CHAPTER - II

A BRIEF SURVEY OF DISCURSIVE WRITINGS IN INDIAN ENGLISH

Indian writing in English was essentially an important by-product of the encounter between India on the one hand, and the English language and western culture on the other. Although two hundred years old and its study barely four decades old, Indian writing in English has become a distinctive literature, "a tree that has sprung up on a hospitable soil that a random breeze had brought from afar."¹

Among the various forms of this body of literature the study of discursive prose is still in the infant stage. The present chapter attempts to present a brief survey of the writings in this genre. As the study here is confined to discursive prose in Indian writing relating especially to the changing socio-political conditions and the social and religious reforms in India, only major writers in these fields are dealt with.

During the 18th century, India, being a mixed race and self divided, presented a picture of decay and misery, lacking vitality

and spirituality - to all appearance, a 'Waste Land'. But then the age of transition followed. The Battle of Plassey in 1857 and the Mutiny, changed the aims of the British 'from commerce to conquest'. The British discovered the need to introduce English language and education in India in order to produce man-power to help in administration. They realized that the spread of English education would lead to the natives' assimilation of western culture which in turn would stabilize the British empire. Hence the British made efforts to educate the Indians on western lines. Macaulay's famous 'Minute' came on 2nd Feb. 1835 'to make the natives of this country good English scholars' and emphasised that "to this end all our efforts ought to be directed." The extremism of the 'Minute' was corrected by Sir Charles Wood in his 'Dispatch' on 19 July 1854. It observed that the object of extending European knowledge throughout all classes of people must be effected by means of instruction. All this resulted in the establishment of the first three Indian Universities - in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, which, hardly a generation thereafter, ushered in a renaissance in the social, political, cultural and literary spheres in India.

Thus there was a gradual rise of an all-India elite as a result of the emergence of the English educated in different parts of India.

3. Ibid., p. 7.
The impact of the western concepts compelled the English educated classes to reflect more seriously on the enormity of their own social evils. They grew more receptive to the calls of social reforms which they had perhaps ignored for centuries. It was basically the idea of an all-round development of the Indian society that led to the social reform movements. The spread of English education provided a rational outlook on the prevalent problems. In fact the influence of the 18th Century West, of the concept of equality, was pronounced on the English-educated in India - the message of philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau in France, and Thomas Paine and John Stuart Mill and others in England. Though the evil practices of ritualistic religion and caste prevailed, rejuvenation of such a religion, the socio-religious cultural renaissance got initiated. This renaissance preceded, and then ran parallel, to nationalism in India. Some of these reform movements identified themselves with national awakening too. Each of these was led by an enlightened spirit who was generally English-educated. Some of the leaders of the movements interpreted Eastern philosophy to the West but at the same time pointed out defects in it in a spirit of revitalising and building up an ideal society. The thoughts of these eminent personalities found expression in their speeches and writings which have come to form part of the discursive prose in Indian English literature.

In the history of Indian writing in English the first attempt of an Indian to write in English was made by Cavelly Venkata Boraiah
in his *Account of Jains* (1803) 'collected from a priest of this sect at Mudgeri' and translated by Boralah. But the first original publication of significance was Raja Rammohan Roy's *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1817). A social reformer and educationist that he was, his first work *Iulfat-ul-Muahiddin* or *A Gift to the Believers in one God* (1804), with its introduction in Arabic and the text in Persian, was an attempt in the battle against orthodoxy and bigotry. Proficient in about a dozen European and Indian languages, Rammohan Roy wrote extensively in English, Hindi, Bengali, Sanskrit and Persian besides editing periodicals in three languages - *The Brahmunical Magazine* (1821 - 23) in English, *Sambad Kaumudi* (1821) in Bengali and *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* (1823) in Persian. In addition to this he wrote thirty-two essays in English. In the works of Raja Rammohan Roy one can perceive 'the subtle mind of an agitator who by his works set in snow-balling motion of both reformation and renaissance in India'. His tract on 'Sati' appeared in 1818. He exposed the irreligious practices and sought to eradicate Idolatry in his translation, *An Abridgement of the Vedanta* (1816). Consequently he had to incur the hostility of his class. In the preface he writes, ".... By taking the path which conscience and sincerity direct, I born a Brahmin" incurred reproaches and prejudices of some of his relations and yet predicted that "a day
will arrive when my humble endeavours will be viewed with justice-perhaps acknowledged with gratitude." With an intention of lessening 'criminal Intercourse, suicide, female murder and human sacrifice', writes Alphonso Karkala J.B., 'he used language like a surgeon's knife to open the blisters of ignorance with delicate care.' He had to incur the wrath of the Christian missionaries also for what they called 'the unheathen interpretation of and meddling with the Christian religion' in his Precepts of Jesus: the Guide to Peace and Happiness (1820). In this he attempted to separate Christ's teachings from other Biblical myths, miracles and legends. A spirited controversy ensued followed by Rammohan Roy's three 'Appeals' the first of which summed up the very purpose of true religion: "May God render religion distinctive of differences and dislikes between man and man, and conducive to the peace and unity of mankind - Amen."

Being a brilliant scholar, Roy sought to raise the decadent Indian society educationally also. He established an English school as long ago as 1823. The intention of the British Government to establish a Sanskrit College in Calcutta prompted him to write a letter to the newly arrived Governor General, William Pitt, Lord Amherst.

Commending the Company's 'laudable desire to Improve the natives of India by education' which 'filled the Indians with sanguine hopes' and 'a mingled feeling of delight and gratitude' Rammohan Roy felt that 'it can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessor or the society'. Hence he appealed to compare 'the state of science and literature in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon with the progress of knowledge made since; he wrote, "....In the same manner the Sanskrit System of education would be best calculated to keep the country in darkness. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, with other useful sciences.... by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus." Thus, Rammohan Roy, besides being the foremost advocate of English education in India, was also instrumental in the establishment of the Hindu College which was later to become the Presidency College.

Of the political writings of Raja Rammohan Roy, his two Petitions Against Press Regulations (1823) are the most important. When the freedom of the press was suppressed by an ordinance he wrote a petition which his biographer Miss Collet called 'The

Aeropagitica of Indian History' in which he argued that "Every Good Ruler, who is convinced of the imperfections of human nature.... will be anxious to afford to every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this object, the unrestrained liberty of publication is the only effectual means that can be employed". But when the petition was rejected he wrote another appeal to the King-in-Council: "Men in power hostile to the liberty of the press which is a disagreeable check upon their conduct.... have attempted to make the world imagine, that it might.... afford the means of combination against the Government.... but.... your Majesty is well aware that a free press has never yet caused a revolution in any part of the world. Whereas, where no freedom of press existed, and grievances consequently remained unrepresented and unredressed, innumerable revolutions have taken place in all parts of the globe." He further pleaded that even though the British were solely interested in securing India as a possession and in turning it to advantage, 'even then it would be of importance to ascertain whether this property will be well taken care of by their servants........ Therefore........ the existence of the press is equally necessary for the sake of the Governors and the Governed." Rammohan Roy's another


important political work in English is his famous *Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue System of India* (1832), which stands testimony to the evidence he gave before the Select committee of the House of Commons in London in 1831. His answers given there were marked by their accuracy and independence.

An eminent social reformer, Raja Rammohan Roy founded the 'Brahmo Samaj' which represents the first organised effort made by educated Indians to reform the Hindu Society. From 1813 to 1828 he wrote against 'Sati' (a social evil of burning widows alive) and is said to have organised vigilance committees to restrain the practice until the rite was abolished by law in 1828. He wrote in eloquent prose passionately protesting against the problems of the day and against the prevalent social evils like the practices of 'Purdah', 'Kulinism' and child marriage. He wielded the English language with confidence and courage, communicating his thought in measured and precise statements no matter what the subject was. His liberal use of English for expression ushered in a new era of Indo-English literature. Indeed, the father of Bangali Prose writing, he is also the first 'begetter' of Indian Prose in English.

Under the first impact of Western education the Indian had


felt inferiority complex; but the feeling was overcome, as, from 1857 to 1920, the gradual change in the country's socio-political ethos resulted in his self-awareness and self-confidence. Though there seemed only one Rammohan Roy - a genius well ahead of his times before 1857, the next fifty years produced a Ranade and a Gokhale, a Tilak and a Vivekananda. Indian English Literature really came of age after 1857, when India's rediscovery of her identity became vigorous, all absorbing quest and when she had learnt enough from the West to progress from imitation, and assimilation to creation. These were men who took themselves seriously, and thought and counselled and acted as responsible and mature leaders of a people just awakened from the stupor of ages; social reform, educational reform and religious reform had to go hand in hand; these could lead to economic progress and this in turn would pave the way for political emancipation in the fullness of time.  

The great task of national restructuring started by Raja Rammohan Roy was carried on by many others on several fronts. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a scholar, was committed to the cause and was the most determined social reformer after Raja Rammohan Roy. The task of religious regeneration, likewise, was taken up by Keshub Chander Sen (1838-1884). He gave a call to England to learn from India devotion, faith and prayer.

15. Ibid., p. 35.
A born orator also, K.C. Sen started the fortnightly, Indian Mirror (1861). His Lectures in India (1901) as also The New Dispensation or the Religion of Harmony (Vol.I 1903, Vol.II 1910), and Discourses and Writings (1904) contain his speeches, mostly on religious subjects, made in India and England. He emphasised on the unity of all religions and advocated education, social reform, elevation of politics, improvement of women, and promotion and advancement of journalism.

During the nineteenth century, institutions like 'Paramahansa Sabha' (1849), 'Prarthana Samaj' (1867) and the 'Arya Samaj' (1875) were founded which laid emphasis on the pure worship of God. Two leaders of the tradition of prophets and saints in Maharashtra were K.T. Ielang and M.G. Kanade. Kashinath Trimbak Ielang (1850-93) was deeply read in English and Sanskrit. He was a powerful orator. His life was full of hectic activity in diverse fields. His Speeches and Writings (2 Vols) were on the legal, literary, educational, social, religious and political problems of the day. Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842 - 1901), well known as 'Rishi Ranade', a scholar with virtually encyclopaedic interests was an economist and a jurist as well. He wrote the pioneering Rise of Maratha Power and Essays in Indian Economics (1898). The three collections of his speeches and writings are - Religious and Social Reform (1902), The Wisdom of a Modern Rishi (1942) and Miscellaneous Writings (1915).
and 'Arya Samaj', and individual reformists, the real challenge to
the West was Ramakrishna Paramahansa around whom crowded the
intellectual bureaucracy of the time. His chosen disciple Swamy
Vivekananda aspired to uplift India. He repudiated superstition and
obscurantism and visioned an ideal Hindu society. He presented to
the West the spiritual philosophy behind Hinduism, and affirmed
the cardinal truth behind all religions. In his Chicago address he
affirmed, "... if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must
be one which holds no location in place or time, which is infinite,
like God it preaches.... which will find a place for every human
being from the lowest grovelling savage... to the highest man
towering by the virtues of his head and heart above humanity....
which will recognize dignity in every man and woman...." Mostly
consisting of his spoken word, the 8 Vols of his Complete Works
stress the unity of all religions and cover in a generally logical and
precise manner subjects secular and sacred, revealing him not only
as a man of religion but also a down-to-earth pragmatic person,
dedicated to the cause of the revitalization of the Hindu Society.
Criticising the upper or the privileged classes for their indifference
to the plight of the poor and down-trodden, he points out, "...You
the upper classes of India --- do you think you are alive ??... You
represent the past tense with all its varieties of forms jumbled into
one... let new India arise in your place... out of the peasants'
cottage grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fishermen, the
cobbler, the sweeper... These common people have suffered
oppression for thousands of years... "17 Repudiating superstition and obscurantism, he roars, "You Hindus have no religion, your God is in the kitchen, your Bible the cooking-pot... the religion of India at present is Don't touchism... "18 Thus did he advocate the reformation of India by shedding meaningless taboos and modern materialism.

The two prominent types of the many kinds of prose produced during the nineteenth century were religious-cultural prose and historical political prose. The writings reflected the strong awareness of the socio-religious and political problems of the day. The intellectual political leaders of the Age of Ranade were men who wrote and spoke out of an innate compulsion in a language that suited the select audience before them whereas during the Gandhian Age that followed the language and spirit lost their brilliance though the warmth remained.19 K.R.S. Iyengar quotes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar bringing out this difference: "...If the India of Ranade was less agitated it was more honest and... was more enlightened... in which men and women did engage themselves seriously in studying and examining the facts of their life... in the face of the opposition of the orthodox mass... In the Age of Gandhi learning... is certainly not deemed to be a necessary qualification of a politician."20

18. Ibid., Preface.
20. Ibid.
However, in the writings produced before the Age of Gandhi, while literary, social, economic and political interests could be discerned, some contained strains of nationalism too. For instance, Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was a strong nationalist. In his Poverty of India he sought Indian representation in administrative and economic policies of the then Government. The founder-member of the London Indian Society, Dadabhai was a Member of the Royal Commission. His numerous speeches are collected in Essays, Speeches, Addresses and Writings (1887) and Speeches and Writings (1916). An able pupil of Naoroji was Vishwanath Narayan Mandalk (1833-89), a lawyer and founder-editor of the weekly Native Opinion. His Writings and Speeches appeared in 1898. Yet another pupil of Naoroji was Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarker (1837-1925) who was a leading religious and social reformer, and an educationalist. His Collected Works (1927-33) appeared in 4 Vols.

At this time the nationalist feelings were running high and hence nationalism came to run parallel to socio-religious movements. The writings of the time, hence, were more in prose. Among these writers was Badruddin Tyabji (1844-1906), a moderate leader who advocated national integration. A large number of extracts from his writings and speeches appeared in G.A. Ganesan's Life. His fellow-jurist, N.G. Chandavarkar (1855-1923) was also a moderate leader and social reformer. Yet another moderate leader, Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915) was a contemporary of Ranade. His Writings and Speeches appeared in 1905.
With the rise of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856 - 1920) the era of moderate politics almost came to an end. Tilak shook off the lethargy of Indians and protesting the slothful acceptance of alien rule, endeavoured for the realisation of an independent India. Although he was a mathematician, his works, Qvian Studies in the Antiquity of the Vedas and The Arctic Home of the Vedas stand testimony to his erudite scholarship. His oratory both in his mother-tongue Marathi and in English, reveal his strong personality. Tilak's younger contemporary and Gandhi ji's acknowledged political 'Guru' was Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866 - 1915). He advocated spiritualization of politics. His Speeches (1908) and Speeches and Writings (3 Vols, 1962) show him as a dedicated Indian to the country's cause. Even Lord Curzon admired his person and his eloquence. Among other leaders in the fields of politics and letters can be named Kristo Das Pal (1834 - 84), a master of pure, polished and idiomatic prose, Bankimchandra Chatterji (1838 - 94) and Womesh Chander Banerji (1844 - 1906).

The writings of Womesh Chunder Dutt covered economics and history— The Peasantry of Bengal (1875), A History of Civilization in Ancient India (3 Vols, 1889), Famine and Land Assessment in India (1900) and Economic History of India (2 Vols. 1902,1904). He was a pioneer in the literature of travel also, being known for his Three years in Europe and Rambles in India (1895). His friend Surendranath Banerjee (1848 - 1924) was a powerful orator. He convened the first National Conference in 1883 which became the forerunner of the Indian
National Congress (1885). One of the forceful spokesmen of this 'Age of knowledge' or the 'Age of Experience', Surendranath Bannerjee, believed that the establishment of the British empire was providential and that 'England has introduced a revolutionary agent of mighty potency into this country, that revolutionary agent is English education'. He electrified his audiences with his eloquence in English during his all India tour. However, his speeches delivered in India and in England (pub. 1890-1908, 1917) declared that '...self-government within the empire as our goal and constitutional and lawful methods the only means of its attainment. In his autobiography A Nation in Making: Being Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life (1920) an attempt is made to trace the growth of the national movement and to do justice to the builders of the nation.

Bipin Chandra Pal (1858 - 1932), a staunch nationalist, wrote on politics as well as religion viz., Nationality and Empire (1916), Indian Nationalism: Its Principles and Personalities (1919) and an Introduction to the Study of Hinduism (1908).

Apart from these various writers some of whom were socio-religious-and-political reformers and some, strong nationalists, there was another group of writers who wrote on Hindu philosophy and

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Prominent discursive writers in the North were men like Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Motilal Nehru, and Lala Lajpat Rai who was an oriental scholar. The latter espoused socio-religious and educational reforms as also political emancipation. Notable among those coming from the South-West are Sir Rama Varma of Travancore, Sir S. Subramania Iyer and V.S. Srinivas Sastry. To this list can be very well added the names of Sarojini Naidu and A.K. Coomaraswamy.

During the 'Gandhian era' the freedom struggle percolated to the grass-roots of Indian society stirring Indian life in areas social, political and economic. Consequently the writings produced during
this period were naturally dominated by political prose. The most notable exponents of this kind of writing were, perhaps, Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar. The three were statesmen, contemporaries influencing the time. The first two, though distinct in their ways, were acknowledged 'Guru and disciple' whereas the third one, a great scholar, stood far apart from the two in views and approach to the problems of the day. Gandhiji, a strong nationalist, was more of a man of religion and action. His two weeklies Harijan and Young India voiced his thoughts. Though he was not a scholar, his writings mainly in the form of essays and articles in his journals reflect an influentially remarkable simplicity and pointedness. More than being a noted writer himself, he was a writers' writer. His autobiography - My Experiments with Truth, and Hind-Swaraj, though written originally in Gujarati and later translated into English under his supervision have characteristically contributed to Indian prose in English. His accepted disciple Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru made a rich contribution to the genre by his Autobiography, Glimpses of World History and The Discovery of India. Yet another contemporary of the two, a humanist scholar was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His Writings and Speeches in eleven Vols cover subjects social, cultural, economic, religious and political.

A notable discursive writer of religious philosophical prose of the period was easily Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. A scholar-philosopher, he wrote An Idealist view of Life (1932) which
brought the East and the West to a closer understanding. His Religion in the Changing World (1967) is a collection of 8 essays that discuss the role of religion in a rapidly changing world. Like Swamy Vivekananda, Dr. Radhakrishnan also was a fluent and impressive speaker who interpreted Indian philosophy to the West.

A host of other eminent persons did contribute to discursive writings in Indian English. Dr. M.K. Naik writes that Rajaji's prose was 'wiry like the man himself, Subhas Chandra gave a rousing call to the Nation, while both differ from the workman-like handling of the language in Vallabhbhai Patel, B.R. Ambedkar and M.N. Roy.'

However, Gandhi and Nehru emerge prominent among all these thinkers, writers, orators and social reformers of modern India. The two are focussed as contributors to the genre very briefly in the next chapter which provides a background to the main study of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as a discursive writer.