As the Indo-English novel deals in the main with life in Hindu society, naturally it is Hindu characters that mostly fill the canvas here. The story or the plot mostly revolves round them and their beliefs and convictions. We meet here the "true Hindus" — the sensitive, intelligent souls who have rejected the husk but owe deep allegiance to the kernel of their ancient religion. These are people who are proud of their cultural heritage and do not let go of this pride even in the distant lands of Europe. They may apparently violate the traditional values of their ancestral religion, yet, somewhere deep within, they retain their tenacious grip on Hinduism. They don the mantle of modernism after the fashion of sophisticated, anglicized society around, but also manage to keep intact their faith in Hindu scriptures and the Hindu vision of life. In sharp contrast to these "true Hindus" are the "pure Hindus" who mistake trapping for essence. They swear by Hinduism and meticulously observe the rites and rituals enjoined upon them by this religion but refute the essence of Hinduism in live practice. Besides these ludicrous, repulsive specimens of fake Hindus — both of the professional and the non-professional type — there is still another class that may be termed "Hindu" in name only. These
characters have little acquaintance with their parent religion and whatever they know of it has only turned them into cynics and sceptics.

The rich variety of characters in the Indo-English novel may be categorized in still another manner. Here we come upon arch rebels who have no patience with the foolish and absurd practices of the past and would not budge an inch from their new-found stand to make a compromise with the old heads. Then there are the moderates — the 'conservative rebels' — who revolt and rebel but only in a selective, guarded manner. There are still others who raise the banner of change and progress, but unable to weather the consequent storm, beat a quick retreat. They allow themselves to be huddled into a position of compromise and soon resign themselves to the allotted fate.

This gallery of voluntary acquiescents and involuntary followers, of symbolic figures and allegorical characters, thus, includes men soaked deep in Hinduism. It also includes men who after rejecting Hinduism have found their moorings elsewhere and those who are still groping around in confusion and frustration. From lecherous men we move on to the ascetics and the mystical, highly spiritualized personalities striving towards perfection. We find here sannyasis, of renunciation — counterfeit or genuine; simple Hindu peasants and labourers.
who are men of deep faith, dumb Hindu wives who bear the yoke of traditional male supremacy as also the perpetuators and victims of the age-old caste system prevalent in Hindu society even today. This is to quote only a few from among the innumerable specimens of distinctly Hindu characters delineated in the long pages of the Indo-English novel.

Westernized Non-conformists

Nayantara Sahgal's characters are generally the urban elite of Hindu society. They come from socially privileged, intellectually enlightened, West-oriented families. Educated in English-medium schools, when not in Europe itself, studying text-books that have been compiled by Englishmen for English children with illustrations of English boys and girls on English farms, at the English sea-side or celebrating an English Christmas against a snow-covered backdrop, her main figures have undoubtedly imbibed a great deal of European culture. Some of them are total aliens on their own soil — extreme examples of what Nayantara herself describes as "Harrow-on-the Hooghly." They are highly diluted, if not
adulterated, specimens of Hinduism who know more about the history of England than about the ancient Indian history, more about Jesus than about Rama or Krishna and more about Christmas than about Holi or Dussehra or Deepavali. "Nearly English," they are better qualified to quote Shelley and Shakespeare and discourse on many an aspect of English life and letters than they are even to recognize what was related to their own culture and religion. Cut off from their root-soil and transplanted in the Western cultural plateau, these characters are sometimes pale and sometimes carbon copies of their Western counterparts. No wonder in these novels we have no Ramaswamy losing himself in the grandeur of Shankracharya's Nirvana Satkam nor any Jayadev longing for his Maitreyi to help complete his spiritual transformation.

However, it does not mean that the characters in Sahgal's novels are devoid of all interest in Hinduism. They indulge in long discussions on Hinduism. Whether they are Hindus or non-Hindus, Hinduism is their favourite subject of talk. They turn to it at the slightest excuse, even if it is to detract or censure it only. Some of them even nibble at important Hindu scriptures like the Rig Veda or the Upanishads or the Gita, though apparently their acquaintance with Hinduism is not very deep-rooted.
Most of Nayantara Sahgal's characters come from the state of Uttar Pradesh, that part of India "where men still greet one another with 'Ram Ram', where the carved images of many armed gods and goddesses reign over the countryside on festival days, where Divali is still a blaze of earthen lamps..." But their immediate surroundings are a world removed from this atmosphere. Sanad in A Time to be Happy belongs to the upper strata of society where the routine was: "golf, beer, a curry lunch, a siesta, the cinema, then a chota peg and dinner." Anyone daring to violate the code was a freak, "a stick in the mud." Mara, short for Tamara, is named for her Russian godmother. She smokes and drinks freely and frankly admits that she is more of a Christian than a 'Hindu'. When her husband protests against too zealous celebrations of Christmas on the ground that they were not Christians, Mara at once retorts: "Well, what are we, anyway? ... We're not Hindus either. What we know about Hinduism could be put into an acorn. ... I knew as much as any Catholic child about the Catechism when I went to school at the convent, and since then I've learned more about the Bible than I shall ever know about the Shastras. And except through your grandmother ... what do you know about your religion?" Her religious and cultural inheritance was like a log for her. She feels that they were like dead wood
on our backs and tells Jit: "We'll die if we go on like this. Sometimes I think we're already dead."

Basically, Nayantara Sahgal's world is peopled by non-conformists. Her characters are conscious of their Hindu origin, but they cannot bring themselves to accept much of what goes by the name of Hinduism. Empty ritualism, dead conventionality, blind faith and meaningless superstition have almost all been left behind by the time we enter the writer's rational world of liberal humanism. But in their eagerness to deny the shell, the outer covering, these characters very often dissociate themselves from the spirit or essence of Hinduism too. In their reaction against what goes by the name of Hinduism, they often swing to the other extreme, losing all sense of balance. Simrit (A Day in Shadow) takes strong drinks like Vodka and smokes too, even if it is her once a year cigarette only. Devi (A Situation in Delhi), another typical Nayantara Sahgal creation, finds a pleasant intoxication in drinking champagne, frosty from the refrigerator. She smokes borrowing a cigarette from Michael. Well, one may dismiss it all as a superficial veneer of Westernization. But it is a measure of their revolt against the traditional Hindu concept of chastity and morality that Gauri (Storm in Chandigarh) though happily married, has no sense of guilt about having an illicit liaison with Dubey and he too, describes her as
beautiful, generous and honest. Difficult to see how a sensible
person like Dubey could describe this infidelity as 'honest',
unless we rationalize that reaction and revolt have made him
swing to the other extreme, tilting the balance badly.

The great incongruity of what they have read of Hinduism
and what they see of it has a confusing effect on these
characters in the Nayantara world. They are puzzled and a
great cry of bafflement escapes them: "What are we?" Sanad,
cought midway between the two worlds — traditional and
modern — is in despair, unable to belong completely to
either. Trivedi wonders what actually we are commanded to
"believe". He tells Dubey: "You and I and our Brahmin ilk
are the custodians of something we haven't a notion about.
'Ve worship not what we can but what we cannot understand'."
And Dubey, the hero of the novel, himself is a critical
insider. He is sceptical about his Brahminic inheritance
and wonders what it had to contribute to the age in which he
lived. Like so many others in the writer's world, Dubey feels
that Hindu tradition has to be upheld and used in an
enlightened way. But it hasn't been so far. In a violent
outburst against society he remarks that what we witness
around us today is the "funeral march" of Hinduism. Trivedi,
too, is equally critical of Hinduism in its existing form. He
bitterly remarks that "this heritage of ours was all up in the
air. The most ancient tradition known to man has been
dependent these many thousand years on a sheep-like adherence
to ritual. Dependent on pots and pans, if you like, on what
we eat, when we fast and how often we bathe. And if it can be
called worship at all, it is a worship of subtleties and
abstractions." Kalyan Sinha, Jasbir Jain attests, "is
alienated from Hinduism because of the passivity of his foster
parents who, he feels, do not live life but simply bear their
lot like beasts of burden." Living and dying was not, in
fact, what they did. They stagnated in the turgid waters of
their lives and gradually rotted away. Kailas Vrind has already
broken free from the narrowness of conventional world represented
by his mother "who had a way of reducing all groping, all
search, all soaring discovery to implacable little formulas."  

Manohar Malgonkar is another important Indo-English
novelist who excels in painting that modern educated class of
Hindu society which has drifted far from the parent religion.
With confidence he delineates those characters who try to
fulfil the "Satpura Code" of qualities rather than observe
the traditional code of Hindu religion. Even if they observe
Hindu rituals and customs, it is generally a mere formality
and not an act of faith with them. They have no scruple about
moulding and mending them to suit their personal convenience.
Lt. Col. Kiran Garud is first and foremost a gentleman according to the norms of the Satpura Regiment. When it comes to the tallying of his daughter's horoscope with that of the prospective bridegroom, Arvind Mathur, Sonal would not mind if the astrologer gave a slant to his opinion to suit his client's wishes. Abhaya gives up wearing the sacred thread within a few days of the thread ceremony. This may well represent his whole attitude towards religion. The more his father tries to convert him to religious beliefs, the more un receptive does he become to all religious teachings. The net result is a superficial conformity to Hindu religion. His attitude to the question of caste divisions in Hindu society or the problem of woman-emancipation is conservative, no doubt, but in his own personal life he enjoys the full freedom and luxury of modern permissive society which is a far cry from the disciplined code of ancient Hindu religion.

Gopal Chandidar, Sundri's husband, "represented the modern generation, staunchly opposed to the structure of the joint Hindu family with its rule by the elders, its clinical segregation of the male and the female." And like other westernized young men what he "hankered for was the linen-bush-shirt and sunglasses set of Bombay."

Manohar Malgonkar specializes in drawing this type. If he attempts to portray the devout type, he is obviously
out of his depth. The result is that his devout figures are not convincing. Moreover, except in his historical novel *The Devil's Wind*, in his writings 'devout' Hindus appear only as ridiculous figures with no depth of character and no brains almost. This is going a step farther than Sahgal in whose novels devout Hindus — treated as rare relics from the past — are insignificant yet fairly respectable personalities. Kamal Kant (*Distant Drum*), Kiran's successor at Baniwade, displays a keen interest in temples and holy men; but he is hardly a respectable figure by any standards. General Shantilal, another character in the same novel, had always been known as the 'Sadhu', the holy man. He never drank, never smoked, never sang bawdy songs. He recited the scriptures for at least one hour every day. But he was always looked upon as something of a crank, a misfit in any unit or mess, and no one seemed to want him. He was shunted from one unimportant job to another. Dealing with this aspect of his art, Sharma rightly asserts: "Malgonkar's major concern seems to lie in those qualities of character that the 'Satpura Code' embodies. The fulfilment of this code is the measure of individual integrity among his protagonists and its components tend to offer a definition of man and his moral stature."16

Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* is the story of another typical Westernized upper-class Hindu family. Here the
head of the family disapproved of "religious ritual of any sort" and held that the celebration of religious festivals "merely perpetuates prejudice and breeds an entirely unjustified sense of righteousness." Talk about polo, dancing, drinking or swimming is common enough among the characters around Baba, the central figure in the story. Some of the family's relations study in Oxford. Going to race-courses and staking on horse-races is not uncommon for the men in her circle. Baba herself would often read foreign novels, "finding in them a sympathy for if not an actual glorification of the romance that filled my head."  

Most of the characters in the novel can claim no roots in the past. Baba's father and mother have been to London and the heroine herself was educated there. Shailini, Baba's sister-in-law, aping "the perfect Hindu wife," is more of a caricature than an attractive person. Under the circumstances, it is natural for Baba to develop some sort of adhesion to the 'romantic tinsel' oozed out by the air around. Throughout the novel she remains a non-conformist, cherishing the glittering Western set of values. It is only before the close that her "perspective undergoes a change under the influence of a quiet, slow, typically Indian pace of life, and that of her mother and grandmother, the Amma of Jalnabad, who is the symbol of the Indian attitude to life." Stumbling through her early infatuations, she at last reaches "the bed-rock of sensible
values.” Just before the curtain comes down, we have the satisfaction of seeing her opt for "safety and conformity." In preferring comfortable Hari to the princes of the romantic mirage, she at long last asserts the "rock-bottom Indianness in herself"—a quality that even a careful reader could not have detected easily.

II

Arch Rebels

The characters discussed above are the ones who want to be in the vanguard of change and progress but most of them are arm-chair academicians only. They lack the zeal and fervour of great pioneers and reformers. It is even doubtful if what they want to achieve can be termed as a revolution at all. They are at best 'conservative rebels' and though they have their importance as a link in the chain, the limelight is stolen by a more fiery group. We have here in our novels, as in real life, a group of arch rebels who hate any compromise with their principles and do not regard any sacrifice too great for the cause they would uphold. They pursue their goal with a vengeance and carry away others with the magnetism of their
personality. The 'contagion' infects a substantial number of people who work to wreak a change in the social setup.

Kalo in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides A Tiger* emerges as a rebel against the age-old Hindu caste divisions. Of course, with his deep roots in the past, it was not easy for him to uphold the banner of revolt. Putting on the sacred thread with nine white strands — a Brahmin’s holy emblem — had at first involved great mental conflict for this low caste wretch. He had closed his eyes. He had held his breath. Clutching the sacred thread in his hands, he had passed it swiftly over his shoulder and across his bare chest. The daring of that gesture had made him tremble. With one stroke he had thrown off the heavy yoke of his past and flouted the three thousand years of his yesterdays. Kalo forges an instrument of revenge out of the very shackles which had been used to crush him and his kind over the centuries. And once he transcends the station that birth and blood had assigned him, exhilaration and a new courage fill his heart. He was aware of the blasphemy he was committing in donning a Brahmin’s garb and in faking a miracle about the stone image of Shiva. It was shocking that he should be deceitful about such sacred things. But the rebel in him was stern and implacable.

The success of his experiment brings confidence to Kalo and lends a note of command to his voice. He often uses
the handle of caste to browbeat and crush the aggressive clients at his temple. Taking cover behind his Brahminic airs, he makes them shed their pride and bow low, even touch his 'Brahminic' feet. Kalo shines bright in borrowed feathers!

Kalo hoped to heap sacrilege on orthodox Hindus by making them violate the so-called sanctity of the caste system and by making them pray to a dead stone as though it were a living image of Shiva. He wanted to make his hard-hitting attack not on an individual but on the life-system that made such individuals possible. He wanted to forge perdition for all who were nurtured in that life, perdition from which there could be no expiation even. He chooses to make a bold challenge and carries it through with great strength of character. He fights his battle with tact and tenacity.

Before the end, we find Kalo growing to his full height. He is now strong and bold enough to take off his mask and look Hindu society straight in the face. He publicly confesses how he made fools of these Hindus and even defied their gods. Following his disclosure when people shout curses and abuses at him, Kalo remains unruffled. In the writer's own words: "He felt stronger than all of them together. His passion had subsided and a great calm was in him. His face was sad and his eyes softened strangely with pity." Complimenting Kalo on his achievement, Biten aptly remarks:
"You have triumphed over these others — and over yourself. What you have done just now will steel the spirit of hundreds and thousands of us. Your story will be a legend of freedom, a legend to inspire and awaken." Against the background of Hindu social and religious order — or should we call it disorder? — Kalo's intelligence, his strong willpower, his rebellious spirit, his supreme stroke of courage in killing the tiger he had been riding, stand fully revealed.

Biten, Kalo's mentor in the novel, is another powerful exponent of Bhabani Bhattacharya's anti-caste crusade. His sensitive mind rebels against the darkness and tyranny of Hindu caste divisions. His orthodox Brahmin parents had spent hours everyday in the prayer-room chanting hymns or reading from the scriptures. And yet, what came of it? All Hinduism did was to petrify their hearts and blind their human vision. When their daughter falls in love with Basav, a non-Brahmin, they are mad with rage. All Biten's protests against their hopelessly narrow approach prove in vain and the poor girl is doomed to a life that is no less than death itself. The day his sister left for her husband's home, the turn in Biten's life began. He felt a break within — a break from that orthodox religion which had twisted his parents' human feelings out of shape. That day for the first time in his
conscious life, he ignored traditional worship.

Later, when Purnima found life in her new home unbearably wretched and committed suicide, Biten clutched and pulled his Brahminic thread hard till all nine strands broke. He flung the thread to a corner of the room as if it were something evil. And to the gaping, gasping Basav he declared: "Basav dada, I am a Brahmin no longer. I am one of you." The grim tragedy of Purnima's death destroyed his faith in the ancient theories of Hindu religion. His parents would have been horrified to see him without the sacred thread. They would have demanded his atonement and fresh investiture. So he left home and boarded the train for Calcutta.

Biten is a man of firm resolve. He was a Brahmin and Bikash Mukerjee was his real name. But when Kalo stipulates Brahminism for marriage with his daughter, Biten would rather lose Lekha than fall back on his caste-privilege for getting what he desires so eagerly. Biten stirred Kalo to depths, not by words but simply by example — an example of smothering one's own heart in loyalty to an ideal. He comes back in time to hear Kalo and to see him drive his steel deep into the tiger. Trained by him, the scum of the earth had hit back, hit where it hurt most. In this story of revolt, thus, stand embodied Biten's transparent sincerity and sharp
intellect, his strong humanism and fervent revolutionary zeal.

Viswanath, though a minor character in the novel, is in line with Kalo and Biten in his revolt against Hindu customs and Hindu gods. He had, in fact, "nothing but irreverence for the temple and all it stood for, and he did not trouble to hide his feeling." He says bitterly: "In this land of thousand and one gods, why is there such devilry and such misery?" He too had once loved and worshipped the gods. But what had come of it? His three year old child died of hunger. It killed his faith in the Hindu gods, but luckily the goodness of his heart lived on.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's tirade against orthodoxy does not begin or end with He Who Rides a Tiger. Harinder, a young friend of Jayadev in Music for Mohini, is another of Bhattacharya's characters who battles against conventionality. He initiates the Battle of the Crocodile Pool and ingenuously carries it through. He sounds the war-cry against caste-distinctions and threatens an intrepid crusade against it. He believes in human dignity, progress and change and has no love lost for orthodox Hinduism.

Mohini's father is poles apart from his orthodox mother. His faith is not in horoscopes but in microscopes.
He dismisses all talk about luck signs and the like as mere rubbish. Away in the Big House, in a moment of crisis, Mohini would hear a voice as though her father was speaking: "Have courage," it said. 'Do not bow down to such insult. You are the new India. The old orthodox ways have been our yoke, have enslaved us. Let us be free.'

Bhashkar (Shadow from Laadakh), the Chief Engineer from Steeltown, has no patience with the ascetic mode of life so enthusiastically advocated by the Hindus in India. He contemptuously terms it "Satyajitism" and sums up his reaction to it in a taunting comment: "Sing the glory of unawakening." Right till the end there is no letup in his hostility to this side of Satyajit's philosophy of life representing Hinduism in Gandhigram, the taboos and inhibitions advocated by it and he remains vehemently critical of these "rickety props of spiritual India."

Mulk Raj Anand has successfully projected his image as an iconoclast and it is no wonder that most of his characters have no love lost for the Hindu religion and all it stands for in the society today. The Prince-hero of The Private Life of an Indian Prince makes a mockery of all old customs. The narrator-hero in Confessions of a Lover is dead against the Hindu religion which he thinks is incapable of receiving fresh
inspiration. He has no better epithets for the superior-caste Hindu brotherhood than "oldies" or "the swine" and boldly declares: "The important thing is to be — to become rebellion itself: Free! Free! Free! Utterly free." Then there is a vein of systematic and manifest radicalism running through Dhooli Singh who dares to challenge the whole community by providing clothes and shelter to the Harijans when their houses are burnt down by the caste Hindus. Bhikhu, "who bears the weight of the message of the novel," is something of a rebel too. Unlike his mother Lakshmi, he refuses to take things lying down. 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." A "militant ideology" permeates the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand and his writings have appropriately been called "a literature of protest." He feels that the modern Indian writer had, of necessity, to ask questions of caste and class and women. And so he deals with the theme of caste-distinctions in Untouchable and The Road, and in Gauri he chooses to concentrate on the hopelessly low status of woman in the traditional Hindu society. Here Gauri, his most memorable woman character, is bullied, mistrusted and
forsaken by her husband. She is forced to leave her home on the foot-hills of the Himalayas under the ever-present shadow of 'the silver' heights of the 'Doula Dhar' where the god Shiva and his consort Parvati or Gauri dwell.36 She, who had all along been the traditional Hindu wife — gentle, long-suffering and all-forgiving — is driven out of her home and forced to go and work as a nurse in Colonel Mahindra's hospital in Hoshiarpur. And there we witness a spectacular change before us. Gauri realises how narrow, limited and hidebound to convention the life she had been leading in the village had been. The Gauri that is reunited for a brief spell of felicity before the tragic parting at the end is a Gauri changed altogether. As she herself puts it: 'When I first came to this house, I worried so much about what the village would say. I had no tongue in my mouth. I only did the house work and lay down to sulk and weep on that little bed. I certainly could not think. Now how can you fly if you have no wings?'

Her contact with the urban world has given her wings, and she is now a bold and self-reliant young woman, who has learnt to think about the problems of rustic life and has also come to develop ideas regarding religion, education and other matters.37

We may nicely sum up the story of her character in M.K.Naik's words: "Gauri's progress from under the shadow of the hoary and holy Doula Dhar to the modern hospital in a city is a journey from tradition to modernity. It signifies for her
a change from bondage to freedom, from meekness to self-assertion, from weakness to strength; in sum, it is the transformation of a cow into a tigress."

The Maharani in *The Princes* is a creature of strong feelings. She travels a long way in the novel — from worshipping the *Satis* in her husband's family to taking up Islam — the religion of her lover. The Maharaja and the Prince may be shocked, but there is certainly something heroic about the Queen refusing to spend the rest of her life shut away in a dark place and, thus, tearing herself away from conventions.

Anita Desai is an expert at portraying problem-characters like Maya, Nirode, Monisha and Sita. The problems of these characters spring from (to quote B.Ramachandra Rao's words in a slightly different context) a "constitutional inability to accept the values and attitudes of society" around. Maya, the hypersensitive heroine of *Cry, the Peacock*, is unable to understand the detachment of her husband, Gautama, and she hurls him to death in a fit of blinding craziness. Nirode, the Bengali youth at the centre of *Voices in the City*, has gone sour on his elders and betters. He is a sceptic who feels lurching within him an increasing burden of dissatisfaction and irresolution. In the words of Darshan Singh Maini:
Volatile, restless, loquacious and anarchic, he can neither turn his undoubted gifts and talents to commodity and become a part of the Establishment, nor become a true revolutionary or a path-finder. ... A rootless nihilist, he has nothing to clutch at, no religion or creed or doctrine. He is, in fact, a hang-over, twilight revolutionary who goes to seed because he has abused his intellect in the name of freedom. ... In this negative rebel, a psychic outlaw, Anita Desai has presented successfully the archetype of the Bengali rebel in search of a cause.40

Equally "fractured and starved" is the life of Nirode's married sister, Monisha. Like him again, she is an abject rebel, a craven tragedian, whose impatience with the void in her life culminates in suicide. Sita, the major protagonist in Where Shall We Go this Summer, finds that the majority of the members of society live lives full of dullness, boredom and deadness ... Living in 'their age-rotted flats,' they appear to be leading inauthentic existences. ... Their 'subhuman placidity, calmness, and sluggishness' infuriate Sita. She regards their colourless and soulless existence as a provocation and even a threat to her own existence. To challenge them, to shatter their complacency, and to shock them into a recognition of the reality, Sita behaves provocatively — she starts smoking, and begins to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces.141
There is another category of lovable characters in this world that may be described as highly intellectual, liberal Hindus or "mature compromisers". These true Hindus do not blindly approve of all that goes by the name of Hinduism. They do stand for radical change and progress but in a peaceful, reformative way only. They would like to retain all that is good in Hindu culture but at the same time they have no hesitation in adopting fresh ideas. This is especially true of some important fictional figures of Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

The Serpent and the Hope is the story of Rama, an extraordinarily sensitive scion of a Brahmin family who had read the Upanishads at the age of four and was given the holy thread at eight. He represents or is supposed to represent the metaphysical Hindu India which transcends time, place and death even. Madeleine married him "because he represented a country and a cause — he was an Indian and a Brahmin." To Savithri he represented the highest self — that
which she was in quest of from life to life. But as at the
level of the physical world. Pratap was her lord, there
could only be a ritualistic or symbolic union of the two
and the ritual is observed in Rama's London room.

Ramaswamy's sensibility is essentially Indian.

as O.P.Mathur puts it: "He says the Gayatri Mantra daily.
To him even the Indian trains seem to chant Mantras and a
dip in the Ganges makes him feel so pure that he cannot
imagine any sin being committed in the name of religion.
India [which is another name for Hinduism here] is like a
juice to him, giving him sweetness and the desire of
immortality."

Rama is interested in the serious things of Vedanta
and is, therefore, a Hindu at a much higher and deeper level
than the level of superficial rites and rituals. When he
received the news of his second son's death in France, his
reaction was: "I was neither in pain, nor was I relieved; I
felt above both, like a child looking at a kite in the sky,"
for he knew what every Hindu knows — that life and death
are alternate events. The soul leaves one body only to take
on the other.

As he is an Advaita Vedantist, Rama's is "an attitude
of absorption, assimilation, and generally, one of
inclusiveness. When he landed in Naples:
Europe didn't seem so far and alien nor Madeleine's golden hair any the less familiar', 'I was too much of a Brahmin to be unfamiliar with anything,' and as though stung by his own consciousness of exclusiveness in the very attempt to be inclusive, he posits a quick corrective: 'Such is the pride of caste and race.' But the pride of race never really came in the way of a civilized participation. Pointing to a chapel in France he could see 'the Mother of God to whom man built a sanctuary, a convocation of stone ... For it was the Word of God made actual in prayer and fast. ... I might have led a cow to her altar had I been in Benares!'

Rama is a highly intellectual man and much above the common run of humanity. He attempts to extend the traditional notion of Brahminism "beyond its original confines to apply it in a larger world of alternative creeds, scientific materialism and comfortable jet aeroplanes." He even tries to intellectualise Vedanta, aspiring "to the formulation of a modernised and intellectualised, certainly politicised, version of Shankara's philosophy by widening old horizons."

But though 'a most civilized young man from an older culture,' Rama is not yet a perfect man. He is only trying to attain perfection the Vedantic way. To put it more plainly, "he has known Vedantism intellectually but not yet realised it spiritually." He has to pass through life, through fire, before he can reach maturity. Hence many pitfalls in his life.
Savithri, "the swinging graduate from Cambridge," is at least as much of a Hindu as Rama himself. To quote from the original:

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.50

Madeleine praises Savithri as the product of three thousand years of civilization. "Ramaswamy, profoundly grounded in the culture of his own land ... sees in Savithri the finest embodiment of his own tradition (despite the veneer of Western life which he thinks can be removed with a babul thorn) ; her Kunkum, chowli, sari, blackbeads lend her an auspiciousness which is reinforced by her knowledge of Bharatruhari and the songs she sings of Mira."51

But though great in their own ways, both Rama and Savithri are not 'perfect' Hindus. In C.D.Narasimhaiah's words: "He is imperfect and so is she, not because of her smoking 'like a chimney', singing 'jazz' and dancing 'boogie woogie' but because of the desire still clinging in her to possess Ramaswamy. They must both reach a state when they can say:
I am not one, I am not two, I am neither one
nor two, \textit{Ahem nirvikalpo nirakara rupo}.\textsuperscript{52}

Dr. Kirillov obviously is dedicated to Marxism and by
his own confession considers metaphysical inquiry the result
of vitamin deficiency. But in spite of his avowed loyalty to
Marxism, he daily recites Sri Sankra's metaphysical verses
and is profoundly in love with the time-honoured Indian lore
and philosophy.

Govindan Nair in \textit{The Cat and Shakespeare} is the
central character of the tale. He is the one knowledgeable
man in the novel and though "a betel-munching non-Brahmin
he could 'explain Brahman to the Brahmin'".\textsuperscript{53}

Among the great lovers of Hinduism in Bhabani
Bhattacharya's novels may be counted the hero and the
heroine of \textit{Music for Mohini}. They want to change much in the
past, yet would preserve their precious heirloom at a great
cost. Thus, in their love of Hinduism they may be described
as neither "dull conformists" nor "misfit rebels" but
"mature compromisers".

Jayadev is a young scholarly reformist. His ideal
figures in life are the glorious sages from the pages of
the \textit{Upanishads}. The vision of their greatness has so filled
his mind and heart that consciously or unconsciously he tries
to identify all that is dear to him with these great figures. His references to Yagnavalkya and Maitreyi run through the novel like a refrain as it were. His very first thoughts on the night of his marriage are: "Did she know herself, know the Maitreyi in her?" And in the weeks following their marriage "Jayadev called her Maitreyi. Maitreyi, who lived three thousand years ago, Maitreyi, the wife and inspiration of Yagnavalkya, the greatest thinker of his age, who had strained for immortality." Maitreyi must have helped her husband more with intuitive realization than with her knowledge. So, he hoped, would his Maitreyi. Modern-minded, she would nevertheless grasp the essence of ancient thought and attune herself to its rhythm. Then she would illumine her husband's way towards his goal.

True, Mohini's ignorance had at first startled him. He had felt depressed. But then he had reflected that Maitreyi was in no small way Yagnavalkya's own creation. And he decided eagerly to teach Mohini. What if he must begin at the beginning? He began by giving her lessons in Sanskrit. And for a fairly long period afterwards, "he was an eager teacher, not an ardent lover. He was creating his Maitreyi." Who but a young Brahmin could play the role ascribed to him here? This idealistic trait in Jayadev, drawing its inspiration from the celestial Hindu texts, lends a unique flavour to
Bhabani Bhattacharya's characterization and helps balance the dull monotony of his realistic, down-to-earth Hindu figures elsewhere!

Mohini fails to play the role expected of her, but Jayadev cannot tear himself away from his vision: "If only she were his Maitreyi, his fellow-traveller, he had often thought wistfully, they would have worked together in complete harmony. What bliss!" and later, when he woke to the folly of his romantic fancy, of expecting so much from a girl of eighteen, he still missed his lost vision. This is enough to show how "in some ways he was one with his ancestors, those strange men in ageing oil paint," though in quite a few others he was unbowed, unfettered by his inheritance. He had no faith in horoscope-reading, no patience with ignorance and superstition. He refused to be a slave to stars and put his foot down firmly to cure his mother of her crazy beliefs. He ruthlessly seized the bowl and flung it aside just when his wife was on the point of offering her blood to the goddess (under pressure from her mother-in-law) in the hope of being blessed with a child.

Jayadev is an unmistakable Hindu character but no mere puppet or automaton in the hands of orthodoxy or the self-styled custodians of Hinduism. His great strength of
Mind, his firmness of character and the delicate idealism in his nature make him a lovable person, revealing the best both in Hinduism as also in the art of Bhabani Bhattacharya.

Mohini, the pivotal character in the novel, is convent-educated and modern and yet she has her roots deep in the Hindu past. We have the writer's own testimony on the point: "The Hindu maiden, born and bred in the ancient star-light of Vedic civilization, washed by the running streams of the centuries, sheathing her limbs and her thoughts in a conventional dress to suit the needs of each passing age, was innately unchanged. ..."59 And on her wedding day, in spite of all her West-oriented training, she was one of "a hundred thousand Hindu maids [who] each bridal day of the year give their hearts to their unknown husbands, asking nothing in return but approval."60 After her marriage, for her husband's sake, she resolves to absorb new ways of thought and habit and to cultivate new interests. Rebellion clutches her heart at times; she finds the new way of life in the Big House too harsh and oppressing. But casting herself in the mould of an ideal Hindu wife, this young rebel subdues herself slowly. Two opposite influences — modernism and traditionalism — work on her but at last she gives her body, her soul and her dream to the Big House. Her surrender is complete and absolute.
In spite of the apparent contradictions in her behaviour, one may well claim credible consistency in Mohini's character. Her behaviour is normal in relation to the society in which she lives, minor aberrations notwithstanding. There is enough detail in the novel to give solidity to her image as a young Hindu wife, straining for perfection.

Old Mother, though well-versed in time-honoured ways and a faithful observer of Hindu rites and conventions, is by no means a relentless fanatic in her faith. Her *Ekadashi* fast, her frequent threats to go to the Holy City of Benares whenever her counsel is disregarded on any vital issue, her effective rejection of any proposal to marry Mohini into a circle of people with no true culture, her contemptuous condemnation of "Apes of Westernism," her faith in amulets and superstitions, her fixed ideas and prejudice against modernism leave us in no doubt about the camp she belongs to. And yet, happily we note, unlike the mother of the Big House, she has "compromised with modernity and her struggle to uphold the orthodox ways was without passion. ... Old Mother was of the old and of the new..." She is a staunch Hindu but by no means a blind, ruthless protagonist of her religion. Barring a few insignificant instances, her conduct and behaviour seem to embody much that is positive in Hinduism.
Besides these, there are many other liberal, likable, distinctly Hindu characters who have retained the essence of Hinduism. Krishna (The Dark Dancer), Srinivas (Nowhere Man), Appa (Two Virgins), Nalini (Too Long in the West) and Premala (Some Inner Fury) are some other characters who have kept a strong link with their Hindu origin while agreeing to let fresh air from Christian Europe and America enter their windows. Jagan in R.K.Narayan’s The Vendor of Sweets is not a highly educated personage. Technically, he does not belong to the intelligentsia, but it is interesting to see how smoothly he fits into both the ancient Hindu world of the Gita and the modern, affluent, technologically advanced world of his son who has just returned from America.

IV

Staunch Hindus

There is another category of characters, mostly women, that may be termed as staunch Hindus. They are orthodox types — recognizable from a distance — and perfectly fit in the set pattern of traditional conservatism. Prominent among them is/mother of the Big House (Music for Mohini)
who is patently the 'grihini' — chief wife — of a joint Hindu family. She might have been lifted off the pages of Modern Hinduism by Wilkins:

Next in authority to the Karta is the grihini or chief wife in the family. This may be the wife or it may be mother of the Karta. In all matters relating to the management of the house, and to the conduct of the female members of the family, her influence is as great as that of the Karta in all that concerns the men... it is quite possible for her to make the home a happy or miserable one for the younger women... The grihini leads a life of self-denial...62

The whole description, down to the minutest detail, applies to the mother of the Big House. She is a widow, mother to Jayadev, head of the family here. Back in the village, her husband had perished in the floods long ago when she herself was away on a pilgrimage. Absence from the village deprived her of the great chance of committing Sati in line with the last lady of the house but she made up for it by leading a completely austere, cold and detached life. This white-clad pillar of orthodoxy permitted herself no comfort or luxury in spite of the great affluence of the family and even subjected herself to rigorous discipline. She kept installed on a throne of god a pair of wooden sandals belonging to her dead husband and offered them worship everyday without fail. She asks Mohini, on her very first entry into the house, to prostrate herself to this
symbol of her father-in-law and ask his blessings from Heavenland. "I have no other god but him," she tells the new young mistress of the house.

Right in the tradition of the grihini, the mother rules the household with a strong hand. She is most stern and exacting towards her son's bride. She is, as Mohini rightly feels, adamant, uncompromising and most meticulous in the observance of conventional duties. She forbids Mohini to sing any songs other than the devotional ones. Mohini may be educated and accomplished, but she must fit into the mould if the house is to know any peace. A most glaring, even shocking demonstration of her faith in the family-tradition can be seen in the snake-bite incident in the novel. Jayadev was reported to be stung by an adder. With a scream Mohini flew toward the gate. But the mother lifted an arm and commanded, "Wait!" The Palki, the palanquin that had come to fetch them, must go empty that it may rush to fetch back Jayadev. And they must not walk or run to the place of the accident: 'It is not becoming'.

Mohini was staggered. She could hardly trust her ears. She stared at the mother and felt violently sick...

'I too, suffer,' she murmured through her tense white lips. 'With every moment that passes, something dies in my blood and bones!' And yet they must wait!
What concessions could be expected from such a diehard conservative when this family tradition is threatened in any way? What would she not sacrifice at the altar of this cold monster? What may sound vulgar and repulsive to a rational, enlightened mind, is naturally not so intolerable to her blind orthodoxy. It is in this background that we must see, examine and judge her last two desperate attempts to get an heir to the Big House. The chronic Hindu craving for a son is a well-known phenomenon. A great sense of urgency is attached to the birth of a son both for worldly and other-worldly reasons. A son is important to look after the parents here in this world as also to carry the family-name. But far more important is his existence for the performance of after-death rites that are believed to give liberation to the parents or other elders in the family. The mother not only has great obsession for the family-tree but also is convinced that "our ancestors in heaven are joyful when a son is born to the house on earth," as his presence is necessary to sprinkle the sacred water for the thirsty mouths of his forefathers in Swarga, their heavenly abode.

Add to this the mother's implacable faith in the reading of horoscopes. The astrologer's interpretation of Jayadev's horoscope — that he will not live long after his twenty-eighth year if he does not get a child by that
time — is as true to her as a divine word. The snake-bite incident is in her opinion Fate's ultimate warning. If the cure is not found, she is sure that Fate will strike again and this time to kill. In the light of all this, can we be surprised that she coerces Mohini into attempting a painful sacrifice at the shrine of the virgin goddess? Not that she lacked a tender heart and did not feel for Mohini. She was not insensitive to the suffering involved. That is why she resolved to give her own blood to the Devi — not that it would count — as an example, an encouragement.

Earlier, we had seen her stooping incredibly low in an effort to beget a son for the family. She played a dirty game in enticing Sudha to try and entrap her son Jayadev. It was a mean conspiracy against her young, innocent, sweet daughter-in-law. We are sorry to see this basically noble and virtuous lady being reduced to the state of an evil pervert. We are sorry but certainly not much surprised. Her utter orthodoxy was bound to lead her into such blind alleys sooner or later. Her moral degradation is only a measure of her desperation. It is, therefore, rather difficult to agree with K.R. Chandrasekharan when he says: "There seems to be a great inconsistency in the mother's character when she fabricates a mean and unscrupulous plot to save her son's life and thereby ensure the perpetuation of the family. She
encourages the luckless Sudha to act the part of a temptress so that she might become the mother of Jayadev's child ... The degradation of the mother's character, however laudable her objective, is a flaw in her characterization. The frailty or flaw in her character may be traced not to the art of Bhabani Bhattacharya, but to the Hindu social fabric that nurtures and makes such frailties and flaws possible. We may wish with all our hearts that this blemish were not there but Bhabani Bhattacharya, a realistic artist as he is, just could not have wished it away. He gives us a glimpse into the inner struggle of the mother. Her soul shrills in outraged protest against the loathsome plan to drag her son into the mire. But she is a helpless prisoner to her orthodoxy and has not breathed the fresh, invigorating air of liberalism. It is only when her heart has been cleared of gloom at last that her vision too gets cleared and she reflects: "What had grown out of her anguish, and how she had tortured both Mohini and herself. The mother of the Big House had transgressed the basic moral laws as though they were meaningless. Was her son's life or, for that matter, even the life of the Big House worth saving at such a price?" The portrayal is true to life and logical in development. Any deviation from the pattern would have made the mother an exception rather than a rule. The last evil note in her
character would have sounded utterly false and unconvincing only if we had not had such a close glimpse into her mentality.

A majority of the women in the Indo-English novels under discussion have a tradition-bound attitude towards life in general and the men-folk in particular. In this there is no difference between the upper-class, city-bred Monju and the illiterate village-girl Kajoli (So Many Hungers). Grandma in A Goddess Named Gold is a mildly religious character who is often seen with her rosary of a hundred and eight beads. The old granny in R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma is an orthodox old woman too. She is a likable character in spite of her typical orthodox whims and her anti-Gandhi stance in the book. She is illiterate and, being uneducated, cannot be expected to understand much of the modern-world changes around her. Moreover, there is nobody in the family who could help modernize her outlook. The only other person in the family is Sri Ram who himself is dependent on Granny, being a young ward to her. No wonder she is governed and controlled by her childhood Samskars, her impressions in early life.

The old man with his painted forehead and rosary (Mr. Sampath) is a miserly person who did not pay even the rent for his house. But he made himself out to be a Sannyasin minus ochre robes. He has been made an object of light satire by Narayan. His talk about toothbrushes, his strong
recommendation of margosa and banyan twigs instead, his rapacity for food — all make him a funny figure instead of a venerable one. Srinivas's wife, in the same novel, in spite of all her husband's coaxings, sticks to the old taboos and does not find it easy to get over her orthodox idiotcies. Raju's mother (The Guide) judges Rosie by the traditional standards and naturally finds her wanting. She, then, refuses to make any compromise on the issue and prefers to leave the house. Before departing, however, she takes with her the prayer-books she had been reading for several years. On Raju's testimony, she had read them everyday of her life before the midday meal, sitting before the pictures of God in meditation. And before departing, she instructs her son: "Don't fail to light the lamps in the god's niche," said my mother, going down the steps.  

Kamala (The Dark Dancer) is a great scholar of the Sanskrit language. She is a staunch believer in nonviolence. Though she has a dynamic personality, she is in practice a traditional Hindu wife. She does not protest easily even when she finds her husband in the wrong and does not grumble even when he tries her beyond endurance. She leaves him without a word of protest when he marries Cynthia and receives him back with all the warmth and tenderness of a Hindu wife when the erring husband returns to the fold.
Baba's mother (Remember the House) went to live in the far South to enjoy the privilege of being near her guru — the spiritual guide. There she visited him everyday to learn and to listen. And then she spent a lot of her time in meditation. She would softly sing hymns or whisper words of a passage from the Bhagavada Gita. She had given up eating meat and took vegetarian food only. And her life of renunciation had borne fruit: "Watching her smiling across the tea-table, I thought she looked content. Perhaps it had all worked out for the best. Perhaps the joy could only come after the wish for it was gone."

Rukmani (Nectar in a Sieve),amma (Two Virgins) and Vasantha (Nawhere Man) are some of Kamala Markandaya's significant orthodox creations. Manohar Malgonkar has created fictive figures in the Maharaja (The Princes), Hari (A Bend in the Ganges), Baji Rao and Nana Saheb (The Devil's Wind) that have all a clear streak of orthodoxy in them. Besides these, there are many other staunch stalwarts who swear by the Hindu laws. But sometimes, rather more often than not, they are downright repulsive — especially the professional ones. It is surprising to see how writer after writer has painted the priests in the Hindu temples as contemptible creatures, one worse than the other.
The priest of the Crocodile Pool (Music for Mohini) is a minor character but even in the course of his brief appearance in the novel, he makes felt the full impact of his orthodox personality. A consecrated tuft of hair on the crown of his head and Siva's trident painted red on his forehead proclaim his identity even before he has uttered a word. His frequent exclamations of "Shiva! Shiva!," his pride in his Brahminic heritage, his conviction about the crocodile being a devotee of Siva — a Brahmin in pre-birth, apparently doomed by his karma to brute form — draw up a fairly comprehensive picture of the man, making him a true representative of the illiterate, shallow, conceited priestly class that the writer intended to portray through him.

The priest in He Who Rides a Tiger emerges as far from a pious personality. His rigid, irrational stand on the bath-milk issue cannot carry conviction with any sane, humane person. His wife, the priest-woman, sails in the same boat too. She has a terrible prejudice against Obhijit whom she suspects to be a low caste waif. If this spineless woman does not ventilate her low feelings, it is only because she is afraid that her frank talk may cost the priest his job.

Nor is the story any different when we come to R.K.Narayan. The priest in The Financial Expert is an awesome
figure. Seen from a distance, he was "a cadaverous man, burnt by the sun, wrapped in a long piece of white cloth, his forehead painted with red marks and his head clean-shaved, with a tuft of hair on top." The sight of this tall, gaunt man fills Margayya with fear. He imagines: "Perhaps he is a sorcerer, or a black magician or an alchemist? He threw a frightened look at him and then at the shack in which he dwelt. 'Perhaps he has hidden human bodies in that shack, and extracts from the corpses some black ointment, with which he acquires extraordinary powers'."

Margayya wanted to get up and run away. In the starlight the man looked eerie, his hollow voice reverberating through the silent night. Margayya's mind was seized with fears: "'Perhaps he will ask me to cut off my son's head.' He imagined Babu being drugged and taken into the shack. 'It's midnight or probably dawn. Let me go home.'"

In Mulk Raj Anand we have the much-expected tone of disrespect towards the so-called pillars of formal Hindu religion: "The semi-nude priests from the temple of Kali, which stood in the inner courtyard of the lower palace, came crowding round us with waving tuft-knots and begged His Highness to visit the temple." Pandit Suraj Mani (The Road) is as hateful a specimen of Hinduism as is to be
found anywhere. He is a lecherous man who has no scruples about exploiting his position as a man of religion to satisfy his carnal desires.

The professional Pundit in *A Bend in the Ganges* is compared to an owl. He is a greedy fellow who seems to have no grain of decency in him. The priest in *The Apprentice* seems to use his presence to repel rather than attract visitors to the temple. Priya (*Remember the House*) finds the family Brahmin "so saturated with bhang that I don't see how he can read the calendar, let alone our horoscopes." The temple-priest in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* has been painted black too. Really surprising to see how unanimous these Indo-English novelists are in their condemnation of these professional priests!

V

**Ascetics or Holy Men**

Renunciation as an ideal has always held a great charm for the Indian mind and the number of holy men in our country — men who have formally renounced the world and donned the symbolic saffron garb — runs into hundreds of thousands. Among the crowd there are many who have taken the garb with purely
In A Goddess Named Gold, Meera's Godfather, the singing minstrel, is covered with religious glory in the traditional Hindu style. When we meet him first in the novel, he has been a wandering minstrel for ten years. Wearing a yellow garb, a tunic almost ankle-length, he sings to people and thus earns his living. It is generally believed that the minstrel was Atmaram in his past birth — the disciple of a great Yogi. Dying young he had been reborn in the village in his present form. And one day when he had been plodding on towards Kailas, earthy abode of the great god Shiva, the Yogi met him, took him back to his cave and showed him his past birth. So in the yellow garb of a minstrel, he was back to his guru. "The old peasant's training had to start over again. He had to reach the state of bliss when you leave your earth-body for a time as you sit in the lotus-posture of meditation and move about in your spirit-body which is like a beam of light."
Everybody in the village has great faith in this story of Atmaram. They believe that the minstrel lives on great heights — the Himalayan summit where the gods and sages dwell. An aura of awe, mystery and supernaturalism thus surrounds the man. Villagers would, in absolute faith, touch the feet of the great Yogi and seek his blessings. “There is sanctity in the dust of your feet,” they tell him. He is often greeted with the cries of "Jai Atmaram!" All believe in what he says because the image of Atmaram, striding the Himalayan peaks, striding out of an age that was gone, was real in their eyes. That image helps overcome their scepticism and believe the incredible even. They readily swallow the amulet-story at his hands and do not pause to question the Seth's stories of miracles built round the minstrel. Grandma is the only figure in the village who mocks at the idea of his being a deity!

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* is the story of a man who "drifts into the role of a Sadhu willy-nilly." He deceives society by passing for a spiritual man but he has not opted for the role deliberately. He starts his career as a holy man not by choice or chance but out of sheer compulsion. He has to wear the mask if he is not to fall into the clutches of the police. As the story progresses, however, he "finds it more and more difficult to tear off the mask until he finds
that the mask has become his face."^{78}

The Swamy in Kamala Markandaya's *Possession* is a very important figure. He is the string-puller behind Valmik, the hero of the novel. From the beginning of the novel he is an ascetic. People know him as a holy man, believe in him and take mandates from him willingly. The full impact of his personality is seen during his visit to England where people crowd around him in thousands. Val goes on a global tour, earns much fame and wealth, but the hold of the Swamy on him does not loosen in any way. He goes to England after getting the permission of his spiritual guide and mentor and comes back to him when he finds life there unsatisfactory.

In *A Silence of Desire* the man at the heart of the novel is a spiritual figure who exercises a vital influence on the other characters. But what kind of a Sadhu is that man? The question remains unanswered till the end. In Meenakshi Mukherjee's words: "The author's stand towards the spiritual powers of the Swami remains complex and elusive to the end."^{79} There is evidence in the novel to support his claim to greatness and there is much to counter it.

In Manohar Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadows*, a novel about Christians and Europeans mostly, we suddenly come upon Bichwa-Baba. It seems that even this highly sophisticated,
anglicized writer was unable to steer clear of Sadhus and their miracle-stories. We have here the strange spectacle of Ruby Miranda being led by her mother — a devout Catholic — to Bichwa-Baba in search of a magic love-potion. "She [Ruby] had heard of Bichwa-Baba, of course, as everybody in Tinapur had, and seen photographs of him. He was said to be more than a hundred years old, and a very holy man; he could read your thoughts and he could give you a wish-fulfilment charm that never failed — at least, that is what the Hindu boys and girls in the railway colony school had always asserted." And now we have the familiar spectacle: "Under a peepul tree sat a man covered in ashes, and naked except for his loin cloth ... 'Shiva walks with men,' Bichwa-Baba pronounced in a deep, booming voice: 'God walks with men and women; only they have not the faith to see!.' Bichwa-Baba sitting in meditation, the Baba picking up his bead chain from near near his feet and counting the beads, the Baba claiming to perform miracles and his giving a love-potion to Miranda with instructions about how to use it — all of this makes him a weird kind of sage. He appears to be a rough, even vulgar ascetic who exploits the faith of innocent masses to make easy money.

That the saffron robe is a very convenient disguise for tramps, destitute people and petty thieves is demonstrated
by G.V. Desani's All about H.Hatterr. The book consists of episodes dealing with the "Sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay, and the right Honourable the Sage of Delhi, the wholly Worshipful of Mogalsarai-Varanasi and his naked Holiness Number One, the Sage of all India himself!" All these sages are equally fraudulent. They are all liars, villains and criminals in the garb of holy men, imposters who dupe and swindle with rare gusto.

Kirtani Mynah is the central figure in Sudhin Ghose's The Flame of the Forest. She is a 'unique creation' in the sense that there is no other significant woman ascetic in the novels under discussion. In a comprehensive analysis of her character, Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

Mynah, the Kirtani (or singer of devotional songs), is not merely a person who sings of God and roams from place to place; nor is she only an aspirant for the ideal of non-attachment. But she has had a mystic experience, a revelation in the Himalayas that has changed her life. ... After this experience, Mynah became a visionary. The mountains, hills, crags, trees all communicated with her.

'The bridegroom was looking for the bride, and the bride Radha was playing at hide-and-seek with the divine spouse Krishna; Purush was rejoicing with Prakriti, and she, Mynah, was Radha's hand-maiden.'

Out of the five paths that people regarded as means of serving Krishna and Radha, Mynah chooses the most difficult. The five paths, we are told, are Santi...
(calm contemplation of the deity), Dasya (willing servitude), Sakhya (friendliness), Vatsalya (filial attachment like that of a child for its parent) and Madhurya (the tender affection of a girl for her lover). Mynah chooses Madhurya, and in her devotion all the Vaishnavic lore of rural Bengal becomes alive.82

VI

The Indo-English novel does not confine itself to the portrayal of individual Hindu characters only. Writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya make a skilful use of their art to delineate whole sections of Hindu society, as it were. The story of the fake Shiva temple (He Who Rides a Tiger) exposes the affluent section. We see how the rich Hindus cringe and crawl before a false god; they bow and prostrate before a false priest just for fear of worldly losses or in the hope of material gains. Mere coincidences are sufficient to beguile these cunning, crafty merchants of Calcutta and all their worldly cunningness notwithstanding, they are duped into making a goddess of Chander Lekha.

We find that the rich in Calcutta callously exchanged merchandise for merit. They found merit cheap and enjoyed the trade. They lavishly poured gold, silver, money, sandalwood,
clarified butter and milk for Shiva's bath on the temple but their stony hearts were devoid of any milk of humanism. Nothing could beat the cruelty of the remark: "Tens of thousands have died of hunger. What difference would a few more or a few less make? The issue at stake is bigger than those useless lives." We share B-10's stinging satire on these human sharks: "This is real business sense! To patronise the temple and so be absolved of any sin that might have resulted from mass murder. To make an ally of the great god who would not be averse to a good bribe."

Sharply contrasted and acting as a foil to these so-called elite are those poor millions who are termed and dismissed as 'scum' of the earth. The great virtue of compassion was to be found among them as we see in the case of the old woman whose pumpkin Chander Lekha had tried to steal. Even in those days of terrible hunger, she gave Chander Lekha the beans she herself needed so badly. She was called a chamar, an untouchable, but she was among the purest in any society.

Through the temple-story again we meet a large mass of the devout — coolies from jute and cotton mills, their women carrying babies in their arms, buying fruit, flowers and lamps for the temple-worship, rickshaw-pullers who
earn their money the hard way, street-beggars and cripples on crutches making offerings to the deity out of their scanty resources.

There is thus a great variety and diversity of Hindu characters in the Indo-English novels under reference and perhaps no significant section of Hindu society has gone unrepresented in these pages. But there is one thing that we miss here still and which this specie of writing could add to it profitably. It would certainly be more interesting if the characters here were less of stock-figures, less of the representative type and more of individuals in their independent human capacity. That would give a new dimension to the already developing, maturing technique in these novels.
References and Notes


3Ibid., p. 4.

4 Ibid., p. 91.

5 Ibid., p. 94.


7 Ibid., p. 144.

8* A Time to be Happy*, p. 96.

9* Storm in Chandigarh*, p. 83.

10Ibid., p. 92.

11 Ibid., p. 82.


14* A Bend in the Ganges*, p. 114.

15Ibid., p. 114.


18 Ibid., p. 149.


20 The Twice Born Fiction, p. 79.

21 Indian Writing in English, p. 473.

22 Santha Rama Rau, p. 58.

23 He Who Rides a Tiger, p. 229.

24 Ibid., p. 232.

25 Ibid., p. 163.

26 Ibid., p. 115.

27 Ibid., p. 115.


29 Shadow from Ladakh, p. 90.

30 Ibid., p. 60.

31 Confessions of a Lover, p. 28.


33 The Road, p. 1.


36 Mulk Raj Anand, p. 86.

37 Ibid., p. 93.

38 Ibid., p. 86.

39 The Novels of Anita Desai, p. 51.


41 The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai, pp. 51-52.


44 The Serpent and the Rope, p. 285.

45 Raja Rao, p. 102.

46 R. Shepherd, "The Conservative Rebel: A Type of Indian Hero," Perspectives on Raja Rao, p. 194.

47 Ibid., p. 176.


49 "Literature as 'Sadhana',' p. 168.

51 Raja Rao, p. 115.
53 Ibid., p. 136.
54 Music for Mohini, p. 90.
55 Ibid., p. 105.
56 Ibid., p. 119.
57 Ibid., p. 124.
58 Ibid., p. 148.
59 Ibid., p. 55.
60 Ibid., p. 63.
61 Ibid., p. 130.
62 Wilkins, p. 23.
63 Music for Mohini, p. 86.
64 Ibid., p. 170.
65 Ibid., p. 115.
66 Bhabani Bhattacharya, p. 55.
67 Music for Mohini, pp. 186-87.
69 Remember the House, p. 164.
71 Ibid., p. 36.
72 Ibid., p. 36.
74 Remember the House, p. 120.
76 Ibid., p. 64.
77 The Twice Born Fiction, p. 119.
78 Ibid., p. 119.
79 Ibid., p. 108.
81 Ibid., p. 105.
82 The Twice Born Fiction, p. 104.
83 He Who Bides a Tiger, p. 130.
84 Ibid., p. 156.
I expect the time will come when every educated native will be as proud of his Mahabharata and Ramayana as Germans are of their Nibelunge and Greeks, even modern Greeks, of their Homer.

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