."

Govindan Nair in Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare is one protagonist who has already attained the ideal in the true sense. In him we find translated into reality the concept of
a man enjoying a superior bliss through detachment and inner calm. Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests: "He has realized the state of a jivan-mukta, which has been defined thus in Yoga Vasistha:

The jivan-mukta state is that in which the saint has ceased to have any desires ... He may be doing all kinds of actions externally, though he remains altogether unaffected by them internally ... He is full of bliss and happiness, and therefore appears to ordinary eyes to be an ordinary happy man ... He is wise and pleasant and loving to all with whom he comes in contact ... though unaffected within himself, he can take part in the enjoyment of others, he can play like a child and can sympathise with the sorrows of sufferers."103

VII

The Metaphysical Quest

Sudhin N. Ghose's tetralogy has been described as "a twentieth century Pilgrim's Progress."104 All the four novels deal with the story of a young man who "persecuted by the corrupt powers-that-be, realizes that his salvation lies only through investigating the deep spiritual springs of life."105 And so the protagonist, Balaram, decides to shed his other preoccupations and starts on a pilgrimage with Myna who herself is "a seeker — a seeker through song and dance and love's consecration."106 This makes the tetralogy "essentially
a parable of the human quest for the divine."

Ghose's mode of exploration of this spiritual journey has been described as "predominantly aesthetic — in the sense that he sees the quest for the divine as a worship of beauty... 'A Vision of Beauty is the same as a glimpse of the Sublime', says the Panditji in And Gazelles Leaping, and Ghose's search for the divine takes the form of a sensitiveness to Beauty. ... 'Urvashi is elusive', says the Panditji, '...Yet it is the quest for Urvashi, the search for Beauty, that is to say, which is the main purpose of human life. It alone distinguishes a man from an ape, from a gnat, from an ant, and from an elephant...""

One notices this quest for Urvashi, the Ultimate in human life, in all the novels of Sudhin N. Ghose and the writer is by no means a 'loner' in launching on such a spiritual, metaphysical quest. He was anticipated in the choice of his subject not only by a significant Indo-English novelist like Dhan Gopal Mukherji (My Brother's Face, 1925) but also by an illustrious English writer of the calibre of L.H. Myres who in his novel The Near and the Far handles the same problem of the search for truth. And he has a brilliant successor in Raja Rao who with his "Magnum Opus The Serpent and the Rope and his metaphysical comedy The Cat and Shakespeare
tackles the theme on a scale and in a manner unprecedented in the field. Ghose lacks the wide range and explicit philosophical overtones of his more ambitious co-travellers but there is no denying the fact that he has "contributed something truly significant to Indo-Anglian fiction." 109

At the top in the list of Indo-English quest novels is Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope. Through his highly intellectual protagonist, Ramaswamy, the author tries to look deep into the problem of Appearance and Reality. Dr. Dilip K. Chakravorty's comment on L.H. Myre's The Near and the Far may almost exactly be applied to this grand 'epic' on Hinduism: "Here is a work which might be described as a prolonged and agonizing search for the element of certainty in this wasteland of the twentieth century." 110

Ramaswamy and Madeleine marry but soon witness an utter wreckage of their marriage. They get involved in a tragedy that the best of their civilized, cultured selves cannot help avert: "To think that everything must end in darkness, even when spring is in the air ..." 111 C.D. Narasimhaiah feels that it is not a tragedy on an individual plane only and Ramaswamy and Madeleine are not the only ones caught in a crisis of the kind depicted here. They, to him it seems, "are types of the modern man and woman groping their way, while caught up in the endless flux of life. And this novel shows one way, which is
India's way, the essential Indian way, ... and the Indian way commends the mediation of the Guru or the spiritual teacher, who alone can see us through the flux of life."

'A metaphysical question and a metaphysical solution' may thus be a good summing up of the central theme of The Serpent and the Rope. This novel is at one level "the tragic story of a marriage of minds which drift apart," and on another and a deeper plane it is "the spiritual autobiography of a learned, sensitive and imaginative modern Indian and the saga of his quest for self-knowledge and self-fulfilment..." In fact, this quest for self-knowledge and metaphysical wisdom is central to the novel. As Raja Rao himself observes: "The main theme is the futility and barrenness of man in human existence when man (or woman) has no deep quest, and a thirst for the ultimate. Man's life here in Samsara is an august mission to find the Absolute. The Absolute according to the Indian tradition being incarnate in the Guru."

The very title of the novel owes its origin to the Non-dualistic philosophy of Shankracharya which proclaims that all the universe is God himself and whoever thinks otherwise, whoever looks upon it as a world separate from the Ultimate Reality, is mistaking the rope for the serpent. The self is regarded as the individual soul owing to the absence of the true knowledge of the self. To expound the doctrine in the
words of Swami Prabhavananda: "The apparent world, as it is experienced in the waking state, may be likened, says Sankara, to an imagined snake which proves, on closer inspection, to be nothing but a coil of rope. When the truth is known, we are no longer deluded by the appearance — the snake — appearance vanishes into the reality of the rope, the world vanishes into Brahman. ..."115

The epigraph to the novel points to the same direction too:

Waves are nothing but water.
So is the sea.

In the words of M.K.Naik: "The Serpent and the Rope is the story of Rama's quest to reach the 'water' of self-realization by following the 'direct path' of renunciation."116 And the end of his 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. 'The Guru is Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha; he is the Ultimate Reality Itself', declares a Sanskrit verse. 'If you would know the Eternal, humbly approach a Guru devoted to Brahman,' says the Mundaka Upanishad... To be in his company is spiritual education. To obey and serve him, to listen to his words — and even to his silences — is to be initiated. Rama does not tell us which way is to be his. But it is enough to know that he is on his way to his Guru, that his ship is nearing port.117
References to the theory of Supreme Illusion, to Advaita — the principle of oneness as the only Reality — and to the immortality of the soul form a harmonious refrain to the highly philosophic central theme of the novel. When their son falls ill, Madeleine changes his name from Krishna to Pierre for fear of having displeased the Hindu gods who could not have liked her — a non-Brahmin — to have a child with a name as sacred as Krishna. When informed about the change, Rama, who was in India at that time, respected her superstition and called him Pierre too. In fact, he was not bothered: "For all we do is really superstition. Was I really called Ramaswamy, or was Madeleine called Madeleine?"

Where but in a truly philosophical Hindu novel could one come upon lines such as the following: "The Brahmin, the Vedantin, has such arrogance. It was Astavakra who said, 'Wonderful, wonderful am I'; he with the eight deformations. Yes, one is wonderful — when one is not one, but the 'I'." and Sankara's Nirvana Satkam / his lion-like roar of 'Shivoham'; 'Shivoham' form an impressive undercurrent here. We have Rama often sing it with full breath in his lungs. We have the nervous, indrawn Russian Georges refer to it with awe, wonder and puzzlement in his voice. As about Savithri: "She wanted to surrender to Truth — and be free. Life was too much sorrow: not joy was its meaning, but liberation. That is why
when I taught her the Nirvana Shataka of Sri Sankara she was so happy — and she could sing it with deep emotion. 'Mano-
budhi Ahankara', she would start and, closing her eyes, enter into herself. It led her to her own silence."

Rama sang long verses about merging with the Brahma and his heart's inner desire is clothed in the remark: "I may still be a Yogi, some day," I said. "I shall follow Sri Aurobindo, and abolish death." Before leaving for India finally, he goes to see Madeleine's cousin Catherine and her husband Georges. There he sings to their baby-daughter Vera a cradlesong that symbolizes the Ultimate in human philosophy:

The Swan is swinging the cradle, baby,
Saying "I am That", "That I am", quietly.
She swings it beautifully, baby,
Abandoning actions and hours.

Rama's love for Savithri is treated on the same Vedantic plane too: "One cannot possess the world, one can become it; I could not possess Savithri — I became I. Hence the famous saying of Yagnyavalkya to his wife: "The husband does not love the wife for the wife's sake, the husband loves the wife for the sake of the Self in her." In his conversation with Georges, Rama talks from a plane where morals and morality become insignificant: "So man must seek not purity of mind and body but to be purity itself.
Man must not wish to taste the sweetness of sugar, as that old Bishop Madhavacharya said in the thirteenth century—I always think of someone sucking a bonbon!—but one must become, as the Vedantins say, sweetness itself."

Rama knows the goal and also the road leading to that goal. He is also equipped with at least part of the equipment for the holy march onwards. But he has still to make a start and brace himself for the trials and ordeals on the way. In this he needs the succour and guidance of an illumined, inspired soul who, in the language of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, has already 'touched the granny', i.e., is a liberated soul already. So Rama realizes that he must go to his Guru in Travancore. Iyengar makes some most interesting and illuminating comments on this momentous decision of Ramaswamy. To quote a rather longish excerpt:

It is Rama's destiny to show the path to Madeleine, although half inadvertently; he can show the way to Savithri, though it causes a wrench to him; he can give solace to Little Mother and Saroja his sister; he can help Catherine, his wife's cousin to find happiness with Georges. But how about himself? How is he to work out his own salvation? It is still on the other side, and he needs a bridge to cross over to it. 'No, not a God but a Guru is what I need', he jots down in his diary on 5 April 1954. And so he decides to seek his Guru in Travancore. In some respects, Rama at the end of the story is the Hindu counterpart to Stavrogin at the end of Dostoevsky's The Possessed. Although Stavrogin shows the way to others—to Shatov, to Kirillov, to Pyotr Verhovensky—he is himself bare of all support in the end; love
might perhaps save him still, but his "experiments with truth" have exhausted him, and he takes the surer way out of the mess — suicide. But Rama is the Hindu Brahmin; to him the surer way would be — not what B.R. Rajan Iyer has called body-cide, — the putting out of the body’s life, but real suicide — the killing of the ego, the ending of the illusion of individuality. And so Rama seeks out his Guru. 125

In his next novel The Cat and Shakespeare, Raja Rao once again uses this literary form as a peg to hang his metaphysics on. The metaphysical quest for Absolute Truth, the chief theme in The Serpent and the Rope, is a leading idea in The Cat and Shakespeare too. The latter is, however, an advance on the former novel in the sense that whereas in The Serpent and the Rope Ramaswamy is an intellectual pilgrim yearning to see into the truth of things, in The Cat and Shakespeare the author goes a step ahead and describes the state of spiritual serenity which descends in the life of a man who leads the life of detachment and resignation. Govindan Nair, the protagonist of the novel, though a man of modest education and living (being a mere clerk in the Ration Office), is a humanist and possesses Shakespeare like all-embracing catholicity. He detaches himself from Maya symbolized by the corruption rampant in the Rationing Office and follows the metaphysic of life as suggested by the symbol of cat in the prapatti marge in Yoga: 'Learn the way of the kitten' i.e. surrender to destiny. 126

The Cat and Shakespeare is thus "a thunderous affirmation of life in Hindu terms where life is the merging of the self
into the self — the paradoxical victory through surrender."¹²⁷

The cat-kitten analogy adopted here is as basic to the philosophy of Ramanuja, a celebrated interpreter of Vedanta, as the serpent-rope analogy is to Sankara's Advaita. Whereas Sankara stresses the path of knowledge in realizing the Ultimate Reality, Ramanuja advocates the path of love and devotion in achieving the same goal. In a beautiful exposition of this 'cat-hold' theory of Ramanuja in The Cat and Shakespeare Iyengar writes: "We all do stumble, the cleverest and the nimblest of us do; but had we the total trust of the kitten in the mother cat, our stumbling wouldn't matter, for we would be arrested half-way in our stumbling and jerked away to a haven of safety. This is the higher wisdom, Paravidya."¹²⁸ And again: "Once we have learnt the way of the kitten, we are saved; once we know that there is a soul within and Grace above, nothing can really touch us. For the rest, well, let's play the game as best we can: the ration shop, the revenue office, the court house — they will somehow sort themselves out. There's no point in worrying, no virtue in running the rat-race like everybody else, no sense at all in getting too deeply involved in the hucksterings of the market-place."¹²⁹

The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare thus share the essential thematic fundamentals, but the two differ vitally in their handling of the details that follow.
As M.K. Naik puts it:

If The Serpent and the Hope presents this quest as an arduous journey on the razor's edge, The Cat and Shakespeare exhibits it as going across the 'wall' of limited finite knowledge and finding oneself in 'a garden all rosy and gentle', as Pai does. ... Pai one day quite casually follows the cat across the 'wall' and sees a vision. He finds himself in a garden of bowers and many sweet-smelling herbs. 'There were old men with beards as long as their knees, and they talked to no one. Young men were in green turbans and others, children and women, sang or danced to no tune but to the tune of the trees. Snakes lived there in plenty and the mongoose roamed all about the garden!' 130

This vision of life as harmony, reconciling diversities and opposites, is only a prelude to a richer vision that follows when Pai walks behind the cat. The vision now vouchsafed symbolizes the kind of spiritual experience which a devotee of modified non-dualism will easily understand: "It presents the Divine Principle as Perfection incarnate, Absolute Good and Infinite Love, as both Immanent and Transcendent; and shows how the ego into which the self degenerates in the world must die when one surrenders oneself to God, and recovers the true Self which is an internal mode of God." 131

The Cat and Shakespeare, as it turns out, is a tale of great complexity indeed. It has "baffled the critics who find it 'all too chatty and catty'." Uma Parameshwaran finds it 'enigmatic' and feels that though
one may not be able to go the whole way with Rama (The Serpent and the Rope), one can understand and sympathize with him because in his questionings and sufferings he is a human being, a man aspiring to be God. But it is not easy to comprehend or go along with the pontifical sayings of Govindan Nair or the mystic cryptograms of Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare. The author and his critics sound as though they have looked into the heart of knowledge. One wonders whether they have, perhaps, looked too long at silence and thus lost touch with the language of men. 133

According to Iyengar's analysis, thematically Raja Rao's Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare "make a triology, and present a steady progression in Raja Rao's Sadhana. Also, The Cat is a 'a metaphysical comedy', even as Dante's Paradise is the conclusion of The Divine Comedy. If there are glimpses of Inferno's circles and Purgatory's slopes in Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope respectively, in The Cat and Shakespeare we are whirled by winged words and shown the 'death of death' and the efflorescence of the perfect perfection of Love, Truth and Harmony." 134

Even a hard core realist and a writer of social fixations like Mulk Raj Anand does not find it easy to ignore the philosophical question so pertinent in the Hindu background: Who am I? In Confessions of a Lover we have professor Sodhi and his young students holding long discussions on the subject, though level of treatment is crude and even downright vulgar. In approach and presentation, in tone and wording, Anand's
handling contrasts sharply and unfavourably with Raja Rao's subtle and refined treatment of this sublime subject. To illustrate the point we may well quote the following extracts from *The Serpent and the Rope*:

> Not mind nor Insight, Mineness nor Substance... 135

Or again,

> Not hearing nor tasting nor smelling nor seeing, But Form of Consciousness and Bliss; Shiva I am, I am Shiva. 136

In Mulk Raj Anand the same reads as:

> Who am I, Am I the five organs of my senses? — that is to say, am I the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the skin, with their functions of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch? Or am I the five organs of activity — that is to say — the organ that produces sounds, hands and feet that give movement, bottom which excretes and penis which gets excited at night? Or am I vital elements — that is to say, breathing, digestion, assimilation, circulation of blood, perspiration and excretion? 137

G.V. Desani, however, approaches this highly subtle and philosophic subject in his usual mock-comic strain. Under his perverse manner he makes Hatterr utter the same metaphysical conundrums as Ramaswamy: 'Hell, what is Truth? as one P. Pilate once asked. ... A truth-thing, or a Truth-idea, might be an a. By the time a feller has the notion of this a, a
sensation of it, its nature changes. What a feller has to communicate another a — to some feller, he has to use a word, a pointer, a shadowgraph, which might be a b. The message now is a (Truth) plus a (the notion of Truth), plus b(a word):baa. In other words if a feller wants to tell another what Truth a is like, he has to aa and baa.

A Ramaswamy would never clown here. To him it would be a matter of agony that Truth was incommunicable.

There are novels in Indo-English literature with only a smattering of this metaphysical stuff in them. For example, the only time Maya's tense nerves relax (Cry, the Peacock) is when Gautama talks to her of the immortality of the soul, of the continuity of life beyond the present existence which is no more than a "brief flash-in-the pan." Or again, in Remember the House, Baba's mother leaves her home in Bombay to sit at the feet of her Guru in the South so that she can attain the ultimate in human destiny — that is, the goal of God-realization. But these are brief casual scatterings that sometimes grow organically and are at other times forced into the novel so that they stand out like redundant growths — unabsorbed and unassimilated.

For their themes, writers of the Indo-English novel have thus 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 tenacious hold of casteism on Hindu society and the persistent crusade against it (He Who Rides a Tiger, The Road), the strength of family ties (Music for Mohini, Nectar in a Sieve), fighting tyranny the nonviolent way (The Dark Dancer, A Bend in the Ganges), faith in the writing finger, and a questioning voice (Cry, the Peacock, So Many Hungers), asceticism versus self-gratification (Shadow from Ladakh, All about H.Hatterr), detachment versus involvement (The Foreigner, The Vendor of Sweets), the Brahminical spiritual vision (The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare), is by no means an exhaustive list but it forms a fairly representative sampling of the typical Hindu themes that have fascinated writers of the Indo-English novel in the period under study.
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2 Monier Williams, pp. 248-49.


4 Ibid., p. 277.


6 Indian Philosophy, I, 221.


8 Quoted by Dr. Dilip K. Chakravorty in Introduction to India in English Fiction (Calcutta: Prayer Books, 1978), pp. 11-12.


11 Ibid., p. 141.


13 Ibid., p. 43.

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16 Ibid., p. 69.


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22 Ibid., p. 36.
23 Ibid., p.36.
24 Quoted by M.K. Naik in *Mulk Raj Anand* on p.29.
25 Ibid., p.38.
27 Ibid., p.36.
28 *The Serpent and the Rope*, p.5.
31 *The Serpent and the Rope*, p.15.
32 Ibid., p.60.
33 Ibid., p.400.
37 Ibid., p.439.
38 Monier Williams, pp. 248-49.

39 The Twice Born Fiction, p. 27.

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45 Cry, the Peacock, p. 108.

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47 Ibid., p. 87.


52 Ibid., p. 250.

53 So Many Hungers, p. 98.

54 Ibid., p. 50.
55 Shadow from Ladakh, p. 49.
56 Ibid., p. 31.
57 Ibid., p. 170.
58 Ibid., p. 170.
59 Ibid., p. 87.

62 Ibid., p. 198.
63 Ibid., p. 282.
64 Ibid., p. 280.
65 Indian Writing in English, p. 510.

66 A Bend in the Ganges, p. 75.
68 Sudhin N. Ghose, p. 34.
69 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
70 Shadow from Ladakh, p. 23.
71 Ibid., pp. 310-11.
72 Ibid., p. 289.
73 Ibid., p. 122.
74 Ibid., p. 212.

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*Cry, the Peacock*, p. 137.


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Ibid., p. 208.

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92 Ibid., pp.206-207.

93 The Twice Born Fiction, p.101.

94 Ibid., p.101.


96 Ibid., p.153.


99 "Humanity and Aesthetic Order in The Vendor of Sweets," p.152.

100 R.K. Narayan, p.113.


103 The Twice Born Fiction, pp.98-99.


105 Ibid., p.13.

106 Indian Writing in English, p.483.


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109 *Indian Writing in English*, p. 486.

110 *India in English Fiction*, p. 55.

111 *The Serpent and the Rope*, p. 395.

112 *Raja Rao*, p. 110.


117 Ibid., pp. 284-85.


119 Ibid., p. 79.

120 Ibid., pp. 187-88.

121 Ibid., p. 139.

122 Ibid., p. 405.

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124 Ibid., p. 111.

125 *Indian Writing in English*, p. 402.
126 "Literature as 'Sadhana'," p.173.
127 Uma Parameshwaran, p.160.
128 Indian Writing in English, p.407.
129 Ibid., p.407.
131 Ibid., p.99.
132 Indian Writing in English, p.408.
133 Uma Parameshwaran, p.161.
134 Indian Writing in English, p.411.
135 The Serpent and the Rope, p.91.
136 Ibid., p.114.
139 Cry, the Peacock, p.141.
Who will deny that to trace the influence of religion upon human character is one of the legitimate functions of the novel?

Walter Pater