A STUDY OF REPRESENTATIVE INDO-ENGLISH NOVELISTS

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ABSTRACT

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By

Uma Ganesan Parameswaran

Indo-English literature, an offshoot of the British Raj in India, came into being early in the nineteenth century in the eastern province of Bengal. Three stages are discernible in its development. Early Indo-English literature is characterized by imitation of the English Romantics and early Victorians. The second stage consists of natively nurtured writers who were either naturally or intentionally inclined to creating an Indo-English idiom and atmosphere in their work. The third stage, which overlaps the second to a greater degree than the second overlaps the first, comprises writers who earlier or later became so anglicized as to be alienated from the heartbeat of Indian life.

In south India, Indo-English writing followed the same basic pattern of early writers--native-talents--native-aliens mentioned above, but since writing in English started only in the last decades of the

nineteenth century, the first stage is short. This dissertation is a study of representative south Indian novelists.

The first chapter is introductory, giving a brief survey of the origins, development, and future of Indo-English literature. In the second chapter a representative early writer, T. Ramakrishna, is analyzed, and it is seen that his historical romances owe much to Sir Walter Scott and also to regional folklore. It is a major characteristic of early writers to adapt regional tales and folklore to create a novel modeled on Scott's historical romances.

The third chapter is focused on R. K. Narayan, the best-known of Indo-English novelists. The thesis is that Narayan's work is a combination of native genius and poor craftsmanship. This chapter, the longest in the dissertation, is in three parts. In the first part, Narayan's literary output is evaluated by applying general criteria of literary analysis; in the second part is analyzed Waiting for the Mahatma where the quality of poor craftsmanship is more in evidence than the quality of native genius; the theme of paternal love is traced in the third part and it is seen that Narayan is at his best when handling this theme.

Native-aliens, such as Kamala Markandaya and Balachandra Rajan who are studied in the fourth chapter,

have more expertise than any of the other writers but they fall short in native genius. The later novels of Kamala Markandaya unmistakably show that she has lost contact with the Indian setting and way of life.

The fifth and last chapter considers Raja Rao who transcends all categories mentioned above. His three novels are like a trilogy on the Blakean idea of Innocence, Experience, and Higher Innocence. Raja Rao, more than any other novelist, has realized the potentials of Indian writing in English. It is an irony that English should have been ousted from India by politicians just as Indo-English literature was coming into its own.

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A THESIS

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Dedicated to

My Mother and My Daughter

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The story of Indo-English literature is similar to that of many other literatures that were born in the wake of the colonial and missionary expansions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is a bastard child of Britain and a British colony, having, characteristically enough, Christian missionaries as foster-parents. What makes Indo-English culture different from many other offshoots of the colonial and missionary empires is that it is only a minor facet of the complex, crystalline structure that characterizes Indian civilization. Likewise, Indo-English literature is only a minor chapter in the history of the country's literatures. Sanskrit and Tamil had a written literature long before the beginning of the Christian era and an oral tradition predating the written by a thousand years. Indo-English writing seems immature and insignificant when placed alongside India's classical literatures. Even compared to the modern vernacular literatures which have made

rapid and remarkable strides in the last hundred years, Indian writing in English is only a minor unit. And compared to the promise of its beginnings and the fine achievement of contemporary writers, the future appears bleak, offering little but the prospect of extinction. Even so, Indo-English literature is worth critical study because it is a distinct entity and has produced writers of great caliber, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Raja Rao.

Like other Anglo-colonial literatures, Indo-English literature was until recently ignored by Britain except for occasional patronizing criticism, and disclaimed if not ostracized by the native people. But within the last decade the tide has turned in favor of Commonwealth literatures. They have become the focus of interest among critics and casual readers. More significant contribution has been made in the creative and critical fields of almost every Commonwealth literature in the last decade than in the ten decades preceding it.

However, unlike other Anglo-colonial literatures, Indo-English literature seems destined to die young. This Cassandrian prognostication about its imminent extinction is based on a realistic appraisal of current political trends and educational statistics, not on baseless pessimism. Indo-English literature has owed its existence to a peculiar concatenation of political

circumstances, and the political scene today precludes any optimism regarding the continuance of English.

The early missionaries had introduced English education to bring more converts more quickly into the Christian fold; the British had subsidized English education in order to consolidate their power through native loyalists. Both had claimed altruistic rationales. Similarly, Indian politicians of today have banished English, ostensibly on such high-sounding principles as strengthening of national identity and perpetuation of regional sub-cultures, but their policy is rooted in practical selfishness that seeks to consolidate their own power. That they have erected a Babel and set in motion a process of divisiveness seems to be of minor importance.

A brief survey of certain landmarks in Indian history will throw light on the origins and future of Indo-English literature.

The two most significant dates in this context are March 7, 1835, and September 14, 1949. On March 7, 1835, the Council under Governor-General William Bentinck passed a Minute on Education making English the medium of instruction in government-subsidized schools; in effect the Minute made English the official language of British India. This administrative move was the culmination of a social movement which in turn had been

set in motion by the political fact of British paramountcy in the sub-continent. At the head of the social movement stood Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833). A titan among men, Rammohan Roy ushered India into a new age. He regenerated Hinduism by breaking down outdated traditions, revolutionized social values by condemning polygamy and widow-immolation, advocated far-reaching fiscal reforms, championed the freedom of the press, and what is most relevant here, urged the introduction of English education. His energetic canvassing for the cause of English education drew the support of Thomas Babington Macaulay. As President of the Committee of Inquiry into Public Instruction, Macaulay's voice carried the issue, and the Orientalists who had been advocating Arabic and Sanskrit education were defeated. Macaulay's speeches on the subject exhibit the idealism and rhetoric for which early Indo-English writers admired him; they also show the qualities of self-interest, political foresight, altruism, and arrogance which characterized the British attitude towards their colonies. All of these traits, except self-interest, are present in the concluding lines of Macaulay's speech to the British House of Commons in 1833:

> It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may,

> in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come, I know not. But never will I attempt to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own. The scepter may pass away from us. . . . But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.[1]

Indian writing in English had started a generation earlier but now, after the country-wide introduction of English education, it gathered considerable momentum. Bengal led the way. Today its star is set, but let it not be forgotten that between 1800 and 1940 this eastern province produced more numerous and greater writers, leaders, reformers, artists, saints and thinkers than the rest of the country put together. Among those who wrote in English are Henry Derozio (1809-1831), Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), Aru Dutt (1854-1874), Toru Dutt (1856-1877), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Manmohan Ghose (1867-1924), Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949). The writing of these earlier figures is characterized by Victorian ideals and Romantic diction even though several of them lived well into the twentieth century.

Partly due to certain educational policies and partly due to the innate Indian reverence for tradition,

Victorians held the field in India long after they had been eclipsed in their native England. As late as the 1930's Indian orators continued to speak in the vein and vocabulary of the old masters--Macaulay, Carlyle, Burke; Indian writers continued to model themselves on Scott and Dickens. It was only after the 1920's that such writers as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao discarded the highflown diction of the earlier generation and started developing an Indo-English language that transmitted the flavor of the vernacular, but these writers could also command the King's English if they so wished. Some other good writers, such as Balachandra Rajan and Kamala Markandaya, adhered for the most part to correct English usage. Still others, like R. K. Narayan and K. Nagarajan, did not consciously cultivate either of these styles but rather wrote in the language naturally spoken by the average educated Indian. The language used by their characters, and occasionally by themselves, has cliches, officialese, Babuisms and picturesque translations of vernacular phrases and idioms. However, these writers differed from Anand and Raja Rao in that theirs was not conscious experimentation but spontaneous naturalness.

While the major writers of the entire two-hundred-year span have had a knowledge of the language and of their art, the minor writers have fallen short of one or the other. The minor writers till the 1930's wrote

pleasing, correct English even though their art was imitative and mediocre. After the 1930's there was rapid deterioration in the standard of English, and we have a plethora of fiction that falls outside the pale of literature even though it is classified in libraries as literature. This deterioration was due to the growing antagonism for the language of the rulers; the national movement was gathering impetus during the thirties, and the boycott of the language was in line with the boycott of everything British. When India gained independence in 1947, this antagonism culminated in the abolition of English in the schools, and the imposition of Hindi. On September 14, 1949, the Constituent Assembly, after several days of acrimonious debate, passed Clause 343 of the Constitution which made Hindi the official language of the Union. English was to be concurrently used till 1965.

During the fifteen-year period granted for the transition from English to Hindi, there were periodic debates and demonstrations by pro-English, non-Hindi-speaking groups. Today there is silence on this front because the fervor for English has been replaced by frenzied fervor for the regional language and fanatic antagonism toward Hindi. Tamilians, who were the staunchest supporters of English, are now busy throwing out all languages other than Tamil from Tamilnadu (Madras State). It is difficult to decide which is the more

absurd and impractical step--the current trend in Tamilnadu to substitute unknown but pure Tamil words for long-accepted, simple English words (for example, "perundu" for "bus") or lexicographer Raghuvira's Hindi in which long-accepted English words are given their exact meaning in simple Hindi by means of long compound words (for example, "electric bulb" being translated as "light-throwing-round-egg" and "necktie" being rendered as "loincloth-for-the-neck").

English, then, has been discarded by government and the masses. Though it continues to survive, the end obviously is near unless some radical political upheaval changes the trend. It is periodically pointed out that some of the best works in Indo-English literature have been written after independence. David McCutchion, for example, begins his volume of critical essays with the words, "By a strange irony, Indian literature in English has been flourishing since Independence more successfully than it ever flourished before."[2] It is not at all strange; on the other hand, it is most natural and could not have been otherwise. In the earlier decades there were weighty issues to be taken up--a nation to be aroused, freedom to be won--and all talent went into the more urgent cause of nationalism. Another factor is that higher education spread to smaller towns and villages only in the 1920's and 1930's, and this was the period

in which some of the best writers of today had their education. Let us remember that all the successful writers of today were born in the days of the British Raj, and even the younger writers have had English as the medium of instruction in school and university. Once the pre-Independence generation dies, as generations must, we might still have a few Indians writing in English, but they are likely to be even more alien to the heartbeat of Indian life than today's expatriate writers. Once English is ousted from schools, and it has been ousted from numberless areas already, the shade of Joseph Conrad (frequently conjured up by McCutchion and others) notwithstanding, the chances of a thriving Indo-English literature are slim indeed. That is why I set 2,000 A.D. as the dirge date for Indo-English literature. I hope time proves this prediction wrong.

Whatever the future may hold for Indo-English literature, enough works of merit have been published in the last hundred years to warrant study. This dissertation is an attempt to evaluate and document certain representative South Indian writers of Indo-English fiction.

By "South Indians" are meant writers in English[3] whose linguistic origin lies within the geographical bounds of the present states of Tamilnadu (formerly Madras), Kerala and Mysore, the regional languages of which are

Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada respectively. Since most of the writers studied here are Tamilians, occasional references to vernacular works are drawn from Tamil literature.

By "Indo-English"[4] fiction is meant fiction written in English by Indians; this term is not the same as "Anglo-Indian" fiction, which denotes fiction written by Englishmen who spent a fair part of their lives in India and set a fair proportion of their novels in India. John Masters, for example, is an Anglo-Indian novelist.

Fiction published in newspapers and magazines is not included in this study.

Indo-English writers may be said to fall into one of four categories: early writers, native-talents, native-aliens, and a fourth group which consists of writers whose work transcends chronological or nationalistic categorization. The early South Indians, born before 1880, were of the first generation in the south to take up English education. Genuinely grateful to the British for having introduced them to the literature and philosophy of the west, they felt impelled to justify the ways of men to the new gods, to build the bridge of which E. M. Forster speaks in A Passage to India, the bridge that has never been built, between the British and Indians; the writings of these early

novelists give us conducted tours of India, past and present, in a language copied from the works of the English Romantics and Victorians.

The second group of writers, most of whom happened to be born between 1895 and 1910, had their early education before the struggle for independence had initiated any antagonism for the English language. When they started their literary careers, circumstances encouraged them to speak in their natural voice; they were not overly anxious to write for the British reader because the growth of English education assured them an audience from among their compatriots. They did not feel compelled to build bridges because the increasing momentum of the national movement precluded the necessity, and even the possibility; they were not inclined to imitate English writers or to use King's English because they realized that Indian literary traditions could be adopted and adapted to let them express themselves in a language that was now one of the many Indian languages. In short, native-talents, as I call these writers, are unanglicized Indians who write best about unanglicized Indians.

The third group of writers are somewhat younger than those in the preceding set. These, too, had their education during the British Raj, but, unlike them, these writers went abroad early in life. Partly due to their foreign education, to their own inclination and to

the fact that their families had already been anglicized to a greater extent, these writers became alien to the heartbeat of Indian life and, at best, have only a cerebral awareness of it. They may be called native-aliens. Most of them, Kamala Markandaya, Santha Rama Rau and Balachandra Rajan, to name only South Indians, are expatriates. Raja Rao is the only expatriate who cannot be called a native-alien. Though he left India at the age of nineteen and has spent much of his life since then outside India, he remains essentially Indian. Among South Indians he stands alone, the only writer who has transcended categories--chronological, generic and national.

This study is, basically, a critical introduction to the works of certain representative authors in these categories. The development and organization of material varies from chapter to chapter, depending on the area that has been covered by critics on the particular writer under scrutiny. Where critical sources are non-existent, as in the case of Ramakrishna, a seemingly disproportionate amount of background material and direct textual quotation is included. The approach is expository more than analytic. In the second chapter, for example, the literary and historical milieu are introduced at length, and the storylines are spelled out. Since the works of Ramakrishna are not readily available for a

reader's reference, direct quotations are used extensively to convey the author's style within the dissertation itself.

Where primary sources and background material are readily available but critical sources are negligible, as in the case of Kamala Markandaya and Balachandra Rajan, the development is different. The background is not stressed, nor is the social milieu which, incidentally, appears in the novels themselves; rather, what is attempted is a critical introduction that covers the entire canon of their literary work and deals with exposition and analysis of such aspects as central themes, conflicts, techniques, images and diction.

In the case of major writers, such as R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the development and organization are different in yet another way. Their literary achievement is considerable; so is the amount of scholarship that is available on the introductory and interpretive aspects of their fiction. Therefore, in the study of Raja Rao, whom I consider the foremost of Indo-English novelists, the introductory approach is omitted altogether in favor of direct thematic analysis. Since total coverage is impractical, this study includes an expository essay on the theme of Shakti in his novels and an analytic essay on one of his novels.

The approach to Narayan is basically the same, i.e., there is an in-depth analysis of one of his novels

and an expository essay on the theme of paternal love in his novels and short stories. However, in addition to these there is a section that gives a general evaluation of Narayan's art. This section attempts to cover ground that has not been covered by other critics and also to re-evaluate certain facets of Narayan's art that have won somewhat indiscriminate admiration. The tendency to give disproportionately high admiration for an author is due to the inability of literary criticism to break away from a complex syndrome that makes up a country's search for national identity and international status. Without in any way discounting the importance of such facts as progressively better literary output and more discriminating readership which would naturally inspire a greater volume of laudatory literary criticism, it must be recognized that literary criticism of most Commonwealth literatures is not yet wholly impartial. Just as there was a proneness, born of a sense of inferiority, for native critics to downgrade these literatures during the British Raj, there is a tendency now, born of a sense of confidence and assertiveness, to lionize leading figures. This is perhaps the natural course in any country when it first takes its place in the comity of nations. Likewise, foreign criticism, which in earlier times tended to be somewhat patronizing even when sincere now tends to be somewhat generous even though sincere.

In the case of Indo-English literature, this issue of objectivity is further complicated by the fact that it is only one of many literatures and that it is written in a language that has been expelled, ostensibly in the interests of national identity. A brief survey of the progress of scholarship and criticism might help to bring out these points more clearly.

Till 1940 there were only sporadic reviews in newspapers and lectures. The pioneer in the cause of systematic criticism is K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. A leading reviewer through the thirties, Srinivasa Iyengar published two volumes in the forties that formally turned the sod for Indo-English criticism. These two volumes--Indo-Anglian Literature (1943) and The Indian Contribution to English Literature (1945)--are priceless bibliographical sources in the study of lesser writers. His latest volume on the subject, Indian Writing in English (1962), is a basic and indispensable reference book. One must keep in mind, however, that Srinivasa Iyengar is a generous critic; he has a word of praise for everyone. Any unfavorable comment he has is tempered with a favorable one. More serious is his questionable choice of quotations because of which some writers (Manjeri Isvaran, for example) suffer. Another shortcoming in this indisputably useful volume is that his critical lens not only sees some good even in the most mediocre of writers but is colored by his admiration

for the poetry and philosophy of Aurobindo, the composer of the modern epic, Savitri. This last quality has been lambasted out of all proportion by certain Indian critics such as P. Lal, Nissim Ezekiel and Jyotirmoy Datta in their reviews and references to Srinivasa Iyengar's books.

Between 1945 and 1965 there was a sharp division of opinion among both critics and writers about the worth of Indo-English literature. Several writers turned to the vernacular, repeating the sentiments of Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1827-1873) who said:

> Let those who feel that they have springs of fresh thought in them fly to their mother-tongue.[5]

Interestingly enough, a comparison of the English and Tamil works of such novelists as Shankar Ram and K. S. Venkataramani shows that they were more successful in Tamil though they started their literary careers with English writing. One of these bilingual writers, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, is now a strong activist in the anti-English lobby and advocates that English be rooted out altogether because it has stifled regional languages.

Generally, those who maintained that there is no worth in Indo-English literature were more voluble and loud than those who attempted to justify it. Indo-English literature was suspect for several reasons. There was the charge of anti-nationalism as already mentioned. There was the charge that these writers were profiting from the prestige gained by India after

independence in the comity of nations and on the eagerness of Americans to pay handsomely for anything Indian, the more legendarily Indian (that is, the more full of nautchgirl-maharaja or poverty-sacred bull motifs) the higher the price. There was also the charge that the style and vocabulary of Indian writing in English was borrowed or colorless. Chalapathi Rau's caustic comment is representative of this group. He says:

> Writing is close to life, but the Indo-Anglians have little to do with life, its lustiness . . . its gorgon splendors. The Indo-Anglians crawl about like the crabs and jellyfish and earthworms of our intellectualism; they are singers of self-praise. . . . Indian writing in English is at its best, composition, and the best of it is translation. . . . We have no prose; we have strings of words, gawkishly arranged like beads. There is no rhythm; there is at best a street-walker's gait.[6]

On the other side we have supporters of Indo-English literature who through articles and university courses promote the cause. One such group consciously coming together under a banner is Writers Workshop. Founded in 1958, it consists of

> a group of writers who agree in principle that English has proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in All-India literature.[7]

On yet another side we have those who, either through ignorance of vernacular literatures or through error of judgment, feel that English writing is and will be superior to other Indian literatures. M. E. Derrett, author of one of the very few full-length volumes on

any aspect of Indo-English literature, exemplifies this view when she says:

> Expression in English can bring a sense of release to the Indian intellectual as he endeavors to express the deepest turns and twists of his own mind. . . . Whatever its future form, it seems certain that the Indian novel in English will surpass its counterpart in the regional languages.[8]

By 1962, when the above was written, it was evident that English, and consequently the Indo-English novel, was to be ousted from India, and also that the major vernacular literatures were drawing abreast of or had already outstripped Indo-English literature. The modern novel which had been launched by vernacular writers in mid-nineteenth century had attained a superior degree of achievement as early as the 1930's. To name just a few of the well-known writers, we have Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) and Saratchandra Chatterji (1876-1938) in Bengali, Prem Chand (1880-1936) and Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi (1868-1938) in Hindi, and R. Krishnamurthi (1899-1954) and R. Mahadevan (1913-1957) in Tamil. It is true that all these novelists were in varying degrees indebted to English literary traditions but their work shows that the vernacular novel had come into its own earlier than the Indo-English novel. A study of these and more recent novels shows that because of the rapid adaptation of literary experiments conducted in western literatures and because of their contact with the essential Indian life, the contemporary and future

vernacular novel is likely to be more prolific and popular than the Indo-English novel and at least as good.

Comparative merits apart, the Indo-English novel is an interesting entity and therefore worthy of study. It is encouraging, therefore, that despite the wrangling over its merits, there has been steady progress in serious Indo-English criticism.

Indian journals such as Quest, The Literary Criterion and The Literary Half-Yearly give a prominent place to the critical aspects while publications such as Writers Workshop and Illustrated Weekly of India emphasize both creative and critical writing in English. In recent years several volumes of essays have appeared from India, the more outstanding ones being Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, Essays Presented to Amy G. Stock and Indian Writing in English. Outside India, there is a growing market for critical articles both in popular and scholarly periodicals, but the approach of essays published in them is more introductory than interpretive because the average reader of such journals is unfamiliar with the subject. One of the very few periodicals in which in-depth analyses appear is The Journal of Commonwealth Literature; the annual bibliography published in it is the most comprehensive available and is adequate for research on contemporary writers. Among organizations for the promotion of critical research in

the area of Commonwealth literatures, the foremost is the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) which issues a periodic bulletin on such issues as work in progress, new journals, news from member associations and outline of Commonwealth Literature courses offered in universities.

The concept of "Commonwealth Literature" is gaining ground, and with it Indo-English criticism is making some headway. However, among South Indian novelists, only R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao have been studied in these publications and study-groups. Of the five other novelists scrutinized in this dissertation, no critical work has been done on four; only two full-length articles have appeared on Kamala Markandaya, other than my own.[9]

Briefly to sum up the aim and scope of this dissertation, it is a study of representative South Indian authors from the four categories into which Indo-English writing may be divided: the early writers who imitated the style and form of English predecessors to write Indian historical romances, native-talents or unanglicized Indians who are more natural and native in their diction and development, native-aliens or anglicized Indians who are more sophisticated in their art and diction but less in contact with the pulse of Indian life, and a fourth class that consists of those who transcend categories.

The following chapter studies a typical Indo-English historical romance by a typical early-writer. The historical romance is the first genre to have been attempted by South Indians. The reason is, probably, that the novel--with its emphasis on characterization--is an import into India where the usual prose form was a sort of travelog that combined the narrative elements of a Decameron with the didactic elements of an Aesop's Fables. Thus, the historical romance, combining as it does action and moral codes at a simple level, would naturally be the first form to be assayed by the first Indo-English writers. It is seen that these romances combine the form and structure of typical Scott romances with plots and folklore-patterns drawn from the native tradition.

The decades during which the early writers published their work corresponds to the period in which the British Empire in India was at its zenith. This political fact has much to do with the adulatory attitude of the early writers towards the British. The times about which he wrote are historical eras which evoke a sense of nostalgia and patriotism in the South Indian mind. Therefore, it is in place here to speak about the times in which Ramakrishna wrote and the times of which he wrote before studying the literary aspects of Ramakrishna's contribution.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Babington Macaulay, ed. Lady Trevelyan (London, 1907), XIX, 192-193.

[2]David McCutchion, Indian Writing in English (Calcutta, 1964), p. 3.

[3]In order to avoid the more cumbersome form--"South Indian writers who write or have written in English"--I use the term "South Indians." However, where "south" is used merely in its geographical sense, it is not capitalized.

[4]K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar popularized the term "Indo-Anglian" because it can be used both as adjective and as substantive. Contemporary Indo-English critics use both terms, "Indo-English" and "Indo-Anglian"; however, all seem to agree that a distinction should be drawn between "Anglo-Indian" and these terms.

[5]Quoted in McCutchion, Indian Writing, p. 20.

[6]M. Chalapathi Rau, "The Indo-Anglians," The Illustrated Weekly of India (Bombay) (May 26, 1963), p. 45.

[7]From the backcover of Writer's Workshop: A Miscellany of Creative Writing, a bimonthly published from Calcutta.

[8]M. E. Derrett, "Why Write in English?" Times Literary Supplement (August 10, 1962), pp. 584-585.

[9]"India for the Western Reader: A Study of Kamala Markandaya's Novels," The Texas Quarterly (Summer, 1968), pp. 231-247.

CHAPTER II

NOSTALGIA: THE HISTORICAL ROMANCES OF T. RAMAKRISHNA

"India likes gods."
"And Englishmen like posing as gods."
--A Passage to India

With all the fervor and rituals attendant upon the installation of an icon in a shrine, statues of British royalty and heroes were erected all over India in the decade following the 1857 mutiny (or first National Struggle, as modern historians would term it.) Wellesley, with drawn sword on horseback; benevolent Bentinck, at his desk; Hardinge, Cornwallis, Clive, they stood in marketplaces and public squares, martial, noble, triumphant.

Of all these icons, none was more devoutly hailed than a familiar sculpture of Queen Victoria that appeared in every city and numberless towns. Victoria Regina Imperatrix, by the grace of God, Queen Empress of India, the symbol of the invincible might, the awe-inspiring majesty, the accepted permanence of the Empire; on a straightbacked throne atop a stone pedestal she sat,

in royal regalia, orb and scepter in hand, robe billowing to the ankles, a somewhat small crown perched on a veiled head, a broad forehead, chiselled nose and mouth, a second chin in the making, imperious-yet-rather-tired eyes surveying her vast empire on which the sun never set. Mother-worshipers by nature, Hindus readily made their obeisance to this image, heavy, solid, eternal. Certainly no one would have thought of moving her then, though she was to be shuttled about in the thirties and forties between extreme nationalists who dunked her by night into the city tanks and British loyalists who retrieved and reinstated her (also by night, in order to avoid riots). Later still, the Congress regime of independent India, with iconoclastic zeal, removed her altogether from public view. But in the decades following the empire-wide celebration of the golden and diamond jubilees, the British Crown seemed eternally powerful and infinitely benevolent to many Indians, especially to those whose imagination had been stirred to life by contact with the literary and scientific wealth of the west. Their attitude of reverence, gratitude and loyalty is obvious in the writings of this age. Their minds responded actively to certain kinds of English literature and philosophy such as romantic idylls, philosophical treatises, idealistic putpourings, reenactments of history. This accounts for their avid interest in

Scott, Dickens, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Ruskin and Macaulay, and their imitation of them.

Writers consciously or unconsciously imitate predecessors who come nearest their own genius. While the social reformers and political thinkers copied the language and styles of Ruskin and John Stuart Mill, novelists turned to Sir Walter Scott, the perfect model for the two Indian enthusiasms; story telling and nostalgia for an idealized past. In the novel genre, as in most others, Tamil writers have adapted English literary techniques to their own literary tradition and produced literature that surpasses the work of those who write in English. Kalki[1] in Ponniyin Chelvan, for example, reconstructs the golden age of the Cholas with authenticity and vivid dynamism, while Chandilyan, in his romances, exemplifies writers who use the historical setting without concerning themselves with research of fact and social history. Indo-English writers, like their Tamil counterparts, used the Scott model but built on and around it with indigenous material. All these writers are essentially Indian and often essentially regional, but one can almost see them at work surrounded by shelves of leather-bound, gilt-edged copies of the complete works of the Master of Abbotsford. Their novels have all the familiar Scott silhouettes--high romance, barehanded struggles, feats of prowess, protestations

of lifelong love, songs and poems within the novel, bards and seers, omens and talismen, tales of old retold and relived, damsels in distress and knights errant, loyalty-unto-death followers. An analysis of Ramakrishna's Padmini reveals all these qualities plus the Indo-English quality of combining these with native literary tradition and folklore.

My choice of T. Ramakrishna (Thottakadu Ramakrishna Pillai) is dictated by several factors. He is the first South Indian to have published a novel. Rajam Aiyar's Vaeudeva Sastry appeared serially in 1895-96, but it was not published as a volume until 1905. Also, Ramakrishna was born earlier than Rajam Aiyar. Moreover, Ramakrishna's romances show, more clearly than other romances, the combination of Scott and native tradition. They also show an attitude towards the British that was typical of many English-educated South Indians at the turn of the century. Yet another factor calling attention to Ramakrishna's work in this context is the fact that he sets his romances in the south. A. S. P. Ayyar, the most prolific of South Indian writers, has written more and better historical romances but all of them are set in the north.

Like the Bengalis of the mid-nineteenth century, Ramakrishna started his literary career with translations of Indian tales into English. Then he wrote two interesting

historical romances--Padmini (1903) and A Dive for Death (1911). Both are subtitled "An Indian Romance," and this is what they basically are. A Dive for Death is the story of Devamani, daughter of a Tamil chieftain, who falls in love with a poor, unknown stranger, Vijia. Vijia survives fistfights and intrigues, defeats a rival in an Erroll Flynn sequence at the edge of a cliff and then gallantly risks his life to save his rival's, and disappears into a chasm. Three years later, true love is rewarded and the lovers are united. True to the tradition of romances, Vijia turns out to be a prince driven out by a usurper, and, of course, the usurper is defeated next and the lovers live happily ever after.

Padmini is the story of a tyrant-king's love for Padmini and her steadfast rejection of him in favor of the impoverished but noble Chennappa.

The historical event from which these tales spring, like many other romances in modern Tamil, is the Battle of Talikota in 1565 which ended forever all hopes of Hindu paramountcy in the south, just as the second Battle of Tarain in 1192 had shattered Hindu power in the north. A digression into history is necessary here to bring out the nostalgia associated with this date, 1565.

Muslims invaded north India as early as 637 A.D., and sporadic "holy wars" to spread the Prophet's creed

and to loot the legendary wealth of Ind had been fought and won by the Muslims since the very inception of Islam. Muhammad of Ghor, incensed by his initial failure in 1191 to overcome the Rajputs, returned in 1192 and on the same battlefield of Tarain, seventy miles north of Delhi, won a decisive victory and established a Muslim foothold in the subcontinent which grew in time to encompass all of northern India. The Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges running east-west about the Tropic of Cancer divide India geographically into the northern plain and the Deccan peninsula. These natural barriers initially confined the Sultans of Delhi, but only for a time. The invaders established themselves firmly in the north and led periodic campaigns south of the Vindhyas. Constant threat from the Muslims resulted in a Hindu resistance, and the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar came into existence in 1336. Under the generous patronage of its benevolent despots Vijayanagar became a center of culture and commerce. Of the wealth and martial prowess of Vijayanagar, Domingo Paes, a Portuguese visitor is said to have written:

> Its king has much treasure and many soldiers and many elephants. . . . In this city you will find men belonging to every nation and people because of the great trade which it has and the many precious stones there, principally diamonds. . . . This is the best provided city in the world.[2]

The Empire had 300 seaports, and as the art of shipbuilding had been perfected several centuries earlier, the empire had invincible command of the seas.

Vijayanagar was the stronghold of Hindu culture. Literature of merit was produced in all four languages--Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. Temple architecture reached new heights of achievement, as evidenced by the existence of musical pillars and halls of perfect acoustical proportions in temples surviving from the period. In contrast to the Muslim tradition of confining women in purdah, the women of Vijayanagar actively participated in political, literary and social life at all levels. The kings were liberals in matters of religious tolerance. Edoardo Barbosa, who visited India from Portugal about 1516 A.D. writes:

> The king allows such freedom that every man may come and go and live according to his own creed without suffering any annoyance, and without enquiry, whether he is Christian, Jew, Moor or Hindu.[3]

The Vijayanagar Empire was its zenith in the first half of the sixteenth century. But came the barbarian onslaught and razed the achievement of two centuries. On January 23, 1565, the combined army of the Muslim rulers of the north routed the forces of Rama Raya. For six months the pillage continued. Robert Sewell, in his monumental work, A Forgotten Empire, records the ravage perpetrated by the invaders, ending

> Never perhaps in the history of the world has such havoc been wrought, and wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city . . . in the full plenitude of prosperity . . . seized, pillaged and reduced to ruins, amid scenes of savage massacre and horrors beggaring description.[4]

T. Ramakrishna is a spiritual descendant of the minstrels who, for decades and centuries after this Troy, stirred into renewed enthusiasm those who hoped for a resurrection of the glory that had been. But the cry for action became, with time, a nostalgic dreaming for a never-to-be-regained past.

Ramakrishna's Padmini is set in the seventeenth century when hope had not yet been atrophied into nostalgia. The location is one of the many principalities that had risen on the ruins of Vijayanagar to which frequent mention is made in ballads within the romance. As with Scott, there are references to specific historical events in the romances. Though there is no historic truth to the particular story narrated in Padmini, an air of probability permeates the plot and reanimates the setting.

Unlike Scott, Ramakrishna plunges into the action without long introductions or preamble. Salwa, an ambitious minister, has usurped the throne of Chandragiri and imprisoned its rightful king, Venkataraya, who is a descendant of Rama Raya, the last emperor of Vijayanagar. The story opens with Salwa being almost moved to remorse by a young minstrel who urges him to restore the throne to Venkataraya; Salwa's mood swings from remorse to anger and he orders that the youth be killed. The minstrel, reminiscent of Thomas Moore's

"Minstrel Boy," breaks his harp so that it may never be used by traitors. His dying prophecy is that the usurper has called down the doom of his entire race:

> Of whom none shall this throne of high renown defile
> None to point where thy body crumbled to the dust.[5]

Salwa sends his trusted servant, Obalu, to kill King Venkataraya and his family, all of whom are imprisoned in a dungeon. Then follows a typical Scott scene but, and this is characteristic of this novelist, it has distinctly Indian atmosphere. Obalu, on seeing imprisoned royalty, is stricken with compunction, but he has sworn fealty to Salwa and cannot but execute the command. The deposed king, with a magnanimity typical of romantic heroes, offers to help him out by enjoining his married son to kill his own family while he, Venktaraya, undertakes to kill his younger sons, his wife and himself, if Obalu would kill the princess, his only daughter. All die except the second son, Srirangaraya, who is spirited out of the dungeon in a washerman's bundle. The device of escape is typically Indian; in folklore and in history we find instances similar to this. For example, Sivaji, the greatest of Maratha leaders, escaped from his Moghul prison, in 1666, in a basket meant for fruits.

On his arm the twelve-year-old prince wears a ruby, the signet stone of the royal house of Vijayanagar. Needless to say, this proof of his royalty plays an important role in the denouement.

The third chapter takes us ahead in time. Salwa has established himself securely on the usurped throne. Hearing of the matchless beauty of a village maiden, Padmini, he sends his messengers with a proposal of marriage. But Padmini, a child of nature, opts to continue her village existence under her parents' roof. Undeterred, Salwa shifts her parents' roof to his own grounds by making Padmini's father a court-official.

Ramakrishna's ornate similes are always explicit though not always syntactically flawless:

> Like the stately lotus sprouting out the unsightly, uninteresting clay, she was born in an uninteresting and obscure village, and like the servant of the royal household that comes to a distant place to pluck the flower and take it to adorn the palace chambers, she was taken to the palace of Chandragiri to shine there as a woman among women, and like that same flower breathing sweetest fragrance when fiercest beat the sun's rays, the beauties of her character shone brightest by the rays of royal favor beating on her at all hours of the day, and her rugged virtue was shown the most when fiercely she was attacked with requests and importunities for marrying her. (P, p. 41).

This simile is one of many instances of the author's proneness to lengthy, descriptive, Victorian sentences. It is also an instance of a common flaw in early Indo-English writers--that of losing sight of the main parallels.

To facilitate his wooing, Salwa makes Padmini a lady-in-waiting to his queen, Ambiga. In Ambiga, he has a loyal and eloquent pleader who importunes Padmini to accept Salwa's suit. Instead of nurse or older woman,

to have one's own wife as a proxy in the wooing might seem odd to the western reader, but it will strike a responsive chord in Indians, who are familiar with the psychological and social acceptance of polygamy even though the present law of the land forbids it for Hindus. Ambiga extols Salwa's valor and recounts his singlehanded encounters with wild boars and with villains. But Padmini is unmoved. She believes in the motto, "I wed whom I love." To convince her, Ambiga resorts to stories of Hindu heroines who loved whom they wed. Here Ramakrishna draws from the wealth of the Mahabharata and of Tamil folklore. No matter how often they are retold, Indian readers respond warmly to stories of these ideal wives--Sita who followed Rama into exile, Savitri who regained Satyavan from the god of death, Chandramati who helped Harishchandra adhere to Truth, Kannaki who razed Madurai to the ground in her blazing anger at the unjust indictment of Kovalan. Some of Ramakrishna's most uncontrolled outbursts of enthusiasm occur when he talks of the Hindu ideal of womanhood; for example,

> Man has thus admitted himself to be the inferior of the woman. . . . He took care to keep her at the highest, and exacted from her a higher order of human virtue, purity and love. Blessed be the daughters of Ind. (P, p. 47).

Such authorial philosophizing is typical of Ramakrishna, who himself is typical of Indo-English writers of historical romances.

Both his heroines, Padmini and Devamani (A Dive for Death), stand up to these high standards. Padmini falls in love with a poor village youth, Chennappa, who bravely retrieves Salwa's treasured diamond from Echanna Naik, a refractory chieftain nefariously plotting against Salwa. Padmini sees him, falls in love and is steadfast in her love for this obscure youth. Love here is in true Indian style. The lovers seldom meet, and when they do, they do not converse directly with each other, and they certainly exchange no kiss or caress. Though she has seen him only once, Padmini mentally plights her trouth and vows to stay a virgin all her life if death should snatch away Chennappa. Several temptations, intrigues and nine chapters after their first meeting, Padmini weds Chennappa, who turns out to be Prince Srirangaraya of the second chapter.

The plot is simple and eminently predictable, even on such points as suspense and accident. So is the characterization. Echanna Naik is a stereotype villain just as Chennappa is a stereotype hero. Salwa's is the only characterization of any complexity. His minstrel and his wife bring out his innate nobility while Naik serves to show that Salwa is an efficient ruler who maintains law and order, and is always prepared for military and conspiratorial emergencies. Ambiga's love for him and his treatment of Padmini reveal him to be

an honorable man where love is concerned. But in other spheres of activity he is ruthless and selfish.

The style, too, is predictable. It must be granted that however stilted some of his descriptions, there are many landscapes in his novels that are effectively painted. His heart is in the lowlands of Tamilnad, and some of his best lyrics are about the countryside near Madras; for example,

> A deep sunk vale, 'tween verdant hills
> That in eternal friendship seemed to hold
> Communion with the changing skies above.

To say that Ramakrishna was imitating the English Romantics in his descriptions, and eighteenth century novelists in his narrative style, is not the whole truth. For he was also drawing on Indian classics. One cannot draw the line in the following passage, for example, between English and Indian influence:

> Where rivers meet, where, in the awful chasm or cleft of a mountain, interesting ice formations resembling sacred symbols appear; where, from great rocky heights, waterfalls have been coursing down incessantly; or where nature puts forth her best forms; or where the earth from her womb gives birth to precious stones of rich luster and hue; in such places such interesting circumstances directed the genius of the people to architectural memorials in the form of temples to the Most High, whose vastness and symmetry and whose real beauty, even in the minutest parts, find no parallel in any other country in the world. (P, p. 72).

It was mentioned in the first chapter that the earlier Indo-English writers desired to build bridges between India and Britain. Ramakrishna is typical on

this score as well. He makes an effort to act as interpreter between the ruler and the ruled. He takes it on himself to introduce India to the British. For example, he explains at length some Indian habits such as chewing betel leaves. Again, he starts nine of the seventeen chapters in Padmini with commentaries on the historical or social setting, and weaves in a philosophical or mythological theme. Some of these thoughts are well-expressed, as in Chapter II where he compares life to the soil, insipid in itself but potentially responsible for beauty; some are blatantly nostalgic, as in Chapter VI, where he speaks of Hindu aesthetics which inspired men to build temples (not pleasure palaces) in settings of sublime beauty; some are flagrantly didactic, as a passage in Chapter III which is a tract on the goodness that is found even in evil men; some are interpretive as the opening paragraph of Chapter XIII, where the ideals of asceticism are dwelt upon. In Chapter IV he gets so carried away by the Hindu ideal of womanhood that he devotes a third of that chapter to extolling the heroines of mythology, and in the rest of the chapter, Padmini and Ambiga are made to continue discussion of these ideals.

Besides these lengthy authorial commentaries, we have other eighteenth century characteristics such as chapter headings and subheadings that outline the content

of the chapter, authorial digressions into philosophy, and generally a flowery vocabulary that was outdated in England long before Ramakrishna's time.

It was earlier stated that some of these writers had admiration and gratitude for the British. Ramakrishna is representative of that stand as well. One of the first decisions that Padmini and Chennappa take on coming into their own (of course the prince gets his throne) is to reward an Englishman, Francis Day, who had helped and protected Padmini when she fled from Salwa.

Francis Day is a historical character. He was a Member of Council at the English settlement of Armagham, sixty-five miles north of modern Madras. Salwa had refused him permission to erect a fort on the coast for their trading post. But Chennappa lends a sympathetic ear not only because Day had helped Padmini but because his astrologer, like Hiawatha counselling his people to welcome the white man, tells him that the the white man would one day rule the whole land, and that Chennappa should therefore welcome and honor Day.

> Deny them not this request. The bird is outside the gate, asking for shelter. It is destined soon to come inside the central hall of the house and to become master of it, and to eat and drink of the best things therein, and the glory and the honor will be yours among future generations, that you first gave shelter to the future lords of the country. (P, p. 142).

The astrologer's counsel is an independent repetition of the encomium made by the last Queen of Vijayanagar before

she immolated herself at the defeat at Talikota. Her prophecy is recalled by the author in conclusion:

> there will come from
> The far off ends of this vast globe of ours--
> A little island planted in the sea--
> A handful of a noble race to trade,
> And shall from thee ask for a plot of land,
> And they shall prosper for their valor and
> Shall be exalted for their righteousness.
> They shall befriend the helpless and the poor,
> And like the streams that seek the ocean broad,
> The chickens that run to their mother's wings,
> The maidens helpless and forlorn, that court
> The succour of the chivalrous and the brave,
> The orphans poor, the bounty of the kind,
> All men of Ind, all races and all creeds
> Shall to their banner flock, to live in peace
> And amity . . .
>
> Thus was laid the foundation of a great empire.
> The rest is history. (P, p. 180).

Yes, indeed, the rest is history. English builders with native workmen built Fort St. George on the Coromandel coast; English traders with shrewd business sense built up the city of Madras around it; English soldiers with their unending supply of ammunition conquered the territory around the city; astute English administrators, with cunning and diplomacy, made native rulers sign away principalities and kingdoms; and the Union Jack fluttered triumphantly all over the peninsula and the northern plain.

Fool, traitor, sycophant? Not exactly. Ramakrishna was writing in the 1900's, a decade of renewed pledges of loyalty to Crown and Emperor occasioned by the death of the Queen-Empress, she who with orb and scepter and tired, imperious eyes surveyed her empire which never saw the set of sun.

The sage-astrologer who counsels Chennappa is not content to eulogize the English for their virtues. He goes on to compose apologias for their legendary stand-offishness and snobbery. He exhorts his compatriots to imitate the British and to be grateful for their presence in the country:

> We want men like the English to wake us from our sleep and to rouse our latent energies, that we may imitate their virtues and cultivate them for our good. (P, p. 197).

Thus, Ramakrishna voluntarily accepts the image that the British wanted the colonials to have of the English nation--that of benevolent rulers who conscientiously and at great personal sacrifice shouldered the white man's burden. Macaulay's spirit would certainly rejoice if he could read the early writers of whom Ramakrishna is fairly typical:

> He (Day) belongs to a nation whose pride and manliness and courage and chivalry will prevent them from mingling freely with us who possess virtues no less important. Dogged stubbornness, endurance, and desire to help the weak against the strong, and to grant equality of political rights to those who are not as physically great as themselves, these masculine virtues characterize such nations. On the other hand, we possess the softer virtues of humility, mild forbearance, kindness and mercy to all living things on earth. (P, p. 196).

This comparison of British and Indian traits, with its corollary that Indians should learn from the British, is typical of early Indo-English writers.

Indeed, this may be taken as one of the criteria for distinguishing between early writers and native-talents.

Native talents, one of whom is studied in the next chapter, are not interested in imitation, whether of social values, way of life or literary techniques. They are more concerned with writing about contemporary conditions and delineating the everyday life of ordinary people, and with using the English language in a flexible, natural way so that it started evolving into a "dialect that will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.[6]

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Kalki" was the pseudonym of R. Krishnamunthi, and "Chandilyan" is the pseudonym of T. Bhashyam.

[2]Cited by R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri, Kalikinkar Datta, An Advanced History of India (London, 1958), p. 374.

[3]Ibid., p. 379.

[4]Robert Sewell, A Forgotten Empire (London, 1900), p. 151.

[5]T. Ramakrishna, Padmini: An Indian Romance (London, 1903), p. 5. Hereafter cited as P. For the second and subsequent quotations from works studied at some length in this dissertation, the page reference is given in parentheses after the quotation, preceded by an abbreviated form of the title.

[6]Raja Rao, Kanthapura (New York, 1963), Foreword. The novel was first published in 1938.

CHAPTER III

NATIVE GENIUS: R. K. NARAYAN

Writers with native talent natively nurtured form a large and significant category in South Indian writing. The best of them show how well an English literary form can be adapted to develop Indian themes and how effectively the English language can be transmuted to express and convey Indian thought-sequences. The leading names in this group are R. K. Narayan, K. Nagarajan, K. S. Venkataramani, Manjeri S. Isvaran[1] and S. Y. Krishnaswamy. All of them were born, educated and spent their formative years in the South; their professions took Isvaran and Krishnaswamy to other parts of the country, but their writing has little to say about it; Narayan and Nagarajan have been abroad, but only after their literary style had been developed; Venkataramani and Shankar Ram are truly writers of the southern soil. All belong to the Brahmin community, an interesting fact though it does not have as significant a bearing on their work as it did in the case of earlier writers such as Madhaviah. Narayan,

especially, carefully avoids all reference to caste, though most of his central characters are Brahmins. All these writers were born between 1890 and 1910 and therefore had their schooling at a time when English was well established but had not yet met with any nationalistic antagonism. In youth, all of them were aware of Gandhi and the national movement and they were influenced to various degrees by them.

Of these authors Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan (born 1906) is the best and most representative. He has published ten novels and four volumes of short stories, has been an irregular contributor to The Hindu and has in recent years written for magazines as varied in their content as Ladies' Home Journal and Playboy. Some consider him the foremost of Indo-English novelists. Although such a judgment is unwarranted, he is, undeniably, a major writer and few have made a more significant contribution. He is a phenomenon because in his work the whole is very much greater than the sum of the parts. This chapter considers Narayan's novels.

The chapter is divided into two sections, the first dealing with a general evaluation of Narayan's work and place in Indo-English literature, and the second with a deeper look at a smaller area of his total work. More critical work has been done on Narayan than on any other Indo-English novelist. As elsewhere in

this dissertation, the amount of available scholarship has helped decide what aspects will be focussed upon and what given a more cursory handling. The idea is to draw upon all sources but mainly to complement them so that a total evaluation of Narayan is made possible by putting together all these sources.

Available criticism on Narayan falls into three categories. First, there are the reviews. The reviews in newspapers and popular magazines have been unduly laudatory and an image has been built up making Narayan an Indian Chekhov. Discounting these as generally unreliable, we have the more serious article-length reviews in literary periodicals which deserve to be sifted because of the insights and perceptive assessments in such reviews as those of William Walsh in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (JCL), and even in the usually oracular statements of reviewers such as David McCutchion and in the extravagantly adulatory reviews such as those of C. D. Narasimhaiah.

Second, there are full-length studies of Narayan's work in periodicals such as JCL and The Literary Criterion. There is even a doctoral dissertation by Nirmal Mukerji on Narayan's fiction. These are introductory in the sense that they are chronological surveys of his fiction mainly consisting of detailed plot summaries and a general commentary. For instance,

V. Panduranga Rao's "The Art of R. K. Narayan"[2] has certain perceptive critical comments but is essentially a general handbook on Narayan's novels, while Nirmal Mukerji's doctoral thesis[3] is an expanded version of the same contents as in Srinivasa Iyengar's volumes.[4] In the same category, but having a different structural approach, is M. E. Derrett's The Modern Indian Novel in English (1966).[5] This volume is a compendium of quotations from Indo-English novels, Indo-English novelists, critics and sociologists. The complex structure of the work, with its frequent jumping from one novel to another, makes it difficult for one to get a cohesive picture of what is said about any one author. Also, the comparative approach requires generalizations to connect the succession of quotations, and these generalizations are not always valid. On the whole, the project is too ambitious to be practical. An example of its basic shortcoming can be seen in the following statement that introduces the chapter, "Characters in the Indian Novel in English":

> Works by authors differing widely in background and ability will be used as illustrations with no deliberate choice. . . . What follows is an illustration of the Indian approach to characterization, rather than a critical review of the skills of the authors. The same approach will be found in the succeeding chapters.[6]

Obviously one cannot draw totally valid conclusions on the Indian approach without relating such factors as

background and ability to the actual writing and relating the quotations to the context from which they are taken. Even a thorough familiarity with the novels from which the quotations are taken is not enough to make this volume a cohesive study because the spotlight shifts too frequently. However, like Srinivasa Iyengar's Indian Writing in English, this work is a very useful source.

The third category of criticism has only recently been introduced. It consists of essays which take the approach advocated in the opening chapter of this dissertation, viz. of entering without lengthy preambles into the study of particular themes or patterns or stylistic or technical characteristics of an author. Rajeev Taranath's "The Average as Positive" in Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English is an excellent example of the kind of approach required to strengthen the field of Indo-English criticism. Taranath traces the common elements in Narayan's characterization of his major characters and draws the conclusion that though Narayan does not overly take sides on moral issues, he does imply that the "average" person is the one who survives.

This approach of studying themes and patterns is adopted in the sections subsequent to the general evaluation of Narayan. There is a section that studies

Waiting for the Mahatma and this is followed by a section that traces the theme of paternal love in Narayan's fiction. Waiting for the Mahatma is, in my opinion, his weakest novel. Other critics do not think so. Indeed, it is usually considered one of his best novels and is frequently seen on the curriculum of Commonwealth Literature courses. Waiting for the Mahatma has been chosen for critical study because it highlights certain traits in Narayan's style, technique and approach to his art that are found in all his novels. Waiting for the Mahatma also shows weaknesses that are present in all his novels, but which are counterbalanced to different degrees in them by his strengths.

The most striking quality about both Narayan's work and Narayan himself is unpretentiousness. Narayan meandered his lone, unrewarded, unrecognized way for twenty-five years before his novels won a reading public large enough to bring in any monetary returns. Between 1928 and 1953 he "lived off the fat of the joint-family system"[7] and did the only thing he wanted to do--he wrote. Once The Guide (1958) was sold to the celluloid world, fame and fortune came in good measure, but Narayan continued to be his old quiet, unpretentious self. Since this study is not about Narayan the man but about Narayan the novelist, no more need be said except that one of the best pen-portraits of the man is to be found in Ved Mehta's article cited above.

Narayan's novels too are unpretentious. The most noteworthy quality about his work is that he knows his limitations and seldom ventures beyond them. This quality makes many of his weaknesses into qualified virtues.

As a preamble to this section, which is a general study of the qualities and characteristics of Narayan's work, a series of statements are first given and then the statements are expanded, justified and substantiated in the light of Narayan's fiction and certain standard criteria of prose criticism.

Narayan is a storyteller, nothing less and seldom more. His plots are thin and there is nothing spectacular or distinctive about them. There are seldom any subplots. But he has what E. M. Forster calls "the primitive power of keeping the reader in suspense and playing on his curiosity."[8] A serious shortcoming in his art is that in seven of the ten novels the plot breaks midway, never quite managing to resolve the incongruence between realism and fantasy which are its main components.

Narayan's characters and setting are drawn from the urban middle class of South Indian towns. The setting is vivid and, as K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, Malgudi is the hero of Narayan's novels. Narayan's characters are mostly one-dimensional and his cast in each novel is limited. Narayan does not identify himself with his

characters nor does he evoke reader-identification. Of his insight and craftsmanship one may say he deftly catches the atmosphere of the Malgudi marketplace but fails when he tries to follow anyone into the lanes that branch off the Market Road; he has breadth but no depth; his prose is clear and correct but lacks poetry. It is the prose of the plains, not the prose of the gushing Ganges of the Himalayas as found in Mulk Raj Anand or Raja Rao. It is the prose of the southern plains in April when the rivers are streamlets standing still in the torrid blaze of the tropical sun, appreciated by passersby not so much for what they contain as for what they represent, not so much for their meagre beauty but for the sheer fact that they are there, still surviving under the summer sun. The same metaphor might be applied to Narayan's early work in general. It is appreciated for the sheer fact of its existence at a time and place when the literary climate was dry and barren.

To take up these statements on narrative skill, style, characterization, plot, setting, theme and literary devices at greater length and depth, one might start with the statement, "Narayan is a story-teller, nothing less and seldom more." In the context of native talents we have to bear in mind the Indian social and literary traditions as well as the fact that

these writers consciously use the novel-form which is a western import. The traditional story-teller, like the minstrel in the European medieval tradition, occupies a place of respect and popularity in the community. His job is to entertain and also to instruct through his entertainment. Like the traditional story-teller, Narayan has an easy flow of words and speaks at a basic level, and needs an essential receptivity on the part of the audience. Narayan certainly entertains but not at a brisk, rollicking pace. On the other hand the laughter he evokes is not recorded laughter edited into the video-tape but genuine and simple laughter. And like the traditional story-teller, Narayan instructs in a mild general way. However, he does not have the force of the story-teller, perhaps because he does not draw upon the story-teller's sources--the epic tales and epic heroes.[9]

Judging Narayan on the basis of the western novel form is another matter altogether. A modern novelist is expected to do more than tell a story. Many renowned critics in the field of prose criticism hold that the modern novel is and should be a medium for moral questioning and enlightenment. Lionel Trilling says the novel "is a perpetual quest for reality," and is "the most effective agent of the moral imagination."[10] Philip Rahv extends the novel's horizons still further, endorsing the Goncourt brothers who say the novel is

> a great, serious, impassioned living form of literary study and social research [and that] by means of analysis and psychological inquiry it is turning into contemporary moral history.[11]

Steven Marcus, tracing the role of the novel in modern society, says the novel should give us

> an adequate notion of what it is like to be alive today, why we are the way we are, and what might be done to remedy our bad situation.[12]

The only generalization possible on Narayan's moral vision (if one can use so profound a term as "moral vision" for Narayan's fiction) is to say that he affirms the average. I disagree with Srinivasa Iyengar who says Narayan

> seems to see the world as a complicated system of checks and counterchecks, the net result being the enthronement of the Absurd.[13]

The final position at the end of each novel is not the enthronement of the Absurd but the triumph of the common in spite of the invasion of it by the eccentric.

This vision is positive, and that, perhaps, is Narayan's contribution to modern fiction. Leslie Fiedler, with his usual flamboyant energy, insists that in order "to fulfill its essential moral obligation, such [serious] fiction must be negative."[14] Perhaps Narayan's paradoxical answer is that fiction can be valid even when it portrays and affirms middle-class life through the use of a non-committal lighter vein. Narayan's affirmation is not a thunderous one. It is found only if one looks for it.

So, judged by the critics' demand for nothing less than salvation, Narayan is not a good modern novelist. There is no overwhelming moral conviction communicated in his stories. He is not passionately concerned with any social or spiritual ideal. He has no Open Sesame password to salvation. He is seldom more than a story-teller. Arguments could be advanced to show Narayan's concern for the spiritual[15] and the seriousness of his satire against those that form such groups as the movie world (Mr. Sampath) and local politics (Waiting for the Mahatma.) But any serious pursuit of such patterns might lead to the Procrustean-bed school of criticism.

Returning to the basic rationale of the statements by Marcus and others quoted above, should these standards be applied? Are we to condemn a major section of novelists as alienated people "resting in a kind of comfortable empiricism . . . entirely unaware that any larger problem exists,"[16] merely because they deal with a traditional literary form in which novelists concerned themselves with particular, limited human and social situations?

However, this limitation, if it is a limitation, of not having an overriding message, becomes, like many other Narayan qualities, a qualified virtue. Narayan may not speak impassionedly from the podium of social reform

as Mulk Raj Anand does, or from the pulpit of spiritual contemplation as Raja Rao does, but neither does he ever lapse into soap-box orations as K. S. Venkataramani occasionally does and minor writers of the Gandhian era invariably did.

Narayan's significant achievement is to be found, not in his message or in his control of the art form but in the eminent success of his creation of a typical South Indian town--Malgudi.

All ten novels and most of the short stories are set in Malgudi. Various critics have attempted to identify the original of this mythical town. Srinivasa Iyengar speculates that it might be Lalgudi on the River Kaveri or Yadavagiri in Mysore. To these speculations I might add my own, that Narayan's Malgudi is Coimbatore which has many of the landmarks--a river on one side, forests on the others, the Mission School and College and all the extensions mentioned in the novels. However, one is not likely to arrive at any definite answer as to its geographical location even if one sifts all the references to the town in the novels including such specific allusions as that Malgudi is almost a day's journey from Madras. The simple reason is that Narayan has not drawn any map or framework of consistency for his Malgudi as Faulkner, for example, did for his Yokna-Patawpha or Hardy had in mind for his Sussex novels.

Others have done this for Narayan. Nirmal Mukerji has appended a map of Malgudi to her doctoral dissertation, "The World of Malgudi"; Srinivasa Iyengar has three pages of careful description of Malgudi and its environs.[17]

The points to note about Narayan's delineation of Malgudi are that he makes it reflect the changes undergone by a typical South Indian town between 1935 (Swami and Friends) and 1967 (The Sweet-Vendor), and that this backdrop is always excellently done, often better than the characterization, plot or prose-style. The setting comes alive in every one of Narayan's novels, whether it is the beauty of River Sarayu in the evening, the carefree atmosphere of Albert Mission School and Albert Mission College in Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts, the crowded locality around Srinivas's press in Mr. Sampath or the awesome silence around Mempi Guest House in The Guide. As Srinivasa Iyengar suggests, Malgudi might be called the real hero of Narayan's novels.[18]

Indeed, Malgudi is the only "character" that grows, changes, reacts to time and circumstance, has a spirit, a soul. Other Narayan characters do not grow. They are essentially what E. M. Forster would call "flat characters."

Minor flat characters are delightful. Narayan has a felicity for caricature, not for character-development. So the most interesting people in his fiction are what

W. J. Harvey calls "Cards," whose distinguishing feature is "relative changelessness, combined with a peculiar kind of freedom."[19] For example, the Adjournment Lawyer, a figure who recurs in Mr. Sampath and The Man-Eater of Malgudi, and the Cousin in The Sweet-Vendor are cards. Their actions are predictable, but one does not tire of them because they slither around and into new shapes though the basic putty is the same.

The major characters, also, are essentially flat even though they undergo experiences that would normally result in change. For example, Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi descends on Nataraj like a cyclone, but Nataraj simply picks himself up, shakes the mud off his sleeve, so to speak, and goes back to his printing routine. Vasu himself is not changed either, and his death is violent as his life was, without any dramatic revelation preceding it.

Narayan's art of characterization may be summed up in a parallel--his main characters are like the weighted, inflatable toys that bob up on their feet no matter how they are pushed. Vasu remains a villain until death and beyond it, Margayya the financial expert, Raju the Guide and Mr. Sampath remain rogues; Krishnan the English Teacher and Chandran the Bachelor of Arts remain romantics. Only in the earliest two novels and in the last do the main characters change within the novel.

Swami leaves childhood behind as he bids farewell to Rajam, Jagan takes the step towards positive "vana-prasthashram," the ascetic life of non-attachment enjoined in the Hindu scriptures for those who have gone through the other three stages of child, brahmacharya (celibate studentship) and grahasta (householder), and Savitri of The Dark Room surrenders.

The Dark Room has not been given the critical attention it deserves in Narayan scholarship. Though the story is thin, the underlying theme is profoundly realistic, as are the little details about everyday life. This novelette clearly shows that Narayan's forte lies in portraying middle-class life with its mediocre monotony and occasional digressions.

The characterization is stronger in this novel than in most others because Narayan shows a causal sequence in the characters' inter-personal relationship and in the outcome of their behavior. The story is about marital disharmony and Narayan, with an artistic conscientiousness not often in evidence, plants incidents and thoughts that show the lack of positive harmony in the marriage even before the actual breach. Both Savitri and Ramani are well-portrayed and consistently-drawn characters. Ramani is finicky about his dress and appearance, fond of exhibiting his status, snobbish and above all, assertive at home and at his office.

Savitri is a young woman, married long enough for life to sink into a rut and for beauty to fade, but not long enough to have had her desire for activity and individuality killed. There are various incidents, in themselves trivial, that show the discordant notes in the domestic orchestra. One of these, the repeated shielding of her son, Babu, from Ramani's reprimands, is made the cause of a major quarrel, and the reconciliation that follows foreshadows the defeat Savitri will suffer at the end with Savitri's aborted attempt at suicide and her humiliated return to her old routine. Narayan prepares the ground for both the final rebellion and the final defeat right through the novelette. Savitri periodically rebels but Ramani simply looks through her acts of resentment, as he does in the end, neither giving her the satisfaction of upsetting him nor the remorse that a loving reconciliation on his part would have caused. The novel ends poignantly, the battle over, with Ramani the victor and Savitri the doubly vanquished. Their family life will thenceforth be harmonious, but the harmony will be the result of all instruments but one--Ramani's assertiveness--having been muted.

In The Dark Room the point of view, though finally non-committal and remote as in all other novels, is Savitri's. Also, it is, as in all other novels,

a single point of view. We are not told or given anything from Ramani's point of view.

All his novels, except The Guide, are straight narrations, uncomplicated by chronological disjointedness or multi-points-of-view. The flashbacks in The Sweet-Vendor and Mr. Sampath are clear and involve no Joycean acrobatics, while the chronological sequence in The Guide, though slightly more difficult to tabulate, is simple enough. The point-of-view adopted in the various novels is similar. Wayne Booth classifies narrators into three main types--implied author, undramatized narrators and dramatized narrators--and further divides the last group into observers and narrator-agents. He defines narrator-agents as those "who produce some measurable effect on the course of events."[20] Narayan has narrator-agents in The Man-Eater of Malgudi and Mr. Sampath. Srinivas in Mr. Sampath and Nataraj in The Man-Eater of Malgudi are, like Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby, characters who help us understand the main character through their comments. Both novels are interesting in that Srinivas and Nataraj play a more important role than Nick Carraway. Each is, in a way, the main character in his novel until the realistic plot breaks to give way to fantasy.

Through his narrator-agents, Narayan gives us his affirmation (if so serious a term may be used for Narayan's

fiction) of middle-class life. As Mark Schorer says in "Technique and Discovery," a novelist expresses his values and his attitude towards the world and by the device of point-of-view.[21] By making Srinivas and Nataraj not only withstand the onslaught of the eccentric and irrational Sampath and Vasu but return to their old routine after the storm, Narayan is expressing his faith in the predictable and relatively sane world of the common man.

In six other novels--Swami and Friends, The Dark Room, The Bachelor of Arts, The Financial Expert, Waiting for the Mahatma and The Sweet-Vendor--there is "indirect presentation" to use Percy Lubbock's terms.[22] Lubbock mentions that one of the effective types of presentation is to have the narration in the third-person where, though the author does not delve into the subconscious or unconscious of his characters, the action is unfolded as seen by or happening to the main character.

In The English Teacher the narrator is himself the protagonist. First-person narration usually gives a certain measure of authenticity to an experience (as recognized and exploited by the writers of cheap nurse-doctor and true-romance stories), but the authenticity of The English Teacher stems from the deeper source of autobiography. However, this same autobiographical quality is the reason for the failure of one of the major scenes in the novel--the scene in which Susila contracts typhoid.

Narayan has given the autobiographical basis of the novel to Ved Mehta:

> My father-in-law was quite well-to-do, wanted to settle a house on Rajam, and one day he came up from Coimbatore and we went round searching for a place. We looked through a number of remodelled houses, and late that afternoon we happened upon one that seemed suitable. It had the solidity of an wold [sic] house and the bright cleanness of a new one. While my father-in-law and I were canvassing the land, Rajam went into the bathroom, an outhouse, to wash. She did not rejoin us. I got worried and walked back to the bathroom. Rajam was pounding away at the shut door, screaming, 'Someone open it! Someone open it!' I gave the door one or two hard kicks and Rajam fell out in my arms. She was convulsed with sobs, and her face was feverish red. She cried out that it was the dirtiest place she had ever been in. She said a fly had settled on her lips. I took her home, but she wouldn't yeat [sic] anything. She kept washing herself, time and time again. By the evening she had temperature and she remained in bed with typhoid for twenty days. It was 1939, and no one had heard of chloramphenicol. Rajam died. A fly had killed an almost five-year-old marriage.[23]

That a writer should write as blunt an autobiography, true to details even to the point of abstaining from embellishing the realistic but repugnant latrine scene, is a strange but perhaps not rare example of self-therapy. Seen from the autobiographical side, Susila's contraction of typhoid virus in a dirty latrine is extremely pathetic; but viewed from the artistic point of view, as a device whereby the heroine feels the touch of Death on her lips, I think it fails. The scene, in the novel, has enough realism to convey a mixture of repugnance and horror, but not enough force or drama to carry us onward without being conscious of the ludicrousness of the experience,

a consciousness enhanced by association with Narayan's hallmark of humorous realism which characterize his terse descriptions of the dirt and filth of Malgudi's marketplace and sewers, or the animal stench in Nataraj's attic or the fly-infested store next to which Margayya sets up office. In the immediate context the whole scene--with Susila falling into Krishnan's arms, her repeated washings at the tap, the contractor's apology about passersby using the outhouse as a public convenience--appears to be no more than, in Krishnan's words, "a sad anticlimax to a very pleasing morning." Perhaps it is unfair of us to expect from a Narayan the supreme potency of "Out, damned spot! out I say! What! will these hands ne'er be clean? . . . Here's the smell of the blood still . . . " but looking at the whole cycle of Krishnan's tragedy, there is no denying that the chapter does not bring out the stark poignancy of the fact that a fly can, and did, end a happy marriage.

The English Teacher, despite the beauty and pathos of the total experience, shows in its parts that Narayan is not capable of portraying heights and depths of emotional experience. On this point, as in others, Narayan knows his limitation and does not often venture into areas which require forceful delineation. But no novelist can get away from the necessity of using words to communicate the basic action and the more vital

qualities of tone and atmosphere. Narayan has not only the reticence of a middle-class person to explore or express deep emotional experiences but an incapacity, as artist, to develop, command and control a powerful and versatile prose style.

In studying prose style, one runs into the problem of definition. According to the simple definition that prose style consists of how a writer uses diction and form, Narayan's style is weak. Judged by the wider definition that relates the use of form and language to matter and pattern, Narayan's style is acceptable.

> All that we can legitimately ask of a novelist in the matter of language is that it be appropriate to the matter in hand. What is said must not stand in a contradictory relation to the way it is said.[24]

Since all Narayan characters are middle-class persons and all his stories are straight narratives, one can say that there is no contradiction between his narrative and his pedestrian diction.

But the basic criterion of readability and interest surely is not to be underestimated. To take a simple definition, M. H. Abrams says:

> Style is the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse--it is <u>how</u> a speaker says whatever he says. The characteristic style of a work or a writer may be analyzed in terms of its diction, or characteristic choice of words, its sentence structure and syntax; the density and types of figurative language; the patterns of its rhythm and of its component sounds; and its rhetorical aims and devices.[25]

Applying this to Narayan, his style is found to be disconcertingly plebeian. His usual style is characterized by a stringing together of subject-predicate-object sentences. "Simple" and "lucid" are words his admirers use for this pedestrian monotone that lacks color, music and strength. His admirers see this simplicity as a vindication of the Indo-English language. C. D. Narasimhaiah's article, "R. K. Narayan's The Guide"[26] is typical of a kind of criticism that has lionized Narayan. Five pages of this encomium on Narayan and The Guide are devoted to praising Narayan's prose style. The irony is that many of the passages quoted do not really exemplify the statement that goes with them. The critic's choice could be held partly responsible, but the fact is that it is not easy to find examples of "fluent, flexible and vigorous" prose or the capacity to "juxtapose the solemn and the vulgar" or the "virtues of educated Indians' speech--now colloquial and racy, now literary and refined" or prose that "glows and glimmers and soon is silent." Here is a passage from that article; it says something about critic and author:

> Is it fast-moving action? He is equal to it too: "There was a clapping of hands. The band struck up, the engine whistled, the bell rang, the guard blew his whistle and the men who had been consuming refreshments climbed into the train."[27]

The last two phrases, especially the words "consuming" and "climbed into" are typical of Indian-English, but

they certainly have no positive merit of any kind except that they are in Narayan's natural voice. Narayan fails in his authorial commentary and narration though he sometimes excels in his dialogues.

"Do you want him to write like a Cambridge don?" these critics ask, or "like some who have stayed too long in the west?" These two phrases recur in Indo-English criticism published in Indian periodicals. The barb is unmistakably aimed at Balachandra Rajan, Cambridge tripos-holder and author of Too Long in the West. No, one does not expect or wish Narayan's language to be highly polished or artificially gilded. However, though realism demands that his characters be made to speak as the man-in-the-street would, one expects the author to be master of a wider vocabulary when the novel is written in third-person narrative. That Narayan has a wide vocabulary is proven by his Dateless Diary (1960), but for some reason, probably intentional unpretentiousness, it never appears in his novels. As V. Y. Kantak in his discerning essay says:

> He does not seem to be interested in exploring the fuller, deeper possibilities of the language he is using. . . . Word or phrase rarely glints with compression or suggested meanings.[28]

The problem faced by the Indo-English writer has been succinctly expressed by Raja Rao:

> We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our

> method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.[29]

But Narayan writes only as an Indian, and a non-literary Indian at that. He neither explores the variety and versatility of English as Balachandna Rajan does, nor the possibility of transmuting the wealth of the vernacular as done by Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Raja Rao and Anand have shown that one can experiment with the Indo-English dialect in numberless ways. Both use literal translation of vernacular idioms, e.g., "why do you make our stomachs burn?";[30] both use literal translations of ejaculations, expletives and interjections, and nicknames. For example, Anand characters frequently use "brother-in-law," a common ejaculation in Hindi, and long abuses such as

> . . . you illegally begotten! You, eater of dung and drinker of urine! You, bitch of a sweeper woman! I will show you how to insult one old enough to be your mother.[31]

Raja Rao in his first novel, translates the nicknames by which various women characters are identified, e.g., "Nose-scratching Nanjamma," "Waterfall Venkamma," "Corner-House Narsamma." Such transmutations are not always effective, it is true, but they animate the world of Kanthapura and The Untouchable with a breath of novelty (if the reader is unfamiliar with the vernacular) or authenticity (if the reader is familiar with the vernacular.) Narayan does not experiment with words. Some

critics feel that Narayan's diction is, nevertheless, effective. Kantak himself goes on to say, "And yet this one-stringed instrument (like that ukelele-like thing one sees farmers selling to city children) suffices for Narayan's purpose." I do not think it suffices. The comparison to the ukelele-like instrument, however, is extremely apposite. That is exactly what Narayan's prose is--a one-stringed violin fashioned out of coconut shells and bamboo. The vendors who sell these are remarkably facile with the instruments; one can recognize the tunes they play; one even smiles with remembered pleasure because of the drolly effective mimicry. But it is not music, and never can be.

The simile can be used further. One smiles with remembered pleasure--the listener contributes substantially to the effect of the one-stringed violin. The listener has heard the tune before; it is a familiar one, a popular one, and it has all the charm of familiar and loved things. This is the source that Narayan taps--the endless storehouse of associations and remembrances that a reader brings with himself. Narayan's catalog descriptions, and his one-line characterizations--such as of the adjournment lawyer's, and the importance of the cricket match in Swami and Friends and the description of the eavesdroppers around the Financial Expert, to mention just a few examples--strike home because they

deal with incidents, people and places the average reader, regardless of his background, knows. Narayan's Bachelor of Arts is an example of this. In the first half, which is the humorous half, Narayan has capitalized on the reader's knowledge of college life. But it has only to be compared to any other novel of youth and university life and much of its credit will be depleted. To compare it with a novel by another South Indian, P. M. Nityanandan's The Long Long Days (1960) is one of the best, perhaps the best, Indo-English novel on the lighter side of youth. Written in a flamboyant style, it radiates the exuberance of an imaginative mind. One-volume writers tend to unload their entire arsenal in a single book, often in the first few chapters. But Nityanandan is a talented writer who seems capable of writing several novels in the same vein as the first and still hold his readers. Nowhere in The Bachelor of Arts can one come across phrases that combine atmosphere, observation and color, as, say, Nityanandan's description of the tediousness of convocation exercises: "you wait and wait, swathed in umbrella cloth and listening to your beard grow," or of the bus conductor: "To hold his job, he had to combine the agility of a performing octopus with the patience of a prematurely requisitioned midwife." A taint of inept bombast is present in many

of his phrases, but they are so picturesque one prefers them to Narayan's unvarnished correctness.

The limitation of his vocabulary is accentuated by his proneness to economize on words. But there are passages that are spectacularly successful because of this very quality. The opening chapters of The English Teacher (titled Grateful to Life and Death in the American edition) are a striking example of Narayan's effective economy of words. He communicates an atmosphere without having said anything abstract. We are told of Krishnan's daily routine that is punctuated with lovers' quarrels and lovers' reconciliations over such mundane issues as grocery-buying, and yet what is transmitted is not monotony but an ethereal sense of total fulfillment. Susila is, in life as in after-life, a presence that comforts and delights not only her husband but the reader as well. Narayan's unadorned prose proves adequate for a profound moment of experience when Krishnan, while returning with Susila from their house-hunting expedition, says, "'It is God's infinite grace that has given me this girl!' The jutka was filled with the scent of jasmine in her hair and the glare of the indigo-coloured saree."[32] "Indigo" is not an aesthetic-sounding word and "glare" is rather inappropriate both in itself and in the coupling of scent and light, and yet within the context the reader instinctively feels

this is a moment of transcendence where Krishnan realizes that the spiritual fragrance of Susila's presence permeates his being as wholly as the jasmine sweetened the air in the buggy; the reader also knows that it is a high point which portends a separation.

Sometimes Narayan's economy of words succeeds in rapidly and effectively summarizing a passage of time. The Guide offers several examples: Raju's self-education from the books at the railway book stall, or still better, Chapter IX, which traces Raju coming into his true color, which is that of a vainglorious rogue who with the gaining of wealth and stature becomes not only a snob but a possessive villain who stifles Rosie more callously than Marco had.[33]

Even more interesting examples of Narayan's excellence at reportorial description are his compressed cataloging of fraternal animosity and the sharing of patrimony in The Financial Expert and The Man-Eater of Malgudi (pp. 8 and 9 respectively.) These catalog descriptions, as I call them, are a characteristic that appears right through Narayan's fiction. One of his very earliest stories is about a delightful youngster, Dodu:

> Dodu's office was his dealwood box with the lid open. . . . When he wanted to do a bit of serious thinking, he would open the lid and squat into his box amidst its contents. . . . Every evening Dodu would make a circuit round the house to gather

> 'things' as he vaguely called them. The w.p.b. in his father's room gave him a steady supply of attractive book jackets, brown wrapping paper, large envelopes, charming catalogs, and pieces of brown thread. From under the window of his big brother, he picked up yellow packets of goldflake cigarettes . . . razor blades, cardboard boxes. When his sister was not at home, he opened her box and appropriated bits of colored thread.[34]

But, in general, Narayan is careless. There are numberless sentences in every Narayan novel that could be markedly improved by simple changes in syntax or diction. The truth is that he never rewrites, never revises, as he himself has admitted to Ved Mehta:

> "I am an inattentive, quick writer who has little sense of style," he said candidly. Once he has written the first few pages of a novel, he seldom retouches a sentence, believing that writing is a "dovetailing process," which means that a novel well begun writes itself.[35]

No doubt some of the most spectacularly effective pieces in literature have been written in that fashion, or to put it in Wordsworth's phraseology, have been a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, but as a rule, artistic creation takes its toll of blood, sweat and toil. For unrevised drafts Narayan's novels are commendable but as completed novels most of them lack not only the polish of revised prose but, more fundamentally, an internal unity.

Here, as in judging all other qualities in Indo-English fiction, one has to remember that the Indian story-telling tradition is of an episodic nature and that little attention is paid to the nuances of

characterization and unity of action, and that fantasy is a common quality in stories. Also, as Northrop Frye and Maurice Shroder point out in their discerning essays,[36] "romance" and "novel" frequently overlap within the same work.

Narayan uses both fantasy and realism in eight of his ten novels, but they are not properly balanced. The first half often has excellent, realistically drawn setting, characterization and action. About halfway through the novel there is a distinct break and fantasy takes over.

Fantasy as an adjunct of comedy is a legitimate and effective device in a novelist's canon. In Narayan's novels it serves its purpose within the immediate context but becomes incongruous in the larger context which includes realistic persons and realistic situations. Every novel except Swami and Friends and The Dark Room has the two factors of realism and fantasy very loosely threaded together. There is a realistic hero (the word "hero" is used for lack of any other suitably short term) and a fantastic villain; the hero is portrayed realistically against a middle class background whereas most things about the villain are fantastic. The two elements could be handled deftly, but Narayan merely places them side by side. That part of the hero's life which is affected by the villain is insulated, so to say.

Srinivas's life, for example, is steered by Sampath into a fantastic venture, but we do not hear enough of the effect it has on Srinivas's private life. Similarly Nataraj's experience with Vasu is almost traumatic, but only a part of his life is shown to come into contact with Vasu's outrageous behavior. This is not to say the characters do not come alive. What is missing is the follow-through, the plumbing of the depths. Not only does Narayan not enter his characters, he is very reticent even in talking about them. Only in the characterization of Jagan the sweet-vendor is this silence effective. Even in The Sweet-Vendor, which is one of his best novels, the plot gets out of hand. The fantasy that goes out of balance here is not Jagan's meeting with the sculptor but Mali's fantastic story-writing machine. Fantasy is used as an adjunct of satire here, but somewhere along the line Narayan misses the links that would make the plot cohesive. As they are, most of his plots break into two disparate plots, the realistic vein being carried alongside the fantastic and then dropped altogether.

T. D. Brunton, commenting on the "original compound of fantasy and realism," says that when "the vein of fantasy predominates, his writing slips into escapism and triviality."[37] I disagree with Brunton. For one thing, if there were a "compound" of fantasy and realism, I would call it successful, but what we have in Narayan

is a mechanical mixture, not an organic compound. Also, when fantasy predominates, Narayan's writing does not slip into escapism and triviality but into incongruity. Brunton's view that Vasu's decision to shoot the temple elephant is trivial and unconvincing is not justified; I feel that Narayan slips into incongruity because the decision is not consistent with Vasu's character. It is consistent only with one facet of his character, his ruthlessness, but essentially Vasu is a careful villain and this intrigue, even if it had succeeded, would have meant too much trouble. Vasu, it is obvious, is not one to let greed dictate strategy because he had strategy enough to draw in all the profit he wanted. The incongruity in The Sweet-Vendor is of another kind. Jagan is realistic and more of a whole, distinct character than Srinivas, Nataraj or even Margayya, and it is a pity that Narayan obtrudes the ridiculous fantasy of story-writing machines into a finely portrayed realistic situation of alienation between father and son.

Narayan's plots fall apart but not due to the improbability of events, as Brunton holds. Perhaps racial and cultural background has something to do with the comprehension or miscomprehension of this aspect; I do not see the events leading to the denouement in various novels as improbable. "Might as well drown myself in the river," and "Might as well renounce the world and

wander as a sanyasi," are not only common idioms in Tamil but not uncommon occurrences, and so Savitri's suicide attempt in The Dark Room and Chandran's renunciation in The Bachelor of Arts are entirely credible happenings. Belief in planchets and supernatural communication such as we find in The English Teacher is present all over the world, and in India it is not unusual even for educated men of letters and of science to have implicit faith in such things. Similarly, Raju the guide becoming a fake-swami is quite probable, as is the drought and the peasants' faith that the swami can end it.

That a familiarity with the Indian background is an important requisite in the understanding of these "fantastic" events is seen in the reviews of The English Teacher. And what Narayan said to Ved Mehta about the adverse comments of the reviewers is relevant to this re-evaluation of fantasy and realism:

> "Of course," Narayan said gleefully, "the reviewers did not realize that the whole story was auto-biographical--that I myself had been a witness to the experiments. But what's the use?" he sighed. "You don't believe it either."[38]

It is necessary then, to differentiate between what is fantasy and what is realistic in the apparently fantastic events in each novel. Mali, in The Sweet-Vendor, setting up a story-writing machine is fantastic but Raju, in The Guide, becoming a fake-swami is quite probable as is the drought and the peasants' faith that the swami can end it.

Brunton is of the opinion that The Guide is radically flawed because

> . . . the career of Raju himself is too fantastic for Narayan's essentially realistic mode to cope with, and the book cannot overcome its inherent improbability.[39]

On the contrary, The Guide is the only one of Narayan's novels which comes close to having a perfect unity and a "compound" of realism and fantasy. In The Guide, Narayan uses the literary device of ambiguity to get this compound. The concluding section of the novel is a fine example of effective use of ambiguity.

Every critic who has published anything on The Guide feels that Raju is transformed into a genuine saint during the fast he undertakes to call down the rain-god. My thesis is that the effect of his experience on the third night of the fast is not lasting and that his essential character does not change. He only takes on another role--of saint--and sets out to enjoy it as he had enjoyed his previous roles of guide, lover, manager, ascetic.

The novel ends with Raju going down to the river on the eleventh day. He hears the frantic appeal of the doctors and the government to break his fast and continue it after recovering some of his lost strength. He smiles. Then he asks Velan to help him to the river. "He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards

the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer." Then he says it is raining in the hills and collapses.

This is a masterly stroke of ambiguity on Narayan's part. Does it rain? Does Raju die? What effect does the telegram have upon him? Does he really pray or are his lips muttering only wordless sounds? C. D. Narasimhaiah infers that the story ends in Raju's self-sacrifice as a supreme expression of his spiritual ascent, a greater-love-hath-no-man-than-this apotheosis. And that "Raju's death, viewed symbolically, means that the individual by losing his life brings rain (and life) to his fellowmen, and his death is just 'death by water'--which is not really death but a means of self-purification and self-realization. It is the triumph of the traditional way of living over natural and manmade catastrophes."[40] Panduranga Rao makes a similar conclusion about Raju's conversion. "For once, Raju's decision does not waver because it is a true decision made in an effort towards self-abnegation. He now faces death rather than abandon this unique experience of selflessness. Death for Raju is thus the culmination of life."[41]

I prefer to pay tribute to Narayan's ambiguity and art by speculating that this risk, though imposed on Raju and not planned by him, pays dividends; that he recovers from his swoon and graciously accedes to the humble requests of disciples and government and allows

glucose-saline injections to reinvigorate his bloodstream while his halo shines brighter than ever in the eyes of the myth-loving rustics and sensation-loving urbans.

The Guide shows that Narayan, despite his limitations, can produce good literature if he would but make an effort. It also shows that Narayan does not make a sustained effort at good writing. He takes his art too easily, carrying over to the novel what Keats says about poetry, "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." Narayan's muse seems to need no single-minded worship. One might be tempted to say Narayan is typically South Indian in that his literary muse occupies but one of the many shrines in the temple of life. But this is not true. Narayan's muse is enshrined in the sanctum-sanctorum of his life. He has, as he confessed to Mehta, only two interests in life--his daughter and his writing. And yet he turns out novels that are far from well-written, and lapses into less-than-mediocrity time and time again in every novel.

Waiting for the Mahatma shows all his weaknesses. Unlike The Guide, which reveals his strengths as well as shortcomings, Waiting for the Mahatma has very little in its favor. It is a Gandhian novel. Technically, Sriram is the hero of the novel and the plot revolves around him; but the predominant figure, even though he is seldom on stage, is Gandhi and the theme is Gandhism.

Mahatma Gandhi--there is magic in the name. What political power that "half-naked fakir"[42] wielded, what spiritual halo surrounded that bald and toothless head, what supreme benediction radiated from those serene eyes, Indians of this century will not lightly forget, and future generations not readily believe. As Einstein said of him, "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." It is natural then that Gandhi would be a recurring figure in contemporary Indian literatures.[43] It is natural, too, that readers should be predisposed to a favorable response whenever Gandhi or Gandhism is mentioned in a story. In spite of this the novel fails. Not only is the portrait of Gandhi weak and uninspiring, but the novel is lacking in characterization, development, meaning, technique and language. Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar, with characteristic mildness, says Narayan's art in this novel "betrays unsureness and perplexity" though it is an "ambitious effort and an impressive feat."[44] There is no need to mince one's words. Narayan's reputation is well enough established for us to give credit and adverse criticism just where they are due without being either patronizing or apologetic. Narayan is a good story-teller. As with his own Nambi,[45] stories flow out of him and hold his listeners' interest,

whether or not they remember anything later. Narayan is a middle-class man who writes about middle-class men in middle-class Indian-English. Simplicity, his greatest virtue, becomes his greatest shortcoming once he steps out of the middle-class world. He is proficient at animating middle-class urban life in South India, but is ignorant of the lives of the rich and the rustic. He is fine at bringing out the eccentricities and vices of common men, and excellent at portraying rogues because his rogues are common men in whom the streak of roguery is more pronounced than in most people;[46] but he is uninteresting when molding good men, and positively out of his depth with supermen. Mahatma Gandhi was a superman. Sriram, the hero, is a good man. And so we have in Waiting for the Mahatma a failure.

It is a regrettable weakness in Narayan that whenever he sets out to sketch a virtuous character he ends up sketching a near-moron. Sriram is, without reprieve, moronic. However, what is even more regrettable is that Narayan very nearly makes Gandhi in the same mold as Sriram. He takes certain familiar characteristics and incidents associated with Gandhi and he sticks them in haphazardly at the first opening he gets. It is well known that Gandhi always used simple and lucid language, that he started most public meetings with bhajan (choral prayer), and that he sometimes mentioned that he expected

to live one hundred and twenty-five years. But the way Narayan inserts them within minutes of bringing Gandhi on the scene is inartistic. Neither his language nor his organization help to mend matters. Here is what happens at the first public meeting addressed by Gandhi:

Gandhi raises his arms and "instantly a silence fell on the gathering." He claps his hands rhythmically and says, "I want you all to keep this up, this beating for a while." Then they start a choral chant of Gandhi's favorite bhajan, Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram.

> It went on and on, then ceased, when Mahatmaji began his speech. Natesh interpreted in Tamil what Gandhi said in Hindi. At the outset Mahatma Gandhi explained that he'd speak only in Hindi as a matter of principle. 'I will not address you in English. It's the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us. I very much wish I could speak to you in your own sweet language, Tamil; but alas, I am too hard-pressed for time to master it now, although I hope if God in his infinite mercy grants me the longevity due to me, that is one hundred and twenty-five years, I shall be able next time to speak to you in Tamil without troubling our friend Natesh.'[47]

Note the weakness of language, the many Babuisms and ignoring of connotations in "you all," "this beating," "went on and on," "at the outset," "very much wish"; and the contradictions involved in the latter part of the last sentence where he casts aspersions on God's justice and God's mercy by yoking them together: if longevity depended on God's mercy, obviously it could not be man's "due"; and if a century and a quarter is "due" a man, it speaks little of God's justice to speculate that he might curtail it.

The same indiscriminate inclusion of Gandhi's well-known ideas and habits mars every scene in which Gandhi appears, e.g., Gandhi distributing Municipal Chairman's treasured oranges to Harijan children, Gandhi's brisk morning walk, Gandhi's last appearance before falling to an assassin's bullet. Subjective responses evoked by Gandhi's presence are even more weakly handled; take, for example, Gandhi's gentle rebukes which, general though they were, had the effect on guilty people of being individually addressed to them. This is neither objectively nor subjectively described; the author does not comment on this ambiguity nor does he bring it out effectively through the characters; he merely drops Gandhi's statements like bricks, and only a very sympathetic reader will appreciate the ambiguity supposed to be there behind the abruptly-expressed incidents on pages 24 and 51.

As a contrast to this pedestrian delineation of the Mahatma's effect on people, let us consider Raja Rao's handling of Moorthy's conversion in Kanthapura. The circumstances are almost identical. Moorthy, a university student, indifferent and ignorant, pushes his way through crowds and volunteers to the dais, and there gets his vision. Here is masterful use of ambiguity: we do not even know how much of Moorthy's "vision" took

place in reality. And here is simple monosyllabic language that rises to heights of inspired and sublime music:

> Then came a dulled silence of his blood and he said to himself "Let me listen," and he listened, and in listening heard, "There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all," and then came a shiver and he turned to the one behind him and said, "Brother," and the man took the fan from Moorthy and Moorthy trembled back and sought his way out to the open, but there were men all about him and behind the men women, and behind them carts and bullocks and behind them the river, and Moorthy said to himself, "No, I cannot go." And he sat beside the platform, his head in his hands, and tears came to his eyes, and he wept softly, and with weeping came peace. He stood up, and he saw there, by the legs of the chair, the sandal and the foot of Mahatma, and he said to himself, "That is my place."[49]

Everything that Narayan has tried and failed to convey in the novel is here in this single passage so rich in objective, symbolic and subjective descriptions--the milling crowds of common people with their bullock carts, the feeling of brotherhood that links all in the presence of the Mahatma, pellucid prose befitting Gandhi, the quintessence of profundity behind the utter simplicity of the words, and above all, the entire movement of conversion from initial indifference to curiosity (not included in the quoted passage) to the abstract influence of Gandhi's presence to concrete rational appeal to resistance (reminiscent of St. Paul and Vivekananda) to

self-surrender (with its symbolic connotations of the foot and sandal associated with Lord Rama) to the peace that passeth understanding.

Narayan's characterization of Gandhi is weak from the very start but he is far more effective in his initial characterization of Sriram. Sriram is introduced as a type of person who recurs in many of Narayan's novels--a goodhearted, somewhat-spoilt, lazy and purposeless young man. Like many other Narayan characters, Sriram has been a poor student and has plodded his way through high school. On his twentieth birthday his grandmother, who had devotedly reared this orphan child of her soldier-son, turns over to him the accumulated military pension of years, and Sriram finds himself lord of Rupees 38, 500-7-6. He celebrates the occasion by buying a seven-rupee canvas-chair on which he spends most of the next four years.

One April evening,[50] at the market, he sees a young woman collecting money for Gandhi's visit, and straightway he wishes he could marry her. But Sriram, unlike some other Narayan heroes--Chandran in Bachelor of Arts or Krishna in "The White Flower" or Ravi in Mr. Sampath (published in the United States as The Printer of Malgudi) or Narayan himself[51]--is not a romantic lover who falls in love at first sight and forever. The impression she leaves on him is not lasting

as proven at the public meeting where he takes a place next to the women's enclosure so he can stare through his dark glasses at young women speculating "what type he would prefer for a wife." Only when he sees Bharati on the dais does he remember that he had fallen in love with her at first sight! With unwonted intelligence (that is never in evidence after him) he shoves his way through the crowd and gains access to Gandhi's hut. There he makes Bharati's acquaintance and decides to become a Gandhian in order to win her. He joins Gandhi's entourage. At this point the lazy, good-hearted, average young man starts turning into a purposeful adult, an obedient disciple and devoted lover. And it is at this point that Narayan's characterization begins to lose conviction.

When Gandhi leaves the south, Sriram joins one of the Gandhian centers that had been established near Malgudi. Then, for no conceivable reason, he takes his abode in an abandoned temple and lives there for an unspecified length of time, having Bharati visit him occasionally. Why he could not visit her or express his love for her is not understandable, and even less realistic is it that a young woman belonging to a big group should walk unescorted several miles into the hills to meet another member of the group.

It is late 1942; the Cripps offer of March-April has been turned down (WFM, p. 104), and Gandhi has been in jail since August (WFM, p. 92). One day Bharati comes with a can of paint, a brush and an order that Sriram is to write Quit India (in English) all over the district.

He sets out to do this, walking through villages and townships in the area. His meeting with several school children is amusing, showing once again that Narayan is excellent at describing comic confrontations. But shortly after, Sriram falls considerably in stature. This is not because he is meant to; the plot, theme, and authorial commentary elsewhere show that Sriram is meant to be a Gandhian hero in formation. The only conclusion one can draw is that the author is either out of his depth or careless. The statements that Narayan puts into Sriram's mouth make him a stupid, ignorant young man rather than the dedicated disciple that he is probably meant to be. Occasionally the narrator himself does scant service to the hero. For example, "He lost count of time. He went on doing things in a sort of machine-like manner." (WFM, p. 101).

When someone asks him why he goes on painting those words, he replies, "I'm merely carrying out an order." This will not do at all. It becomes more and more obvious that Sriram has not understood what the

whole non-violent, non-cooperation movement is about; his is an inferior path altogether--the path of blind obedience. Gandhi is a Mahatma. Mahatmas must be obeyed. Therefore do what Gandhi says without questioning or comprehending. Because he does not understand the ABC of Gandhism, he is its worst advocate. Repeatedly he is stumped for an answer; to the school master who says the time to start the freedom struggle is after the war, Sriram says, "Be careful. You will be beheaded when Britain leaves India. We have a list of everybody who has to be beheaded." (WFM, p. 97).

To the astute timber contractor who contributes to the War Fund as well as to the Harijan Fund he has no argument at all, but a weak request that he pray to Gandhi's picture "that he may inspire you with reasonable thinking." His visit to the white plantation owner, Mathieson, shows Sriram's ignorance unequivocally. When Mathieson says it is a pity the Cripp offer was rejected, Sriram is silent. "Such intricate academic technicalities refused to enter his head." "'It is just an eyewash,' he said remembering a newspaper comment." (WFM, p. 105).

When he meets someone less literate and more rustic than himself, he becomes a braggart as seen in the Solur teashop incident. The clinching proof of Sriram's moronic incomprehension is the way he is taken in by

Jagadish. Jagadish, a prosperous photographer, is a terrorist leader who exploits Sriram and the location of the abandoned shrine in which Sriram lives. He gives Sriram a special radio set that receives Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's broadcasts to the underground workers of his Indian National Army. Sriram faithfully transcribes the messages, never doubting that all those exhortations that Indians should arm themselves and resort to violent means in their fight for independence formed part of a program that had Gandhi's total sanction.

At no time do we get even a passing impression that the spoilt twenty-year-old idler of the first page is growing into manhood. When we leave him on the last page, he is well past the age of thirty, and yet he is as helpless and childish as on the first. Not Gandhi, not a decade of experience, not his love for a mature, idealistic woman has matured him any. Towards the end of the novel, he tells Gandhi, "Bharati went away to jail and there was no one who could tell me what to do."

Sriram's love affair, even more than his nationalistic activities, shows his immaturity. Here again, the author's probable intention--as seen in the denouement--is to show how love and admiration can transform an average person into a hero.

With Bharati he is always a child, sometimes petulant, sometimes willful, sometimes pathetic, but

always childish. His first meeting sets the tone for the entire relationship. At first he is a braggart, a little boy on an adventure, immensely proud and vaunting. Then he is a pathetic little boy, feeling lost and scared on alien ground. His speech and manners are not those of a man of twenty-four but a boy of ten. His love, too, smacks of a small boy's intense calf love.

Once he starts living in the abandoned temple several miles from Koppal Village, each of Bharati's visits is a repetition of the first--full of petulant demands on his part, and stinging wit followed by affection and tenderness on Bharati's. The whole incident of his outburst, "No one can stop me and you from marrying now.[52] This is how gods marry" (WFM, p. 122) is weakly handled and makes him more a wilful child than an importunate lover. "He rested his head on her bosom and remained silent." Even his fevered ritual before the broken image exudes an air of theatricality more than a "positive and dynamic" love he is supposed to feel, and it ends with him "pathetically" blinking and talking "childishly."

Later, when Bharati sends a message from jail that his grandmother is dying, Sriram, who has not thought of his grandmother all these long years though he has been only fifty miles away, returns home and is told by his old friend and neighbor, Kanni, that his

grandmother had died earlier that night. Sriram's grief is unconvincing. He goes over the house, checks his old trunk and sees that everything is just as it had been. A similar scene in The Bachelor of Arts where Chandran finds that his mother had kept his room meticulously clean in his absence is effective whereas this scene is utterly lacking in poignancy. Instead, it serves only to make Sriram quite heartless. He sobs for a while, and then tells Kanni that he is hungry and that there is nothing in the kitchen.

> "How can there be anything? She was ill so long; those ladies were bringing her milk and gruel."
> "I'm very hungry, Kanni," Sriram said again pathetically.

Narayan's portrayal of Sriram is such that the reader's sympathy is not evoked; rather, one feels repulsed by this character who turns to ask about his grandmother's last days only after satisfying his hunger.

After this the story takes a fantastic turn. In this novel the occasion that breaks it is even more fantastic than usual, and strangely incongruous in the context of Narayan's general realism. The old woman starts breathing again at the cremation ground; since the crowd believes that disaster would overtake the town if anyone due to be cremated was brought back into the walls of the city, she is kept in a house just outside the city limits. With all this publicity, Sriram is

recognized and arrested. He spends the next few years in jail and is released early in 1948.

Back in Malgudi, he visits Jagadish, who writes a long love-letter to Bharati on his behalf. Bharati replies asking him to join her at Birla House in Delhi. Sriram reaches Delhi, is warmly welcomed by Bharati, who is taking care of refugee children; together they meet Gandhi on the evening of January 30, 1948, and get his blessing to be married. The over-simplistic dialogues here are not worthy of being ascribed to Gandhi's last hours on earth. His premonition that he may not be present at their wedding next morning retrieves the atmosphere somewhat despite being a stock characteristic, but the last two sentences fail to transmit the magnitude and drama of the tragedy: "The Mahatma fell on the dais. He was dead in a few seconds." This is a crowning example of the inadequacy of the "simplicity" of Narayan's prose that is so much talked about. Narayan's simplicity of language, his limitative vocabulary and unvarnished narration cannot rise to the challenge of crises in the narrative. As V. Y. Kantak says in his perceptive essay, Narayan's is a one-stringed instrument that serves a purpose much of the time but "his language does so seem to miss a dimension."[53] Perhaps the ending would have gained in effect if the last three sentences had been replaced by a simple "Hé Ram!", Gandhi's last words.

It is not in the main story or the main characters that we can find artistic or literary worth in Waiting for the Mahatma. There are several sensible and humorous arguments, it is true, but they are marred by the author's reluctance to enter his characters. All those who express conservative or counter-revolutionary views, the obverse of the Gandhian coin, so to say, could have been made electrically alive however brief their appearance, but the author has developed neither these characters nor these ideas. Examples of potentially rich scenes are: Gorpad's impatience at the rampant blackmarketing, Mathieson's gentle reminder that his thirty-year stay in India has made him feel as much love and responsibility for the country as any Indian, the Solur rustics' bland pledge of loyalty to the British government which seemed nearer and more relevant than Gandhi's men, the prisoner's forthright denunciation of political prisoners who come to jail out of self-interest as he says, "I've seen all those Gandhi's followers in prison, and they think they are honoured guests . . . in a bungalow with a cook and pocket money and . . . books to read and sherbet to drink."

Those who do hold our attention are the common people with their gossipy tongues and malice-tinted views and their basically good hearts--Kanni, the shopkeeper with his scrupulous account-keeping, who nevertheless

is a good neighbor in time of need, the smooth-tongued Fund Office Manager who later provides for Sriram's grandmother so that she can be comfortably off in Banaras, unscrupulous Jagadish who exploits Sriram but helps him trace Bharati, Chairman Natesh who has scrounged upon the Corporation but is nevertheless so human as to be incoherent with nervousness in Gandhi's presence, those common people with their common malice and envy who pass snide remarks at the public meeting--these are the people who are given animate and eloquent identity by Narayan.

Waiting for the Mahatma, then, may be said to provide examples of the levels that Narayan's art cannot reach. Usually Narayan is careful to avoid scenes and plots which require dynamic delineation; Waiting for the Mahatma is one of the few novels where he has omitted, intentionally or unintentionally, to take this precaution. He does not use the devices that are his forte--ambiguity, unsentimentality, humor and a lightness of spirit. All these and more are used in his latest, and possibly best, novel--The Sweet-Vendor. Between Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) and The Sweet-Vendor (1967) Narayan published two novels, The Guide (1958) and The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962). Each of the three last novels is a meritorious work of creation though all have their shortcomings. One can see the

author's progressive control of the medium with which he is working. These novels are comparatively more ambitious in conception and more effective in execution. The uneven mixture of fantasy and realism is still present, but both qualities are so well manipulated that they can be accepted as a characteristic of Narayan's writing that is not always detrimental to the total effect.

The Sweet-Vendor is worth a comprehensive study for its literary and thematic virtues. What follows is not a study of the novel as an entity but of a theme that runs through Narayan's work and culminates in The Sweet-Vendor. In this novel Narayan shows the point at which fatherly love needs must stop if father and son are to ascend to a higher plane of fulfillment.

Paternal love is one of the more significant refrains in Narayan's fiction. From his earliest stories, for example "Forty-five a Month," in which the usually servile Venkat Rao decides to defy his irascible boss in order to spend his evenings with his child, this sentiment is highlighted as one of the most beautiful experiences in life. There is no character in Narayan so vile that he is not moved by love for children, at least his own. Even morons like Kali in "Sweets for Angels" find a kind of spiritual ecstasy watching innocent children. And Narayan's rogues become lovable because of their ready response to children. Pickpocket

Raju in "The Trail of the Green Blazer" pays dearly for this emotion but he also wins us over. A delightful predecessor to Raju the Guide, this pickpocket stalks his prey (a man in a green blazer) through the fair and waits while he haggles vociferously with a balloon seller over a balloon for his "motherless boy." At an opportune moment Raju swoops down on his quarry. It is a rich find and Raju is mighty pleased--till he comes upon the balloon tucked away in one of the flaps of the wallet.

> Raju almost sobbed at the thought of the disappointed child--the motherless boy . . . perhaps of the same age as his second son. Suppose his wife were dead (personally it might make things easier for him, he need not conceal his cash under the roof) . . . it would make him very sad indeed and tax all his ingenuity to keep his young ones quiet.[54]

The Green Blazer looked a ruffian; he would probably beat the child if the child asked him for the balloon that night. Raju decides that the motherless boy must have his balloon. And in trying to put the wallet back into Green Blazer's pocket, Raju is caught! He comes out of jail eighteen months later a wiser man. "For now he believed God had gifted the likes of him with only one-way deftness." He would never again try to put anything back.

Kannan, the gambler in "Wife's Holiday" is also of Raju's mold; he feels very guilty as he breaks open his son's piggy bank. But he has to face only his wife's anger, not prison.

In the novels, most of his major characters are devoted fathers. Even Ramani, the bossy, bullying head of the house in The Dark Room is genuinely concerned about his children. Srinivas (in The Printer of Malgudi) though fanatically in love with his tabloid to the exclusion of all other interests, from time to time feels the wonder of fatherhood. Chandran's father (in The Bachelor of Arts) belongs to an earlier and more undemonstrative generation; he says nothing very effusive when Chandran returns just as he said nothing when Chandran ran away, but he ages in those eight months. One of the best points about The Bachelor of Arts is this relationship, the wordlessly intimated bond between parents and son--the sorrowing father not tending the garden, the fond mother keeping Chandran's room spotlessly clean.

The other fathers make no secret of their delight in their children. In The English Teacher, Krishnan's love for his daughter, Leela, is fully in keeping with his romantic temperament. On the other hand, we see a whole new side of Sampath, the Printer of Malgudi, when he appears as a father. Instead of the quick-witted, bossy efficiency expert, we see a typical father, inordinately proud of his children, insistent about showing off their accomplishments, and crooning over their abilities. In a way it is incongruous, but

in the larger context it shows Narayan's insight into human beings. Vasu, the Man-Eater of Malgudi, is the only major character who dislikes children, and he happens to be the only total villain in Narayan's fiction. Narayan seems to say, The man that hath no paternal love in himself is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.

In Margayya the Financial Expert and Jagan the Sweet-Vendor we see paternal love carried to the point of imprudence. Both have only two overwhelming interests in life and for both one of the interests is their only son. The first part of The Financial Expert is a fine delineation of the wonderful experience of fatherhood. Balu, though utterly spoilt, is a lovable little scamp, and all the scenes between father and son are very evocative and realistic--the child's enthusiastic reception of his father every evening, demanding toys--"a tiny engine, tiny cows, tiny tables, tiny everything, of the maximum size of a mustard seed,"[55] his cunning blackmail of his parents when he is hurt, his engaging prattle, his stubborn tantrums one of which results in Margayya's precious account books literally going down the drain--all these are vividly and sensitively described, as are Margayya's various responses of love, wonder, anxiety and ambition for his young son. For example:

> His mind gloated over visions of his son. He would grow into an aristocrat. He would study, not in a Corporation School, but in the convent, and hobnob with the sons of the District Collector or the Superintendent of Police or Mangal Seth, the biggest mill-owner in the town. He would promise him a car all for himself when he came to the College. He could go to America and obtain degrees. . . . He would buy another bungalow in Lawley Road for his son, and then his vision went on to the next generation of aristocrats. (FE, p. 24).

Part II that carries Margayya to success and riches through the publication of "Bed Life" (rechristened Domestic Harmony), and Balu to his thirteenth year, is again, full of excellent and humorous pictures of this relationship. In Part III, the bond breaks up as it must with all that over-indulgence. Balu fails his high school examination several times and Margayya, despite every effort at sympathetic communication, is rebuffed by his teenage son.

Echoing his first rash act of throwing Margayya's account book into the Vinayak Mudali Street sewer, Balu throws his high school transcripts into the same gutter and closes yet another chapter in Margayya's life. The alienation between father and son is rather hastily scanned. But the thread is taken up with all the former verve once Balu runs away. Margayya covers up for his son. He tells people Balu has gone to Bombay and Madras to see a bit of the world. "What is there in Matriculation? I have no faith in our education. Who wants

all this nonsense about A squared plus B squared. . . . Boys must learn things in the rough school of life." (FE, p. 122).

Later, when people crowd in on hearing Balu is dead in Madras, the business side of his mind can think only something as outrageous as "If an entrance be charged, we might earn lakhs." Nevertheless this Shylock too loves his offspring with frenzied love and his lostness is pathetic as he contemplates the unavoidable visit to the evil metropolis, Madras.

The resolution of the mystery of Balu's supposed death is far too simple and implausible to be anything but fantasy typical of Narayan. An observation that bears repetition is that most of Narayan's novels are a mixture of realism and fantasy; the mixture is not always in optimum proportion and frequently breaks the plot into two disparate pieces. However, in this novel the fantasy is not intrusive though it is a stock-in-trade.

After his return Balu's fall into bad habits and bad company is swift. His Madras escapade has assured his parents' silence; they are willing to tolerate any and every thing he does. There is hardly any exchange of words between father and son, pleasant or unpleasant. Marriage does not mend matters any except that Margayya, for a brief while, feels the

happiness of knowing his son happy. Balu is not the only one responsible for the subsequent alienation. Margayya becomes too absorbed in making easy money to bother about his son, and he does not even visit his grandson. It is only when he loses his ill-gained wealth to the last rupee and is poorer than when he started that paternal love as genuine and without strings as the love he had for his infant son returns. However, Margayya ends exactly where he started. Rajeev Taranath feels, "At the end of the novel, he is apparently back at the position he started from; but with an altered and enriched kind of awareness. In other words, he has ceased to be anonymous to himself."[56] Impressive though this hypothesis is, I feel it reflects the sensitivity of the critic more than any intrinsic pattern in Narayan's philosophy. Margayya has not, after all, learnt anything from several other experiences; his self-imposed discipline of worship did not improve him any, because it was not a discipline at all but merely ritual; the rise to wealth did not affect him, and his reflections about money automatically bringing recognition and status turn out untrue; money can bring him nothing because he does not know how to use money; he still lives in his bare, old-fashioned little house with its single file of four rooms, and the small room he builds upstairs houses dust and currency notes. Except for a new umbrella "he gave

no outward sign of his affluence. . . . He walked to his office every day. His coat was of spun silk, but he chose a shade that approximated to the one he had worn for years so that no one might notice the difference. He whitewashed the walls of his house inside only . . . " (FE, p. 119). He does not even buy an oil lamp for his office. Indeed, his miserliness becomes disgusting at this point. Even later the only comfort he indulges in is a car, and that is more in self-defense than for comfort. He learns nothing from Balu's flight, supposed death, and return; he is more cowed and a little more willing to part with money to keep Balu near, but the episode has not made him aware of anything--neither values nor human hearts nor human suffering. Even the birth of his grandson, the one sure soft spot in dynasty-loving egoists, does not move him. At this point he has lost all paternal love, it seems to me, and I do not see his attack on Dr. Pal the way Panduranga Rao does; Panduranga Rao says, "He punishes Pal and thunderously exhibits his resentment against lewd life. But the beating he administers to Pal is something more: it is a revolt against a world that ever keeps him unhappy."[57] I disagree with this critic because I do not see any evidence that Margayya is unhappy or "caught between the two civilizations of modern India." It seems to me that Margayya is blissfully happy in his profession right

from his banyan tree days to his financial wizardry. He is a very practical businessman as his deft manipulations show, especially the astuteness with which he divests himself of the notoriety of Domestic Harmony with a thundering profit to boot; he does not sell his partnership out of any sudden moral awakening; he had three very practical reasons:

> He detested his office and the furniture. . . . He liked to keep his knees folded and tucked--that alone gave him a feeling of being on solid ground. And then his table and all its equipment seemed to him a most senseless luxury.
>
> "Well, to let you into a secret, there is not much of that either; the figures are falling off; sales are not as good as they used to be."
>
> And then it hurt his dignity to be called the publisher of Domestic Harmony. (FE, pp. 95-96).

These are the real, prosaic reasons, and the rest--about Domestic Harmony's harmful influence and his wish to keep Balu pure--is sheer rationalization, if not outright hypocrisy.

As for his revolt against Dr. Pal's moral turpitude, let us not forget that Margayya's conscience has not been overly troubled by Pal's questionable ethics at any time even though he has been cognizant of it from their very first meeting at the idyllic pond. Moreover, Margayya exploits Pal as much as Pal exploits him. To quote but one example, in his 20 per cent-guaranteed-interest project his "instinct was right in choosing Dr. Pal as his tout." (FE, p. 158).

Yet another reason why I disagree with these two critics--Panduranga Rao and Taranath--and maintain that Margayya does not reach a higher plane is because I cannot ignore the significance of the sentence:

> Later in life Margayya often speculated what would have become of him if he had started back home after speaking to his daughter-in-law a little earlier and missed Dr. Pal's Austin that night, or if he had remained in the shadows and had allowed Pal to go off after dropping Balu, whom he might probably have tackled with more circumspection and diplomacy: he might even have shared his property with him as he demanded: that would have saved him at least the rest of it--and prevented the doctor from doing what he did. (FE, p. 174, italics mine).

Margayya works his own ruin, all right, but he does not bring it about for any moral principles, nor does he go unrepentant into the limbo of bankruptcy. Neither as a father nor as a businessman does Margayya "find" himself. If a sequel were to be written, it would essentially be a copy of the same script.

But Jagan is different. He starts from the same point as Margayya, with two overwhelming passions, one of which is his son, but he finishes on a higher plane; both as man and father he finds himself, not fully for most discoveries are sudden in perception but slow in realization; Narayan's growing artistic maturity has realized this and contributes to making The Sweet Vendor his best novel to date.

The parallels between Margayya and Jagan are numerous. Both are essentially misers who have hoarded

a huge fortune and do not wish to spend a penny of it. For both, their only child is a child of many prayers. Both express their gratitude to the deity of their prayers by making an offering of their son's weight in gold and silver; Margayya, we remember, took care to be prompt in fulfilling the vow and he "had not been a day too soon in weighing the youngster in gold as he showed a tendency to grow heavier each day." (FE, p. 132). Both have inordinately high hopes for their son and heir. Both are ruined by the son they have spoilt. Both novels show only the father's feelings for his son and make no mention at all of the relationship seen from the son's point of view. In both, the sons cannot really be called "adult" even though Balu is nineteen and Mali about thirty years old when their fathers are ruined. Both, Margayya and Jagan, have a core of romanticism, and repeatedly go back to pleasant memories. Especially similar is the thrill each gets reminiscing about the time his wife was a young bashful bride and himself a virile lover; Jagan's nostalgic reminiscence towards the end of The Sweet-Vendor is about the finest piece Narayan has ever written. Both men are themselves the product of fundamental change in the traditional family pattern; the joint family system, so basic to the Hindu way of life, has been broken in their youth, and each lives with his immediate family in a relatively isolated domestic world;

Margayya's isolation is fanatically intentional (the division of property described on p. 8 is very typical of Narayan's blend of humor and satire, and it is similar to the description of the disintegration of Nataraj's family in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, p. 8).

The Sweet-Vendor dilates upon the stage of the father-son relationship that was skimmed over in The Financial Expert, namely, the growing lack of communication that starts in the son's teens. The nuances of the relationship--always seen through the father's eyes and mind--are better handled in The Sweet-Vendor; the inarticulation of a fond father in an undemonstrative family setting is brought out admirably, and only rarely does ludicrousness supersede pathos. Both, Jagan and Mali, come out in sharper relief than most Narayan characters; in this novel we can discern a distinct improvement in the manipulation of the finer aspects of vocabulary and art; instead of Narayan's usual pencil-sketch characterization we have a hero who is painted in color, with clear details of physical appearance, habits, moods and thought-processes.

Like many other Narayan characters, Jagan is an eccentric. His Gandhian precepts, including tanning, are described at length; the ambiguity in which the method in his madness is wrapped up shows yet another significant advance in Narayan's art. Jagan has an

elaborate logic for his various habits such as using only twenty drops of honey per day instead of sugar, using only margosa twigs for brushing teeth, only ten watt bulbs in the house. . . . We never come to know whether his philosophy is a rationalizing of his thrifty nature or whether it has been formulated out of genuine moral or hygienic convictions. Margayya's shrewdness evokes the reader's admiration but his miserliness is as unequivocally clear. But with Jagan, Narayan builds up the reader's sympathy by surrounding his miserliness with ambiguity and endowing him with unquestionably virtuous qualities. Jagan is genuinely loyal to Gandhi; he has, after all, been spinning khadi for his own clothes, and wearing only acceptable Gandhian footwear, and has been using unadulterated foodstuffs in his shop. That Jagan is not as obsessed with money as Margayya is also unquestionable. He loves the sound of money and is as reluctant as Margayya to spend any of it, but he does not stint when it comes to keeping his two loves--the purity of his sweets and the welfare of his son. He is liberal with his son's lunch-money allowance and he does not feel robbed when Mali extracts ten thousand rupees from his loft. Whereas Shylock places equal stress on the loss of his child and his ducats, Jagan is concerned only about his child, his ducats becoming purely incidental. Even when asked to shell out fifty

thousand dollars, he is more concerned about his son's rashness than about the money. And when, at last, he awakens to the futility of profit-making he reduces the price of his sweets, and later he leaves his entire fortune without a backward look. His genuine love for his shop prompts him to ask his cousin to keep it going, but he himself is through with the whole dreary routine of being "a money-making sweet-maker with a spoilt son."[58] It considerably enhances Jagan's stature and the author's that the change of heart precedes Mali's arrest.

Essentially Jagan, the father, is naive, naive to the point of stupidity at times, whereas Margayya is never naive. Both Margayya and Jagan are motivated by a desire to save face when they cover up for their sons' abandoning of their studies--both use almost the same words "he wants to educate himself in the school of life." Later too, to save face, Jagan lies to Grace regarding Mali's correspondence with him. But only Jagan's plight arouses genuine pity because he is essentially too naive to conceal his feelings and fears successfully. He is too naive to see the obvious difference between Mali's "brusque, disconnected or imperious" letters and Grace's long, chatty, informative ones; too naive to see why Nataraj can rush Mali's prospectus through the press in a week while his own Nature Cure and National Diet has languished for years at Nataraj's office.

But as a sweet-vendor Jagan is certainly not naive. He handles the Bombay Anand Bhavan sait and the delegation with seeming naivete, but it is actually suavity par excellence that makes him repeat many banalities and trivia without committing himself an iota. And later, if he does reverse his decision about the price of sweets, it is not because he is intimidated by his compeers but because of his new awareness that his own peace of mind is more important than anything else. This is the "awareness" that Jagan reaches, the philosophy the novel embodies--Let each man work for his own salvation, his own, nobody else's. Thus Jagan passes through several stages of perception before he finds the proper focus for the good life. In the beginning his focus is on his son and his business. Then the son moves out of focus once he walks out of Albert Mission College, and Jagan endeavors to place him back in focus through a subjective process with the help of letters. When Mali returns from America, Jagan realizes that the lens of communication is completely fogged over and he tries to clear it through Grace. Even so, the focus is irreparably blurred, and then he concentrates on his business though Mali and Grace still form part of the composition. Then his son's constant nagging tilts the camera in a completely new direction and Jagan suddenly sees a whole new vista. This is the point at

which he reduces the price of his sweetmeat packets. The visit to the ruined garden with the hair-dyer stirs a desire in him to focus on this new landscape. It is only a desire, and at this point the lifelong habit of focussing on his son still binds him.

His long reminiscence at the foot of Lawley Statue is his long-overdue editing of the reel. As the reel of his life is projected on his mental screen, Jagan discovers that the entire reel is now irrelevant, something to be reviewed once and then shelved away in the closet of obsolete home movies. The realization comes only during the viewing which is unpremeditated. He relives his bachelorhood and his marriage, the long years of marital orgy while books lay unread, examinations unpassed; then the longer years of barrenness resulting in a kind of emasculation when he "felt fatigued by all this apparatus of sex, its promises and its futility, the sadness and the sweat at the end of it all (SV, p. 172); then the hours of prayer on Badri Hill at the Santana Krishna shrine, and then at last the sprout gladdening a long-barren earth.

The sprout had become a sapling, the sapling was now a tree. And he, Jagan, the sower, had thought himself the gardener personally responsible for its growth. This attitude had directed the entire relationship. For

Jagan, Mali at all times was a helpless, motherless boy to be protected and indulged:

> Poor boy, poor boy, let him be. . . . I wonder what God has in store for him . . . must give him more time. (SV, p. 23).

> All right, I'll come to your college and speak to those people. (SV, p. 29).

He had assumed that he was solely responsible for getting Mali out of scrapes and that he could put everything right. Now, at the foot of Lawley Statue, he realizes that he was not the gardener; there was no need to rebuke himself for having thought otherwise because it was immaterial now, just as it was immaterial to judge whether he had been a good gardener or a bad one; the tree had grown, it would probably have grown anyway, perhaps better, perhaps worse, and that too was immaterial because it was past. The sower and the seed were two different units. Jagan was now responsible only for himself, and Mali for Mali. "Who are we to get him out or to put him in?" (SV, p. 190). "I am going somewhere, not carrying more than what my shoulder can bear. . . . I am a free man." (SV, pp. 190-191). With these realizations Jagan ascends to a new level of perception.

He was responsible only for himself. He had neglected his foremost responsibility--his salvation--all these years. He had to find the right focus. Whatever the focus should be, it was neither the shop nor

Mali. Perhaps it should be the five-headed goddess Gayatri coming out of the stone that had lain in the river at the foot of the ruined garden. Perhaps not.

Jagan is nowhere near completing the picture. But he has perceived the framework, somewhere within which is the object that ought to be focussed upon. And the day is clear and bright.

FOOTNOTES

[1]For a critical appreciation of Manjeri Isvaran's fiction, see my article, "An Indo English Minstrel: A Study of Manjeri Isvaran's Fiction," Literature East and West (Winter, 1970), pp. 43-67.

[2]V. Panduranga Rao, "The Art of R. K. Narayan," Journal of Commonwealth Literature (July, 1968), pp. 29-40.

[3]Nirmal Mukerji, "The World of Malgudi: A Study of the Novels of R. K. Narayan." (1960) An unpublished doctoral dissertation.

[4]K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indo-Anglian Literature (Bombay, 1943), The Indian Contribution to English Literature (Bombay, 1945), and Indian Writing in English (New York, 1962).

[5]M. E. Derrett, The Modern Indian Novel in English: A Comparative Approach (Brussels, 1966).

[6]Derrett, Modern Indian Novel, p. 57.

[7]Ved Mehta, "The Train Had Just Arrived at Malgudi Station," The New Yorker, XXXVIII, 30 (September 15, 1962), p. 83.

[8]E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1961), p. 53. First published in 1927.

[9]In the opening pages of his Gods, Demons and Others, an anthology of retold tales from the epics, Narayan speaks at length about the traditional story-teller who draws upon the treasure-house of the epics which is an unfailing source of interest and instruction. In Mehta's "The Train Had Just Arrived," Narayan is quoted as saying he "can't write a novel without Krishna,

Ganesa, Hanuman, astrologers, pundits, and devadasis." (p. 54) But the truth is that there is no serious reference to mythology, religion or epics in Narayan's novels and very little mention of them even in passing.

[10]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (London, 1961), pp. 212 and 222 respectively. First published in 1950.

[11]Philip Rahv, The Myth and the Powerhouse (New York, 1965), p. 34.

[12]Steven Marcus, "The Novel Again," Partisan Review, XXIX (1962), p. 190.

[13]Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing, p. 294.

[14]Leslie Fiedler, No! in Thunder (Boston, 1960), pp. 4-5.

[15]For example, William Walsh, "The Spiritual and the Practical," The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (July, 1968), pp. 121-123 and Panduranga Rao, op. cit.

[16]W. J. Harvey, Essays in Criticism, XIII (January, 1963), p. 59.

[17]Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing, pp. 281-284.

[18]Ibid., p. 284.

[19]W. J. Harvey, Character and the Novel (London, 1965), p. 61.

[20]Wayne Booth, "Distance and Point of View," Essays in Criticism, XI (1961), p. 67.

[21]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Hudson Review, I (Spring, 1948), p. 72.

[22]Percy Lubbock, Craft of Fiction (New York, 1931), p. 69. First published in 1929.

[23]Mehta, "The Train," p. 62.

[24]Philip Rahv, Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction (New York, 1965), p. 58.

[25]M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1971), p. 165.

[26]C. D. Narasimhaiah, "R. K. Narayan's The Guide," The Literary Criterion (Summer, 1961), pp. 63-92.

[27]Ibid., p. 87.

[28]V. Y. Kantak, "The Language of Indian Fiction in English," in Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, ed. M. K. Naik, S. K. Desai and G. S. Amur (Dharwar, 1968), pp. 148-149.

[29]Raja Rao, Kanthapura (New York, 1963), Foreword. The novel was first published in 1938.

[30]Ibid., p. 3.

[31]Mulk Raj Anand, The Untouchable (Bombay, 1933), p. 15.

[32]R. K. Narayan, The English Teacher (Mysore, 1963), p. 70. First published in London (1946). Published in the United States as Grateful to Life and Death (East Lansing, 1953).

[33]Marco has had scant justice at the hands of critics. It is my thesis that he is scrupulously honest in his relationship with Rosie. Raju's relationship with her is tainted with his own commercial ambition, whereas Marco's only fault is that he expects physical fidelity from a wife. Marco is genuinely overwhelmed when he realizes Rosie's infidelity whereas Raju is not really upset when Rosie leaves him.

[34]R. K. Narayan, Dodu and Other Stories (Mysore, 1943), p. 1.

[35]Quoted by Mehta, "The Train," p. 79.

[36]Northrop Frye, "The Four Forms of Prose Fiction," Hudson Review II (Winter, 1950), pp. 582-595. Maurice Z. Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," The Massachusetts Review (1963), pp. 291-308.

[37]T. D. Brunton, "India in Fiction," in Critical Essays, p. 59.

[38]Quoted by Mehta, "The Train," p. 62.

[39]Brunton, "India in Fiction," p. 60.

[40]Narasimhaiah, "The Guide," p. 91.

[41]Panduranga Rao, "The Art of Narayan," p. 35.

[42]Winston Churchill's description of Gandhi.

[43]Chapter XIV of Srinivasa Iyengar's Indian Writing in English is a very good basis for the study of Gandhiana in Indo-English Literature.

[44]Ibid., p. 293.

[45]The story-teller in "Under the Banyan Tree," in The Astrologer's Day and Other Stories (Mysore, 1947).

[46]Except for Vasu the Man-Eater of Malgudi, who is as black as Chaucer's Friar, Narayan's rogues are varying shades of gray like Chaucer's other pilgrims, and delightful for the same reason.

[47]R. K. Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma (East Lansing, 1955), p. 23. Page references for subsequent quotations are given in parentheses, preceded by an abbreviated form of the title, WFM.

[48]Bourgeois Indian-English phrases and usage.

[49]Raja Rao, Kanthapura (New York, 1963), p. 33.

[50]On New Year's Eve, i.e. April 12 or 13, for New Year's Day usually falls on April 13 or 14.

[51]See Mehta, "The Train," pp. 67-72.

[52]Narayan invariably uses the incorrect sequence, "me and you."

[53]Kantak, "The Language of Indian Fiction," p. 150.

[54]R. K. Narayan, Lawley Road (Mysore, 1956), p. 11.

[55]R. K. Narayan, The Financial Expert (East Lansing, 1963), p. 7. First published in London (1952). Page reference for subsequent quotations are given in parentheses, preceded by an abbreviated form of the title, FE.

[56]Rajeev Taranath, "The Average as the Positive: A Note on R. K. Narayan," Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, p. 366.

[57]Panduranga Rao, "The Art of Narayan," p. 34.

[58]R. K. Narayan, The Sweet-Vendor (London, 1967), p. 122. Page references for subsequent quotations from this novel are given in parentheses, preceded by the abbreviated form of the title, SV.

CHAPTER IV

NATIVE-ALIENS AND EXPATRIATES: KAMALA MARKANDAYA AND BALACHANDRA RAJAN

South Indian writers have been divided, in this dissertation, into three main groups. It is relevant here to summarize the distinctions among the three.

The early writers chose to write in English because the British Empire was at its zenith in their time and they were inspired by the wealth of literature and philosophy that came to them by the medium of the English language. But their roots were deep in Hindu culture. They were bilingual, often trilingual, knowing Sanskrit in addition to their mother-tongue and English. Hindu scriptures, mythology and folklore formed part of their basic education; they were conversant with Sanskrit and Tamil classics, and they were familiar with Greek and Roman classics in translation. Several of them, such as A. Madhaviah and K. S. Venkataramani in the south, were intensely conscious of social problems and had to resolve personal conflicts of loyalties and values--east and west, old and new--without having any precedents as guidelines.

The native-talents shared the same background as the first group. Certain things, however, were made easier for them. Various degrees of anglicization had taken place, and therefore they did not have to make radical adjustments in their personal life; India was coming into its own as a nation, and so they did not feel compelled to explain or apologize for India. Certain basic reforms, such as the Sarada Act banning child-marriage, and educational programs, had been effected, and so they were not impelled to use the novel as a platform for their views. They felt free to follow their own native genius, and a new pride in vernacular literature made them adapt native themes and evolve their own literary techniques and forms. In short, while early writers consciously tried to imitate and impress, or to write with a missionary purpose, native talents spoke naturally and in their own voice.

The native-aliens, on the other hand, differ markedly from the other two types. They are more anglicized in their social, behavioral and educational patterns. Educated in mission schools, they picked up not only more anglicized accents of speech but adopted, even at home, a more anglicized routine--in eating, dressing, pastimes and all that goes with what is termed "way of life." Most of them completed their education outside India. Among South Indians, Santha Rama Rau matriculated

from St. Paul's School, London, and graduated from Wellesley College in the United States; Kamala Markandaya toured Europe before graduating from Madras University; Balachandra Rajan took his advanced degrees, including the Ph.D., from Cambridge, England. Today all three are expatriates in actuality as they have long been in their way of life.

These expatriates have fluency in and knowledge of the English language and literary techniques far superior to that of the native-talents. However, it must be noted that they are unilingual, English being the only language which they can use for purposes of serious communication.

They are not as rooted in Hindu culture as the native-talents or early writers. This is why the term native-aliens seems appropriate for them. Whereas the early writers were themselves immersed in Hindu tradition, and the native-talents either in their own routine or in their parents' were in close touch with Hindu scriptures and rituals, native-aliens were reared in an atmosphere once removed from the typical Hindu routine. Their parents, and often grandparents, were of the second generation of anglicized Indians. This background is clearly brought out in the most authentic works of all the expatriates; in the case of the South Indians, it is delineated specifically in Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House, Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury and Balachandra Rajan's The Dark Dancer.

Though not wholly valid, what Mara in Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh says of her anglicized group could apply to South Indian expatriates as well:

> I knew as much as any Catholic child about the Catechism when I went to school at the Convent, and since then I've learnt more about the Bible than I shall ever know about the Shastras, and except through your grandmother, who said her prayers everyday and went to the temple now and then and told you stories from the Ramayana, what do you know about your religion?[1]

This superficial knowledge of the Hindu scriptures and customs is most noticeable in the works of Santha Rama Rau. Her travelogs and her novel, Remember the House (1956), though very well-written, reveal an almost immature nostalgia for the sights and sounds of Hindu festivals which had been celebrated at her grandmother's home. In her most recent novel, The Adventuress (1970), Santha Rama Rau has totally dropped India both in setting and in cast. The same shift is in process in Kamala Markandaya's latest novel, The Coffer Dams (1969), where the action, though set in India, is seen through the eyes and experiences of an Englishwoman. The interesting thing about Kamala Markandaya is that despite her superficial knowledge of and scant research into the customs and traditions of the Hindu way of life, her novels are successful.[2]

With Rajan there is a difference. Though he too was initiated early into the anglicized world of British India, he is more conversant with Hinduism. His attitude

towards the rituals and routine is neither nostalgic as in Santha Rama Rau nor a literary device as in Kamala Markandaya, but detached and cerebral, and sometimes sarcastic or facetious. However, one has only to read The Dark Dancer with an open mind to see that beneath the scorn that the hero, Krishnan, expresses for Hinduism is a blood-consciousness that responds more than aesthetically and cerebrally to the magnificence of temple gopurams and sculptures.

None of the South Indian native-aliens are as markedly anglophile as Nirad Chaudhari, but they appreciate and admire British tradition. Kamala Markandaya's characters are torn between loyalties; their ambivalence is seen not only in the love-hate relationship the Indian develops for the British, as Lady Caroline points out in Possession, but in the love-hate relationship that Indians have for India. This relationship is more marked in Rajan's The Dark Dancer.

Kamala Markandaya and Rajan, who are studied in the following sections, do not have much in common outside the above-mentioned common elements shared by all expatriates. The former is a novelist by profession while the latter is a scholar who happens to have published novels. Rajan is neither as conscientious about the novel-form or as interested in it as Markandaya. Not much critical scholarship has been done on either, but

in the little that is available it is seen that both have been overpraised by non-Indian critics and over-denounced by Indian critics. Rajan, especially, has been singled out for severe criticism by Indians. In summary, their criticism may be said to hinge on two points--the lack of Indianness and the artificiality of his prose style. The latter point has some validity, for Rajan has a tendency to lapse into incongruent flippancy or facetious gravity that is acceptable in a light novel such as his Too Long in the West but not in a serious work such as The Dark Dancer. As for the other charge, one feels "Indianness" needs to be defined correctly. Krishnan is as Indian as Indo-English literature is Indian. Both are representative only of a small minority, but that does not in any way invalidate their right to be called Indian. These charges are answered at somewhat greater length in the last section of this chapter, but what is mainly attempted there is the interpretation of The Dark Dancer in the light of the central image in the novel.

The approach in both sections--on Kamala Markandaya and on Rajan--is introductory and expository more than analytical; this is consistent with the guideline followed throughout this dissertation regarding the study of authors on whom no significant critical scholarship is available. There is scope, in Markandaya's novels, for analytical studies of such aspects as structure,

use of dialogue, sociological verity and use of symbols. These and other aspects are mentioned in the following study, but as with all studies that break ground in a yet-unexplored area, they are not pursued to their ultimate source or implication. The Coffer Dams is omitted because it is, as mentioned earlier, a turning point in the author's canon. It indicates that there might be a distinct cleft between the first five novels and any others that might follow The Coffer Dams, which is her sixth novel. Either a lapse of time or another novel is necessary to place The Coffer Dams in its proper perspective.

Kamala Markandaya belongs to the generation of writers born and educated in the old order who could have been the pioneers of an offshoot language with its own characteristic themes and idioms if a group of politicians with misconceived notions of patriotism had not come to power. The most prominent feature in her writing is her simple and effective language. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand's which courses down tempestuously, or Raja Rao's which meanders tortuously, her language flows, even and beautiful, like the Ganges in the plains. Theirs is a translated language. The fluent, unending stream of abuses so characteristic of Anand's Coolie and the involved loquaciousness of Raja Rao's Kanthapura are literal translations from the vernacular. The reader

who knows the author's vernacular recognizes and enjoys this style but others--and these form a majority in India itself where there are fourteen major languages--find it confusing and laborious. Kamala Markandaya's is not a translated language. She does not attempt to adapt the vernacular idiom or tone; her language is always unobtrusively pure. Yet she succeeds in bringing out the texture of the social classes by varying the degree of simplicity and articulation.

A pattern emerges when Kamala Markandaya's first five novels are studied as a unit because they present a cross section of Indian society. Each novel has three facets--a personal story, a wider conflict, and a social background. Nectar in a Sieve is the story of a peasant woman, Rukmani, whose rustic life is shattered by the intrusion of industrialization. Some Inner Fury has as background the westernized upper class with its conflict of loyalties: Mira falls in love with an Englishman, her brother Kitsamy upholds the authority of the British Raj, and her brother Govind seeks to overthrow the Raj by terrorist activities. In A Silence of Desire we see a representative of that most inarticulate of Indian groups, the lower middle class, caught between different values--old and new, eastern and western, religious and agnostic. Her fourth novel, Possession, leaves the Indian backdrop. Lady Caroline Bell discovers artistic

genius in a goatherd and whisks him off to England where her dedicated effort skyrockets him to success but his soul is twisted in the process. In her fifth novel, A Handful of Rice, the setting is Madras, and we see a drifter, Ravi, made into a traditional householder by his love for a tailor's daughter. We, more than the characters, are left to wonder if it was worthwhile for Ravi to exchange the hazards of Bohemian life for the monotony of bourgeois morality.

Certain stylistic traits run through all five novels. The plots unweave at a sure and swift pace. There are no secondary plots, no political or philosophical digressions, no lyrical descriptions, or extraneous characterizations. The narratives are continuous and the lapses of time between incidents are often dismissed in a phrase. This gives forward-surging motion to the stories. The author's art does not have much depth but her strokes are broad, bold, and singleminded.

The first four novels are, effectively, first person narratives. Each novel is as organized as a classical play. A microcosmic equilibrium is upset giving rise to conflicts; the focus is always on the main character, the plot is unfolded step by step, there is a rapid denouement after the climax. Some classical "machinery" also is used. There are symbolic forewarnings in each story. In Some Inner Fury Mira places the

garland meant for her brother around the neck of Richard Marlowe. The significance is obvious--one of the most important rituals in a Hindu marriage is the garlanding of the bridegroom by the bride. This custom dates back to ancient times when a princess chose her husband from assembled guests by garlanding the man she desired to wed. Similarly, the first object mentioned in A Silence of Desire which centers around the differences in religious attitudes is the tulasi plant which Sarojini worshiped and Dandekar did not.

As in the classical plays the story is complete in itself and the few threads are neatly drawn and tied, but other questions remain:

Is not the soul enriched by the spirit of acceptance that levels down both pleasures and pains into a balanced harmony?

Can a conflict of loyalties ever be resolved without suffering and destruction?

Is it perhaps better to have faith and die than to live on vacillating between different sets of values? Can there be effective articulation between an average man and his wife, or is there a wall built between them by the very emotions of love and loyalty that bind them?

Can flight from material pleasures regain for man the pristine simplicity of his soul?

What use honesty?

Unlike the classical plays these novels do not have an omniscient commentator with specific answers. But the discerning reader sees the pattern--as long as one has roots one survives. The novels seem to say that if one's roots are injured or absent one dies. Nathan's roots are scarred when he is evicted from his land; he dies. But Rukmani's roots are in her children, and therefore she lives. Premala's roots are scorched when she is taken away from her traditional way of life and asked to be a society-lady; she dies. Kit dies because he has no roots; he is only a vine clinging to the British Raj. But Govind's roots are deep in his native soil, and therefore nothing, not all the violence of his hatred for the British, not all the disappointment over his unrequited love, can destroy him. Sarojini's roots reach the very bowels of primitive pantheism, and so she survives. Caroline is rooted in autocratic self-confidence and, like Scarlett O'Hara, feels that tomorrow she can regain what was lost today. Ravi, a transplanted villager, grows new roots but they are precariously shallow.

The delineation of the roots of different classes of Indian society is Kamala Markandaya's continuing theme. She has artistic instinct enough to know where the roots are but not the artistic care to keep in constant touch with her subject. Her chief merit lies in that she presents Indian ways of life without authorial commentary.

Nectar in a Sieve is the story of the faceless peasant who stands silhouetted in the unending twilight of Indian agrarian bankruptcy, the horizon showing through the silent trees now with crimson gashes, now with soul exalting splendor, always holding out the promise that the setting sun will rise again after the night, the night ever approaching yet never encompassing. . . . It is easy to wring tears of pity for the plight of the peasant, underfed, uneducated, exploited, and easier still to rouse anger and contempt for the superstitious and slow moving masses. They stand there vulnerable and open to every attack, be it indifference, contempt or emasculating charity. But to evoke admiration, even envy, for the simple faith and unswerving tenacity they hold needs sympathy and skill. Kamala Markandaya has both.

Fact after fact is presented within the story without commentary or criticism; one gets an idea of how life flows in an Indian village standing at the periphery of urban civilization.

Rukmani (NS) is a child of the transition between the insular, autonomous village life of old and the new village dependent upon urban civilization and in constant contact with it. Rukmani's father is the village headman, a position that once carried much power and prestige but which now with changing times has lost both. As a

result Rukmani's wedding was not half as colorful as her sister's had been. A bride at twelve, Rukmani is a mother at thirteen, mother of six children at twenty-four, old at forty. Put bluntly in this manner the ages shock one; but Kamala Markandaya weaves the facts so evenly into the story that one sympathetically realizes that tropical flowers in their natural state blossom early, wither soon, and yet retain a clinging fragrance.

"A woman, they say, always remembers her wedding night . . . but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as in body"(NS, p. 11). It is an ideal marriage. Kali's and Janaki's is happy enough. Kunthi's is not. So it is everywhere, no matter the form of betrothal and the age of the bride, some marriages turn out very well, some break up, and most follow a mediocre monotony of compromise. Rukmani's marriage is not without crises. But it is something richer than compromise that saves it when Rukmani learns of Nathan's infidelity with Kunthi. Rukmani understands and forgives Nathan, for she knows that Kunthi has fire in her body so that "men burn before and after"; their marital bonds are strengthened by her acceptance.

Time and again the story tells that a spirit of acceptance strengthens one in times of suffering. The

rainstorm ruins their huts and floods out their fields. They accept Nature's anger, wait for wind and rain to abate, and then build their huts anew and plough their fields afresh. Ira's husband brings her back to her parents five years after the wedding because she is barren. "I do not blame him, he is justified, for a man needs children. He has been patient." Nathan himself waited seven years for his first son, but he does not rebuke his son-in-law. He accepts his daughter's fate resignedly, as he accepts, though he does not forgive, her later prostitution. And, when Ira has a son, she accepts his albinism and guards him from the world's inquisitive gaze. It is when one sheds this passive spirit of acceptance that one is ruined. Raja refuses to accept the working conditions in the factory; his rebellion results in his death. Rukmani accepts even this shattering blow with the same passivity with which she accepted the departure of her elder sons for Ceylon. But passivity does not signify absence of emotion. Her reaction to Raja's death is one of the most poignant passages in the book:

> They merely laid hands on him, and he fell. . . . But why should others lay hands on him? They told me, but the sense of their words escaped. They told me, but I could not remember. They repeated themselves again and again, but I kept forgetting. . . . I think, the eyes must be closed, though death has glazed them, and I do so; the jaw must be tied, for it is sagging, I put a bandage about it; the body must be washed and I wash it. (NS, p. 123).

The spirit of acceptance, born of simple faith, does not break down even when the deities in whom Rukmani and Nathan repose their faith remain unmoved by their prayers: "That year the rains failed . . . I took a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to my goddess, and I wept at her feet. I thought she looked at me with compassion and I went away comforted, but no rain came" (NS, p. 101). Like her unvarnished language, her faith too is unpolluted by doubts.

The dumbness and passivity of these people might annoy readers accustomed to a more dynamic outlook on life. Each of the three main characters in the first three novels--Rukmani, Mira and Sarojini--surrenders herself so unquestioningly and wholly that one feels that she cannot possibly survive once her prop is taken away. But when the crisis comes, the strength of this attitude is proved, and we realize that if she had not bent like the grass she would surely have broken. Rukmani's surrender of her interests and independence to her husband and children is total. A time comes when her husband cannot support her and her older children are gone from her. Without the least break or imbalance of body, mind, or spirit, she lives on, now supporting her husband and her younger children. Mira (SIF) surrenders herself to Richard. The storm of "your people-my people" sweeps over her, but she springs back, as

complete and instant in her reconciliation to the parting as in her surrender to the love of an alien. Sarojini (SD) places all her faith in the Swami, surrendering her meagre wealth, her time, even her will power, to him. Yet, when he leaves, she does not break. She accepts his decision and returns to her old routine.

The total surrender on one hand, and the seemingly callous indifference to death or parting on the other seem paradoxical but both are born of an inner strength. This strength is spiritual in essence and it tightens family bonds. It also sublimates extra-marital relationships such as exist between Rukmani and Kenny, Premala and Govind, Sarojini and the Swami. There is a strong and obvious element of sex in their relationship, and yet there is as strong and obvious an element of asexuality.

No word or touch of love passes between them. Rukmani, Premala and Sarojini are absolutely faithful in thought, word and deed to their husbands. Sex does not figure in their action or desires in their dealings with the men they hold so dear, and in the case of Rukmani and Sarojini one sees that it is a bond in the consideration of which sexual thoughts and acts are irrelevant; yet it is a bond that would not exist if they did not belong to opposite sexes. Their relationship might seem unnatural to some, but in their social and cultural

setting it is not uncommon or incomprehensible. They move, as it were, on a different plane of chastity.

This spiritualized love is finely brought out in Nectar in a Sieve. From first to last Rukmani is bound to the English doctor, Kennington. He attends on her dying mother. He operates on her so that she may conceive. He helps Ira similarly, and though the consequences are unfortunate, Rukmani bears him no ill will. Her indebtedness is increased when he makes Selvam his assistant. But it is not just gratitude and sympathy that bind them but mutual admiration and friendship. Her joy at seeing him is spontaneous. When she learns that he has returned after a long absence she drops her marketing and flies to him, garland in hand, as a beloved would to a lover. Yet, the plane of their affection is unmistakably elevated.

The love between Govind and Premala (SIF) is not as devoid of sexual attraction. Starved of her husband's understanding, inhibited by generations of Brahmin discipline, Premala is unable to accept Govind's love even though her heart responds. Govind's love is not as exalted as Rukmani's, and therefore he suffers and is punished by having his secret trumpeted to the world by Hickey over Premala's dead body.

The love that Sarojini bears the Swami (SD) is even more ethereal than Rukmani's feeling for Kenny. But

its consequences are more material because her husband is drawn into the vortex of the attachment. Though she is just one of the scores around him, Sarojini is deeply and individually involved with the Swami. Her faith in his powers of healing is implicit and unquestioning. His touch on her head, she believes, will dissolve away the tumor in her womb. A look, a smile, a word from him is enough to strengthen her. She behaves like a woman who is carrying on a passionate liaison. She ignores her house, her children, her daily routine. She upsets the equilibrium of her married life. She steals from the family silver to contribute to his fund. Then she throws caution to the winds and becomes completely indifferent to her family, spending her days at his ashram and her nights in solitude and prayer. Yet it is not physical love. Dandekar wishes it were, for that is something human, and therefore combatable. Dandekar realizes that Sarojini lives in a world of superconsciousness, but he is a common man desiring only the monotony of common existence. In his plea to his boss, Chari, he confesses to what he is--a mediocre mind yearning for mediocre pleasures with a stubborn intensity:

> "I want my world back, my children happy, my floors swept--"
> "Is that important too?"
> "Yes, yes, yes," he cried. "In the world I'm in it's important, all the small things are important, and I know it's small and petty but I'm a small and petty man--." (SD, p. 221).

Because of Chari's investigations the Swami leaves the town. The prop that sustained Sarojini's soul, and even her health, is taken away. But she bears it with such stoic calm that Dandeker wishes he could recall the Swami and absolve his sense of meanness. He who has been consorting with prostitutes to relieve his physical urge can well imagine how much more difficult it must be to find relief for a spiritual urge. But Sarojini does not need the Swami's material presence which, she realizes, has taken on a value that is against the essence of his teaching. When Dandekar asks her what she intends to do without the Swami, she replies, "Nothing. What should I do? I formed an attachment, it is broken, that is all. One must accept it. . . . It would be sinful to batter oneself to pieces because one refuses to recognize that another's life is his own. If the Swami chose to go, it was his decision. One must accept it in good heart" (SD, p. 244).

Since India is a land where mysticism walks side by side with realism, most novels with an Indian setting include a pious man steeped in the scriptures, and Indo-Anglians, eager to woo and win the western reader, invariably add an eremite to the dramatis personae. It must, however, be granted that of all the swamis in Indo-Anglian literature the swami of A Silence of Desire is one of the best portrayals.

He is a true ascetic; he has no attachments, though his followers are ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. He does not claim to be a healer. He claims to give solace, and no one who meets him is disappointed. He argues and comforts without too many words. Dandekar who goes to accuse finds himself accusing himself. Feeling the power of the swami he tries to get away. But he is held by the ascetic personality. Pathetically he asks the swami to return the silver vessels that Sarojini has donated to a fund which feeds and supports the maimed and diseased.

> "I can't do it, it's asking too much of me, from ordinary people like me, I--"
> "I know." The Swami's low voice halted his frenzy. "I do not ask."
> "But you take," cried Dandekar. "Sarojini gives and gives and you do not stop her."
> "If I were to compel her not to give, I would also be free to compel her to give. . . . Compulsion is the beginning of corruption. . . . It is an eating away of the spirit of whoever does it, and whoever has it done to him. Is that what you want?" (SD, p. 175).

From this genuine ascetic to the charlatan of Possession is an incredible drop. One wonders how the same author who created this spiritual giant could have later created a ludicrous effigy and passed it off as a real spiritualist. The Swami of Possession is, as far as I am concerned, a quack. Too often he evokes only disgust. He is not meant to. The author's intention is to make him a sage and a seer embodying the spirit of Indian philosophy, a Vasishta incarnated into the

twentieth century, a beacon lighting Val's life and bringing him safe to shore after his voyage on the perilous seas of love and fame. Kamala Markandaya fails very badly in this; the Swami rings hollow, though, ironically, he is typical of the many such pseudo-eremites in India who have enough scriptural knowledge to impress laymen, and not enough self-control or detachment to keep away from commercial ambitions. The secondary plot of the novel could well be a satire on this racket, for unintentionally Kamala Markandaya has exposed the group of self-styled Swamis who are exploiting the people who yearn for absolute values and faith in a dizzily fast-moving world. Since the author did not intend to be satirical, her characterization of the Swami is the worst defect in her worst novel.

When the Swami is not obviously hollow he is obviously comic. We first see him in meditation, " . . . a thin, muscular figure with not an ounce of spare flesh anywhere, not a stitch of clothing on his body." When he saw Suya and Caroline "unhurriedly he rose, felt for his loincloth and wound it round him. . . . (P, p. 27).

When Val asks him if he should go away with Caroline, the Swami says he must, "because if you did not you would have no peace . . . for the sound of chafing is like the croaking of bullfrogs, it has little charm" (P, p. 32). Beauty and charm rate high in his code of values.

When Val seeks reassurance as to whether he will like the new life, the Swami gives a superficial, all-embracing answer, "You will and you will not," and his "eyes were like a woman's." When Val takes leave he hastens him on. "The voice was steady, but its edges were raw." (P, p. 33).

The Swami seems too much in and of this world to be genuine!

Val is not his only bond. He holds many strings and he is loth to let go of even one. The lonely hilltop guarded by two shaggy outcasts is only his headquarters, not his permanent abode. He is a globe trotter; we see him in Delhi, London, European and American capitals, everywhere surrounded by material comfort and fashionable women.

His platitudes are unattractive: "One can never be a misfit in the service of God." "Everyone makes mistakes." His excuses are inexcusable. He says he realized after meeting Caroline that there were lessons that he had yet to learn from the world and therefore he returned to the world, "What else should I be doing among you ladies here but sitting at your feet learning my lesson?" There were "denials and delightful murmurs from his audience."

O charlatan, charlatan, too crude even to cloak charlatanism in a veneer of authenticity!

Whatever lesson it was he learned at the feet of women it certainly was not detachment. He returns to the village. Val follows him. Caroline follows Val. Caroline and the swami fight for the prize and the swami wins. But his woman's eyes are troubled when Caroline confidently says that a time will come when Val will leave him and return to her.

Possession is a failure in other ways also: The characterizations are neither realistic nor impressive; the plot is farfetched, and the theme is flimsy. In the other novels the strong story interest makes the reader gloss over the sketchiness of certain sections, but in this one there are too many gaping holes and skeletal outlines in the narrative for one to extenuate the author's short comings.

However, Possession contains an excellent commentary on Indo-British relationship. This aspect in itself is justification enough for a literary study of the novel.

Lady Caroline Bell is an autocrat, typical of the British Raj in India. She sets about getting possession of Val with the same dedication and ruthlessness with which the British subjugated India. She molds him into a man, an artist and a lover after the image she has in mind, and in the process ruins him, depleting him of independence and spiritual strength, though in her opinion he gains more than he loses.

Caroline does exactly what she wants, and the others do exactly what she wants them to do. Within minutes of seeing Val's crude paints and fine paintings she decides to make him a successful artist. Nothing can stop her. She moves into the headman's house, and he goes elsewhere. She besieges Val's family with her proposal, day after day. The villagers serve her as they would a feudal lord. She fared "needless to say, extremely well. Wherever the British go, as the whole of the East knows, they live on the fat of the land, though the British themselves have no inkling of it. Simply by taking it for granted they have the hypnotised natives piling it onto their plates" (P, p. 17). She buys Val from his parents for five thousand rupees. She whisks him off to Madras. There she protects him even though it means social ostracism for her. To escape the formal schooling which English law demands, she exiles herself to Switzerland and returns to England with Val when he is sixteen. For his sake she moves from her Belgravia residence and takes a house in Silvertown East. With singleminded dedication she works for him, tolerating his moods, forgiving his lapses, and wheedling publicity men in the art world.

Her ruthlessness is prompted by her love and ambition. She does not allow personal jealousy of Ellie to overcome her, but when Ellie's pregnancy threatens Val's career, Caroline silently and unscrupulously drives

Ellie to suicide. With terrible finesse she eliminates Annabel from Val's life. At the point when Val is about to desert her and his artistic career in favor of Annabel, Caroline reveals with studied casualness the fact of Ellie's suicide. Val, whom she has kept in ignorance, is stunned; and Annabel, unaware of Val's innocence, is shocked out of her love.

Annabel is eliminated, but Val does not return to Caroline. With typical British obduracy she follows him to his village. Val is adamant. It is the Swami's hour of triumph, but Caroline has the last word: "There is still one thing to be taken into account: Valmiki is yours now, but he has been mine. One day he will want to be mine again, I shall take care to make him want me again, and on that day I shall be back to claim him" (P, p. 249).

Caroline speaks of Val as of a possession to be transferred from hand to hand. This attitude demands submission and gets it till the resentment of people like Suya flares up and wins independence. The Suya-Caroline relationship is yet another symbol of the Indo-British world.

Suya is a prototype of the class of educated Indians in close contact with the English, admiring them and resenting them at the same time. She admits that Caroline came of "a breed that never accepted defeat,"

that she has qualities that command admiration. She gives her admiration reluctantly. Suya's attitude has a little of each of the main characters in Some Inner Fury. She resembles Kitsamy in that her romance with British culture is not a cheap flirtation but a deep understanding. Like Roshan, she has many English friends and moves familiarly in high society without herself conforming to its superficialities. Like Govind she nurses a resentment against the British for their domination and arrogance.

Her defensive veneer of resentment protects her from admiring Caroline too much and from being hurt by Caroline's callousness. Numerous comments and incidents spotlight this attitude.

Suya meets Caroline at Jumbo's party. Jumbo is an ex-ruler who throws lavish parties just as he used to when he had his kingdom and the British ruled India. His British friends gave him this name "not because of his size, but because it was the custom for people of his class to be given nicknames . . . so that Bingos, Beppos, Binkies and Roys abounded in the luminous upper strata of erstwhile British India." Caroline speaks to Suya without a formal introduction. "She spoke directly, with the clear forthrightness just this side of insolence which the English upper middle class use in speaking to

anyone who is not English upper middle class, and which would be insolence but for their serene unconsciousness of it" (P, p. 4).

Caroline and Suya agree to meet at the station at nine o'clock. Caroline asks, "Nine o'clock Indian time?" and Suya resents this barb at the proverbial Indian unpunctuality.

Her resentment grows stronger as Caroline fastens her hold on Val, but mutual admiration also grows. In a conversation, Caroline puts the Indo-British relationship in words, " . . . we go out of our way to meet, and we squabble every time we do. It's a sort of love-hate relationship, don't you think? Like the kind Britain and India used to have" (P, p. 75).

It is exactly that, though Suya does not admit it then. Caroline is Britain, Suya is India. The analogy continues throughout. When Caroline follows Val to India she needs Suya's help. Suya insists that everything is over, that she intends leaving Val in peace.

> "Whose peace?" she said with cold scorn. "His? or yours?"
>
> Caroline could, as she always had been able, position a splinter between a man and his conscience with which he had lately been at peace.
>
> Divide and rule. It was a formidable inherited skill (P, p. 242).

Suya does what Caroline wants her to do. She guides Caroline safely past the crones who guard the Swami's

seclusion. Caroline's expression of gratitude is typical of her arrogance, "You're nothing any more. I don't mean to be offensive."

Suya shoots barbs of sarcasm and resentment at Caroline and the British. At the same time there is ample evidence of deep love and esteem. Incongruity is the due exacted from anyone stepping outside the bounds set by birth, she muses as she flies back to Bombay. It worked impartially on British and Indian alike, yet the results were not always dismal. "Given courage they could rise beyond grotesquerie to become unique and splendid like the British in India" (P, p. 93). She hopes Val will achieve that splendor. But Val does not. Cut off from his moorings he floats, flounders and then saves himself for the nonce by striking out for his native shores. He is determined to wash his hands of Caroline and England. But it is implied that this is not going to be easy. The love-hate reaction has set in.

In Nector in a Sieve the same love-hate relationship exists within Hickey and Kenny. However, Hickey's feeling is not so much for India as for his goal. He would face the same anywhere because he is a missionary interested in ideals and not in people, in the outcome and not in the work itself. He loves his villagers because they are raw material for the establishment of

his ideal. He hates them because they often refuse to be molded. Kenny, on the other hand, loves the people and the place in a human manner. He works in the present for the present. He identifies himself with the place. When Rukmani asks him why he lives and labors in a country not his own he answers that he had always thought that India was his country. Yet he hates India and Indians; he hates their submissiveness, their abject acceptance of misfortune:

> "Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand--cry out for help--do something? There is nothing in this country, oh God, there is nothing!" (NS, p. 63).

> "Acquiescent imbeciles," he said scornfully, "do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want, or from suffering?" (NS, p. 155).

> "I work among you when my spirit wills it . . . I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your eternal, shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses." (NS, p. 99).

The English, in Kamala Markandaya's novels, are insulting, arrogant, impatient with Indians, but they are also endowed with sterling qualities and the Indian characters pay tribute to them, reluctantly like Suya or readily like Mira, in Some Inner Fury, who admires the British.

Every Britisher in the novel is upright and does what he considers his duty. The Scottish superintendent of the jail where Roshan is imprisoned has known and

liked Roshan since her birth, but he arrests her just the same for what he believes are anti-social activities. Hickey is fanatical and bigoted, but he does his missionary work with single-minded dedication. Richard, though his customs permit physical intimacies and though he has yearned four years for her, does not possess Mira till the tenth day of their vacation when she asks him to take her.

British discipline is most evident and admirable in the last few incidents of Some Inner Fury. Anti-British demonstrations sweep across the town. Yet the annual Government House party, a British tradition in itself, is held with all due pageant and éclat. The guards and guests move about casually even though they know what is in the offing. "I looked upon the faces of men bred in another country, another tradition, and they were fearless; and if this fearlessness was begotten of insensitivity in some, it was not so brutishly sired in others, for one of these men I knew well, and loved" (SIF, p. 206).

The same unfaltering courage is seen when Indian crowds break into the law court where Govind, a terrorist leader, is standing trial for manslaughter. Around Hickey, the principal witness, the English "had formed themselves tightly, protectively, and those faces were fearless still, but grim, with that dawning of cruelty

which comes to Englishmen who see the codes of decent conduct broken, the rules of fair play flung aside . . . " (SIF, p. 251).

That is how Mira sees the British, and from the novels one gathers that Mira's view approximates the author's. Kamala Markandaya aligns herself with the moderates who tilted the scale in favor of the British because their personal experience had been pleasant. She knows the English in India better than she knows the peasants and clerks of India. The English belong to the world in which she has lived whereas Rukmani, Dandekar, and Val belong to a world which she loves but which lies on the other side of the wall. For the un-Anglicized Indian she has the affinity of sympathy; for the British in India she has the affinity of association; for the Anglicized Indian she has the affinity of personal knowledge and identification. That is why the setting of Some Inner Fury rings truest.

Mira's father was a member of the English Club "because it provided amenities such as no other place did . . . infinitely better kept than the ones belonging to the Oriental Club which a small group of Indians, tired of being blackballed from the English Club, had recently started" (SIF, p. 24). It is interesting to note that nowhere in Kamala Markandaya's novels do we

meet anyone who would have belonged to the Oriental Club. They belong to a social limbo with which one, author or not, does not consort.

The life led by the Anglicized Indians of the English Club type comes alive in Some Inner Fury. This select group worked conscientiously for the British Government and the Government graciously allocated for them a place in the hierarchy just this side of the red carpet, and both British and Indians behaved as though the red carpet were not there but each knew just how far one could move into the other's territory.

However, compared to the rest of India, they lived well. They had big mansions with gardens and lawns, chauffeurs, butler, gardener, washerman, watchman, house-boy, and other odd-job men. In summer they went to the cool of the hills. Their daily routine was the same wherever they were posted. The men were at their office "from ten till five, played squash or golf, depending on your age, later; then there were drinks, and afterwards you dined with someone, or someone dined with you, or you went to whichever club you belong to for bridge or billiards, or more drinks at the bar" (SIF, p. 127). Every few days there were parties or dances; there were several parties, like the Resident's or the Governor's, which were of social significance, and every-body who was anybody was invited, and if somebody was not invited he became a nobody.

It was a dichotomous way of life, especially for the women who were society-ladies and traditional housewives at the same time. As her husband's consort a woman played the role of a fashionable hostess in a westernized society. As a Hindu housewife she saw to it that the household deities were propitiated, festivals and holy days observed, children brought up in an Indo-English discipline, and the servants ruled over in feudal style. They had servants waiting attendance all over the house yet did such chores as buying groceries and tending babies. They had liquor and meat served to guests but themselves partook of traditional food after traditional prayers. They encouraged their children to dress and be educated in English ways but took care to follow conventions regarding their morality and marriage. Their own marriages were eminently successful because the partners compromised, the men respecting and joining the religious rites and the women accepting and adjusting to their husbands' westernizations.

The next generation would not compromise. Kit, though prompt to rise in defense of Hinduism against Christian missionary activities, could not bring himself to participate in Hindu rituals; Premala though pathetically eager to please Kit failed in her social obligations. Whereas Kit's parents had two sets of rooms in their house--one furnished in the western style and one in the

Indian--Kit's house was furnished entirely in the English style with Wilton carpets, wing chairs, cocktail cabinets, and English bone china. It is symbolic of their marriage that there is no room for compromise. Govind's philosophy has no room for compromise either; he hates everything British.

Compromise, the author seems to say throughout her novels, compromise so that the best traits may mingle and produce a better race. Her idea of compromise, as mentioned before, consists of assimilating a large portion of British culture as spread in India. This attitude introduces a veil between her and those of her characters who are taken from a social class different from her own. She moves sympathetically through the world of clerks, housewives, swamis and freedom fighters, but when it comes to identification she veers away and at best becomes non-committal. For example, the Swami in A Silence of Desire leaves the town. Is it by his own choice, or is it imposed by Chari and Ghose who start an investigation into his activities? In other words is he genuine or is he a charlatan? After building him up as a noble and true hermit the author becomes noncommittal and leaves the answer ambiguous. Similarly, in Some Inner Fury Hickey swears that Govind killed Kit. Govind pleads innocent. It is a test of the impartiality of British justice. On the witness stand Mira, an Indian, says she

had her arms around Govind at the time, and Hickey, an Englishman, says he saw Govind throw the knife that killed Kit. It is an Indian's word against an Englishman's. What verdict will British justice give? At this point the crowd swoops in and carries Govind away, and British justice is saved the ordeal. It seems to me that this is symbolic of the author's stand--she does not wish to put British integrity to the test.

Nevertheless, unintentionally the author throws an unfavorable light on the Indian image. The Indian gets the freedom he deserves but he gets it in a way that is not altogether creditable, whereas the English come off well.

Kamala Markandaya's themes are not new but this weakness becomes a strength because the Indian setting still has the attraction of novelty for the western reader, and universal themes set against an Indian backdrop are welcome. In her plots the author uses thick bold strokes, but in painting her backdrops she resorts to mosaics. A one-line comment here, a passing observation there, a casual description elsewhere--and a fine picture emerges. The western reader gets an inside view of Indian life. It is only a view, not a profound understanding, but it is clear.

A Silence of Desire is her best novel so far as artistic finesse is concerned and her worst in artistic

lapses. The mosaic bits form a realistic picture of apartment life in Bombay--the eight-story apartment block has only one water faucet, the rooms will hold no more than two beds, framed tableaux of gods and goddesses look down from kitchen walls, Dandekar eats off a plantain leaf and his wife dines only after he has eaten, they have many neighbors but no friends. Even more admirable than the material description is the sensitive manner in which the inarticulation of the middle class is brought out.

When first Dandekar suspects his wife of having a lover he tries to prove his masculinity and ownership by trying to possess her. Night after night she withdraws into her shell and he refrains from thrusting himself upon her. He is unable to ask her the reason: " . . . brutal insistences like these, as much as physical ones, were beyond his nature." Earlier, he knows that he should get the matter of the photograph cleared, but he cannot steel himself into expressing his suspicion in so many words. His silence is not motivated by ostrich-like stupidity that thinks the facts will dissolve into nothingness if one refuses to see them but by sensitivity. He has the middle-class sensitivity towards intimacies; he flinches from seeing the nakedness of her soul just as he flinches from seeing the nakedness of her tear-stained face. He feels that he is intruding on her privacy.

Dandekar is thoroughly middle class. He loves monotony and security and fears emotional scenes. He is content to be a clerk, a husband, and a father. But middle-class sensitivity is raw-edged, easily hurt, and Dandekar is driven to anguish and self-torture. Lower-middle-class life offers no cathartic escapes. Sensitivity gives rise to hurts. Hurts pile up unarticulated and inarticulation always builds a wall be it inarticulation of love and loyalty or of suspicion.

Dandekar, like other Markandaya characters, is a type, and here again a weakness becomes a strength and for the same reason. Indian types are still so little known that these characterizations do not pall. Dandekar is the nearest Kamala Markandaya comes to creating an individual. His portrait shows that the author has come a long way from the type-characters of Nectar in a Sieve and Some Inner Fury. But not far enough. Like Dandekar she has a self-conscious reticence that forbids her from baring the soul of her characters as they stand poised on peaks and abysses of emotional experience.

Kamala Markandaya's understanding of personalities deepens progressively in the first four novels, but her alienation from the Indian scene widens with the years. Numerous examples can be cited from A Silence of Desire. Obvious incongruencies such as putting the name "Dandekar"

in the same linguistic or regional group as "Chari" could have been avoided; it is like coupling the names "Chang" and "Johansson"; a time may come when they do belong to the same linguistic group, but it was not so in the India of 1957. More important, Dandekar, a clerk earning a meagre monthly salary of one hundred and twenty rupees lives altogether too comfortably to be true to life. A Handful of Rice shows evidence not only of alienation but of the author's limits. Here she portrays a milieu that is unfamiliar to her, a world of violence and unscrupulousness combined with humdrum temptations and dry-as-dust daily routines. To sketch a temptation-assaulted Ravi caught in the sound and fury of today's urban scene requires a pen that has been dipped in the bloodstream of chaos and endless night.

Suya's comment that incongruity is the price one pays for stepping outside the bounds set by birth can be stretched a point further. Incongruity is the price one pays when one returns in thought, or even actuality, to the land one has long left behind.

The later novels employ weak devices that subjugate artistry to plot technicalities. In Possession, for example, in order to give proof of the Swami's love and care Madras is made to have all its hotels occupied to the last room, a contingency that simply could not arise in a metropolis such as Madras. It is not just

the good hotels that have no vacancy; Suya and Caroline try even the seediest. This exaggeration is unfortunate, particularly because the preceding paragraph builds up such a fine atmosphere of rejection by society as represented by the aristocrat, Jumbo, and middle class Suya. Late in the search Val tells them of the name and location of a charity hall that the Swami had given him foreseeing this predicament.

Another example of the author's willingness to throw realism to the winds in order to highlight a point of character or plot is seen in A Silence of Desire. The plot requires that Dandekar start suspecting his wife of infidelity. A photograph treasured in secret by a wife is a common but not inexcusable device. Dandekar has to find the photograph. The immediate circumstances leading up to the discovery are ludicrous. Dandekar suddenly remembers that an old footlocker contains, along with silver cups and mementos, a history text used in his schooldays which has a chapter entitled "Benefits of British Rule," and Dandekar does not want his children to think that the British had bestowed any benefits on India. To get this book and destroy it he asks his wife for the locker key; she pretends to have misplaced it. Later he finds it, opens the footlocker, and discovers the photograph. The whole sequence is much too far-fetched and contrived.

Kamala Markandaya limits herself to a small canvas in each novel and effectively brings out certain social foibles and certain emotional conflicts faced by average human beings. She has a facile pen and a sympathetic attitude. But she does not go deeply into any problem or situation despite her keen insight and her eye for details. She races on and the casual reader is carried away. A closer study, however, shows weaknesses in plot and characterization, and also holes in the realistic setting. The first three novels reveal progressive improvement in her grasp of human reactions to events, but her later novels bear evidence of increasing alienation from the Indian setting.

In the final analysis, Kamala Markandaya emerges as a conscientious novelist. Whatever her limitations, she takes her art seriously and she has turned out six eminently readable novels, some of which deserve closer study than has been given here.

Balachandra Rajan, another of the major South Indian expatriates, is not as conscientious about being a novelist nor is he as consistent in style, quality or quantity as Kamala Markandaya. Born in 1920, Rajan was educated in England, like the hero of his first novel. In his own life he reversed the sequence of the careers that he cuts out for Krishnan by joining the Indian civil service first and then turning to an academic position.

He is better known for his scholarship on Milton and Eliot, and rightly so, than for his two novels--The Dark Dancer (1958) and Too Long in the West (1961). However, within Indo-English literature his novels are significant contributions, especially to what is called the field of expatriates and native aliens who explore or echo the growing alienation of western-educated Indians from their native culture and life. Both novels open with the central character returning to the ancestral home in India after several years at a foreign university. But the experiences they encounter as they fall into the old pattern of conformism are very different.

Too Long in the West is a hilarious comedy, a spoof of the absurdities in Indian and American social codes, of arranged marriages, and of the foibles and eccentricities of individuals. Everyone and everything is caricatured and made an occasion for laughter, except Nalini, who is the only failure in this delightful comic strip.

The Dark Dancer, on the other hand, is an intense story of the self-division and maturation of an individual and of a nation, of the cyclic phenomenon of fratricidal war and its message transmitted in the blood-consciousness of a people, that Kurukshetra was not and never shall be fought in vain. Everything and

everyone is on a higher-than-normal key; most characters, including minor ones, strain under the effort of their solos, and sometimes they tend to balance precariously or too long on their special note. There are different instruments and different players but all are controlled by a brilliant conductor who is, however, a little too high-strung to sweep into total identification himself, his orchestra or his audience. The work has the mark of brilliance, though not of genius. But then, how many geniuses can literature boast? Indo-English literature has a visionary in Aurobindo, a bard in Tagore, a lyricist in Sarojini Naidu, an eloquent socialist in Mulk Raj Anand, a compassionate humorist in R. K. Narayan, an anguished pilgrim in Raja Rao . . . but a genius? No, not yet.

It is interesting to note that Rajan's hallmark of prose brilliance has come under fire more often than any other quality of his writing. Frederic Morton, reviewing The Dark Dancer, comments that Rajan has "a lyric way with words" that "turns into an uncertain blessing."[4] David McCutchion is surprised that the critic of Paradise Lost and editor of Focus should have published The Dark Dancer under his own name "because of the astonishing insensitivity to language it reveals."[5] Prema Nandakumar feels, "The main weakness of the novel [The Dark Dancer] lies in the uncertainty of its style."[6] V. Y. Kantak

quotes from the opening chapter of The Dark Dancer to illustrate the inadequacy, in his opinion, of Rajan's "mannered prose." "The effort to load the language with significance becomes a constant strain. It distracts attention from the object itself. What is being rendered hardly seems to count, as though all that mattered was to elicit admiration for the brilliance of the rendering."[7] C. D. Narasmmhaiah, one of Rajan's most violent critics, uses Nandakumar's words to reinforce his opinion: "To pass from Rajan's Too Long in the West to Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope is to move from a wash-basin in one's flat to the Ganga at Benares."[8]

Looking deeper into these and other comments, one sees two factors at work. The first is that considerable stress seems to be placed on the necessity of simplicity and an Indian flavor in language. It is true that some of the best works in Indo-English literature contain these two elements, for example, Raja Rao's Kanthapura and most of Narayan's novels. But the essential point is that all three novelists are successful because each speaks in his own voice, an injunction Rajan has repeated in articles and in his novels.[9] Narayan's prose style is frequently pedestrian to the point of reader-frustration, and yet he is successful because essentially he speaks in his own voice--a raconteur's voice of effortless narration. Outside his characters',

Rajan too speaks in his own voice--with a scholar's naturally high flow of vocabulary. Whereas Narayan seldom gets into the skin of his characters, both Raja Rao and Rajan do, and this accounts for the burnished gold in their prose. In Kanthapura, Raja Rao's style is eminently successful because he transmits the lilt of vernacular idioms and the thought flow of the village narrator. In The Serpent and the Rope, the prose is tortured and complex because the central character is a tortured and complex personality. So is Krishnan of The Dark Dancer. Indeed, the tone and language of these two novels run parallel to each other as do the themes and characters. And this brings me to the second factor, that however small in extent Indo-English literature might be, it does not warrant comparisons between two entirely different types such as Too Long in the West and The Serpent and the Rope. It is far more relevant to compare The Dark Dancer with Raja Rao's masterpiece even though Raja Rao is a far superior novelist, and Too Long in the West with one of Narayan's novels. Rajan does often load every rift with ore in The Dark Dancer, but the style is consistent with the introspective, inhibited, intellectual, snobbish character of the hero through whom we see most of the happenings. On the other hand, in Too Long in the West the style is "all Jest and youthful Jollity, Quips and Cranks and wanton Wiles,

Nods and Becks, and wreathed Smiles," consistent with the tone and theme of this comedy.

To read the comedy as "a story about the clash of Indian and American cultures. . . . Nalini, fresh from an open society in which she has learnt to think for herself, is caught up once again in the traditional village life--advertised for marriage and exhibited before a miscellaneous collection of suitors,"[10] is to misconstrue the novel and the milieu. Nalini's life at Mudalur, and the intentionally exaggerated misadventures that take place, are very far indeed from traditional village life. The novel is a fantasia woven around an eccentric assemblage of parents, suitors and rustics. Realism and satire are thrown in for good measure but only to enhance the lively tempo. Thus, the mild satire against the American way of life in the second chapter is very perceptive but essentially humorous:

> She herself joined in this universal ritualized insanity, inched furiously through five miles in four hours and desperately drove two hundred in three and a half. . . . She was drawn to the many-sidedness of New York, to the turbulent harmony of its tongues and races, to the mammoth stores that refused to be undersold and the small shops perpetually pretending to go out of business. . . . She liked the people with their welcoming, decent vulgarity, their worship of children and cheesecake, their demented escapes into weekend mirages, their homely dedication to the twenty-one inch dream.[11]

Similarly, every characterization has a kernel of realism or human sympathy, but essentially the figures are caricatures, purposely exaggerated out of all

proportion, except Nalini who is the only failure. She is too idealized, without however being shown as ideal. Her flashes of repartee are more interesting and apparent than the "immemorial wisdom of her body." During her first days in New York, she is by turn too-obviously naive and too-obviously sophisticated, too-obviously ignorant and too-obviously knowledgeable to be appealing. But the others are delightful.

Sambasivan, for nine months of the year, is a pot-bellied, mild-spoken, henpecked professor who has long emptied his rooms and his mind to their bare essentials; but every summer he becomes a minor god ruling over the days and destiny of Mudalur. "He looked at his kingdom and considered it good." He is not God, but a minor deity, and this "was not presumptuous, since in the wisdom of his country all but the greatest gods were less than rishis." He thinks of himself as a benevolent despot though there is nothing despotic or powerful about him as the durbar under the marquee shows.

His wife, Lakshmi, is a vain, proud, ambitious woman who feels satisfied with the morning if she has successfully pressed out a blackhead, but she too is a breathing human being as she muses on her children: "And for Nalini, who inherited her hopes, the sacred fire would soon have to be lit. . . . They were growing up." "When she thought of Nalini as her unachieved

self, the passion of a lost dream reached through her and she couldn't bear to think of her daughter being given away."

There are the other idlers of Mudalur--Murugesan, an "artist" who solves problems of village economy by printing currency bills; Guruswamy, the swindling steward, who refuses to work because he "has served tea to eminent Englishmen"; Kesavan the carpenter who fills Hillview with needless furniture, and the other rustics who are easily roused by invectives but relapse into passivity because they cannot think of a life where one has to work more than five hours a day. Delightful caricatures all.

The four suitors are even more like cartoon figures. There is Satyamurti, a cyclist who comes like "a calamity out of the rain," who provides uproarious comedy with his exaggerated version of Indo-English officialese: "You are author of advertisement in Hindu of fourteen ultimo? Indicating availability of daughter, presumably virgin." Kalyanasundaram, the researcher into arranged marriages, is full of grandiloquence, as is Kubera, owner of Cosmic Cosmetics; both think of improving the entire country with their talents. Equally self-conceited is Viswakarman, a journalist in search of a father-in-law who will present him with a linotype machine on which to print his manifestoes and tracts.

For some reason Viswakarman is described as both insolent and frightened; his insolence is not a mask for his diffidence as in Satyamurti's case. Too many qualities are attributed to him to make this characterization good. "His face had the frightened, unnaturally brilliant look of one who by some weird negligence had been in his suit when it was sent to the cleaners." A picturesque description, but what does it mean? To his self-conceit the author adds another quality that apparently annoys him considerably--the Indian proneness to imitation and emulation. Viswakarman is a master at imitating the masters of English literature, and he is shocked when Nalini tells him to listen "to the sound of your own voice." Like the other suitors, he talks arrogantly and long. Indeed, when the rivals' dominant qualities are noted we see a sameness in their attitudes, actions and speech, and this includes the other two suitors, Ernest Hamilton-Jones, who joins the race because he is American and therefore cannot pass up a competition, and Raman, who is forced despite himself into the tournament. All talk endlessly, and all think highly of themselves:

> "First class, right through," the young man proudly proclaimed. "Highest marks for the last ten years in my district." (Kalyan, TLW, p. 65).

> "I am not simply a reporter but a master of style. In fact I am a master of many styles." (Viswakarman, TLW, p. 89).

> "Ask any question you want. My name is Satyamurti, meaning 'truth-teller'." (TLW, p. 34).

"You think you have met me already. You have, and so have tens of thousands of others. . . . I am a man of good taste." (Kubera, TLW, p. 108).

"You can't be wholly beyond redemption," he said. "After all, you showed that you were not without taste by selecting me." (Raman, TLW, p. 226).

"Marry me and make it all come true. The two of us can reform the world together." (Ernest, TLW, p. 149).

All of them speak in the same way, the same exaggeration, bossiness, even the same kind of jokes. The poses and repartees have an Oscar Wilde touch, and as in Wodehouse, there is no difference between speakers--any of them could have said any or all of these:

"She has behaved," said Sambasivan, "exactly as the daughter of her father should."
The young man peered at him dubiously.
"Very well, I will not prejudge." (TLW, p. 33).

"You talk like a file," she said. "Sideways, you happen to look like one also."
"You are extremely ill-mannered. A Brahmin girl should strive to be like a cow. She should furnish the household with everything but impertinence." (TLW, p. 88).

"Nothing, but nothing, compares with Attar of Darkness . . . exquisitely nationalist, quintessentially Indian, made rigorously to a sacred, secret formula older than history, newer than nuclear physics."
"You won't catch me living up to that," said Nalini.
"You will marry me," he insisted. "Some women achieve greatness. Others have greatness sprayed upon them." (TLW, p. 111).

"If you want to get married you might learn not to walk over an apology."
"And you might learn to deliver one with grace." (TLW, p. 75).

"You haven't come in answer to the advertisement, have you?"
Ernest's tone was reproving. "I never read advertisements. My function in life is to make people healthier." (TLW, p. 120).

In a comedy like Too Long in the West such superficial homogeneity is acceptable. But in a serious novel like The Dark Dancer[12] this quality is intrusive. The major characters tend to speak alike in the same voice--flippant outside while intense thoughts race on within, considering pros and cons, hopes and despairs, suffering the anguish of inhibition-caused inarticulation. And still deeper is the inmost voice questioning, desperately wondering if what it wanted to say has been said or whether the outer voice and words have fallen short. Often a character stops short, leaving a sentence unfinished or regretted, feeling that the words have not conveyed the meaning or sentiment adequately, e.g.:

> She paused, pursing her lips. She hadn't meant to be patronizing, but it had happened that way out of the stubbornness of language. (Kamala, DD, p. 49).

> He had made the last remark straightforwardly, out of his respect for Kamala, not intending it to carry the weight of a large meaning. (M.O., DD, p. 279).

> It was the first time she had spoken of wanting him, and she said it tautly, as if admission hurt a little . . . (Cynthia, DD, p. 95).

> He had meant it as a reminder of the practical, a declaration of necessity. But when the words came out, they sounded only defeatist. (Krishnan, DD, p. 96).

However, Krishnan is the only one who chronically runs into this inarticulation. Occasionally, the "explanatory footnote in his voice" as he calls it fails to come through, and the articulate misgivings about his inarticulation serve no purpose. Especially when he wants to commiserate with someone, he sounds disgustingly patronizing. For

example, to Vijayaraghavan, who is in love with Kamala and so rails against Krishnan: "I know how you feel," said Krishnan reassuringly, wishing he could say something a little less inadequate" (DD, p. 184). The same condescending tone comes across in his last meeting with Cynthia. Similarly with Pratap Singh, who is full of anger and bitterness as he talks of the Rawalpindi massacre of Hindus and Sikhs. And yet again when he turns to his guests on hearing the radio announcement that August 15 is to be Independence Day:

"Seventy-two days," he said, "Seventy-three days to freedom. It didn't sound exactly the way it should have" (DD, p. 113). Here, in addition to the total inadequacy of the statement and speculation, one feels that perhaps the author himself periodically feels a qualm that he has not effectively communicated what he wants to; a needless qualm. As for Krishnan's misgivings, most of the time, the instant retrospection is effective, and we feel the effort and helplessness behind the words, for example: To Kamala, who intuitively asks about Cynthia, he quickly explains they had been undergraduates together. "He had meant to reassure her about the past but he had done it at the cost of unsettling the present. It must have gone down deep, it must have taken root in him, for it to come out that way in the nuances" (DD, p. 86).

Krishnan is quick to respond, especially to his own shortcomings; but his response is intellectual,

dialectic, detached. Thus, he sees the absurdities of elaborate marriage festivities, but he also sees the social and spiritual need for a carnival that "helped to loosen for a moment the rigid and priest-like compulsions of austerity which seemed to claim even the wealthiest of his community" (DD, p. 21). He dissects himself with the same ruthlessness. The opening chapter, that has fallen flat for some critics, is, in my opinion, an excellent introduction to the character of the arrogant yet sensitive hero. His detachment as he walks back to his ancestral home behind the massive Cudappah pillars is seemingly unnatural, but it is a poignant expression of the utter alienation he feels on the realization that his response is only intellectual, that his heart has ne'er within him burn'd as home his footsteps he hath turn'd from wandering on a foreign strand. He knows that an intellectual response is not enough, but he does not know how else he can respond. This is his tragedy. Krishnan is one who has rejected his beginnings and then discovers that his inmost yearning is to belong. The Dark Dancer is the story of this search.

The predominant images in this voyage of discovery are the gopuram and the Dark Dancer. The latter image recurs in South Indian literatures just as the Ganga and Shakti recur in all Indian literatures. It is invariably used as a symbol of supreme beauty and mystery; its emotional and aesthetic associations for the South Indian

are very rich. The pose (see DD, 28) itself is very familiar and is reproduced in numerous temples all over South India and even the Far East--old Cambodia, Siam, East Indies. And yet it is above monotony. As Rajan says, "Again and again, century after century, thousands of times in city or in village, the molten metal would settle into solidity and the craftsman gazing upon it would feel the strange light of a vision not his own" (DD, p. 28).

The other main image in the novel is the gopuram, the four-sided pyramid built above the gates of temples and above the inner shrine. For Rajan, it symbolizes lonely but steadfast defiance. In Too Long in the West, this image is seen in Mahavir Peak, "an impenitence of the earth, an object of awe and desolation. Its shape was aloof, disturbing, satisfying. One found a challenge and then a repose in its loneliness" (TLW, p. 2). In The Dark Dancer, Krishnan sees in the gopuram "the marriage of solitude with the unknown." It is symbolic of man, for each man at the core is an island entire unto himself, a thrust of earth in an alien and unfriendly ocean, "however blunted, frustrated, upheld unyieldingly from the obstinate earth, the blunted thrust giving aspiration solidity and earthiness." The stress of the blunted top is significant. The enmity of the sky and environment exerts ceaseless pressure on the lonely, upthrust

(a favorite word with Rajan) tower, but a gopuram-like individual resists the pressures and stands on, lonely, defiant, beautiful.

In another sense, the gopuram image is linked with the image of the Dancer. It is symbolic of Hinduism. The four faces of a gopuram are closely packed with carved figures "vaguely similar yet never exactly the same, brown stone proudly declaring the earth's promise, so that in the apparent riot of diversity one felt the presence, not of a pattern but of a unifying force, straining upward into the spiritual, penetrating down into the sensual, until the borders of division melted away and the two worlds were extensions of each other" (DD, p. 166). It contains and answers every need of spirit and body and intellect, for each man to partake of as he wishes and is able; his to decide whether he wants to enjoy the architectural perfection from outside, or whether he wants to walk through the outer gopuram doors and pray to the myriad deities who have their shrines within the walls, or whether he wants to walk to the inmost shrine under the central gopuram and there contemplate and worship the Dark Dancer.

Krishnan's Brahmin background places him in the last group, necessarily the smallest in any social structure. Not only the path of bhakti, of rapt adoration; not only the path of karma, causal reward and

punishment; not only the path of gnana, of actively striving for knowledge, but a stricter code encompassing all these and more--right action for its own sake, without consideration of reward or punishment, cause or effect. The Dark Dancer is an appropriate image for this concept, this abstract superhuman perfection that a human being can perceive and merge into. Like the gopuram, the Dancer is infinite power and infinite serenity.

Krishnan gets his vision of the Genesis in his marriage pandal, though he does not comprehend its meaning.

> In the beginning was rhythm, not the word. Not darkness but moonlight and the radiance of creation. There had never been nothing without form and void but always form in its essence, everlastingly changing. . . . Nataraja, one leg arched in that supreme expression of energy, the dying smile of the demon beneath the other's lightness, all that infinite power of destruction drawn back into the bronze circle of repose . . . the intense union of power with tranquillity, not captured but liberated in that eternal dancing. . . . Creation, Destruction. Two concepts but one dance . . . asserting the law invincibly, ecstatically, the drums beating . . . raise me, raise me into the mystery's centre. (DD, p. 28).

But one is not automatically raised. One is lost in the mazes of the motion, the mystery, the meaning. Krishnan's subconscious is always conscious of the Dancer but only in fragments. He intellectually knows there is a whole but he perceives only parts. At his nuptials he can hear only the remorseless beating of the drums,

"the tattoo blurred like an ancestral memory." The novel is the story of this consciousness, now growing, now darker, and towards the last, brighter than ever before in his life. He chooses Kamala because he does not want the tranquillity of compromise that most men want and get out of arranged marriages. "Was there a place for contentment in the temple's heart, in the kindling core of the mind where Siva dances?" Not contentment but a sense of belonging is what he seeks. And instinctually he feels that Kamala would lead him to that deep commitment which is part of belonging. "She would not change him. She would accept him. She would leave him nothing but himself, no masks, no pretense, no illusion. Without harshness, perhaps without love also, she would lead him to the precipice of belonging, the point of no return and no escape." And there he would create his island because creation is an act inspired when one cannot escape. Bondage and liberation, like creation and destruction, are antithetical yet complementary forces in the cosmic dance of Siva.

Krishnan's instinct about Kamala's inner strength is right, and she would have led him to the supreme realization, but the way would have been long and arduous. Krishnan is not strong enough to make that kind of pilgrimage, and he chafes impatiently seeing her tranquillity as inertia and not as strength of

spirit. The national changes within India parallel this change. The invincible but slow strength of Gandhi's non-violent movement is impatiently speeded up, and India moves to its ruin even as Krishnan does to his.

India's movements and Krishnan's parallel at every step henceforward in the novel. The day he meets Cynthia is the day of the Rawalpindi carnage, the day of foreboding that sets with a pall of inevitability. India that has been patiently pushing its icon of freedom within a resplendent Juggernaut up the steep hill to the new temple now gives the Juggernaut an impatient push and in that impatient heave it loses its breath for a costly moment; the Juggernaut slips back ever so little, but it is a Juggernaut and therefore kills those who inadvertantly or purposely touch it without reverence. India shudders at the touch of the slipping Juggernaut and then rallies with reinforced breath. "It was still possible that it might not be," but the heavy pall of inevitability has already fallen. Similarly, Krishnan is chafing at the slowness of his journey to "belonging." Cynthia's arrival catches him in that vulnerable state of impatience, and though he rallies, feeling it was still possible it might not be, a new chain of causation has been set rolling--in the wrong direction.

Kamala, Hinduism, the Dance--all are one. Cynthia and her ideas are the opposite of all these. She cannot

give without expecting an equal return. "You've no right to give less than you receive. If you couldn't give everything, then you ought not to have started it" (DD, p. 175). She cannot conceive of a fusion of the Dancer's infinite energy and infinite repose. She can see and represent and identify herself with only a fragmentary aspect of the Dance--the aspect of energy and motion and liberation, none of which is of the Dance without the complementary aspect of stillness, repose and the circle that encompasses all. Krishnan is attracted because he too is at the moment responsive only to a fragment.

A fragment of the Cosmic Dance is not as fragments of terrestrial wholes where parts bear the qualities of the whole, and fractions add up to one. The Cosmic Dance is Whole; fragments are worthless, meaningless, nothing. One has to see the whole or he sees nothing, though he may think he sees the best angle. Cynthia is the very antipode of Krishnan's destination. She does not want him to belong but to be (DD, p. 97). She cannot perceive that the bronze circle encircles the universe; she sees it only as a cage. And because Krishnan has veered away from Kamala he too starts seeing himself as a caged animal, an image that has never come to his mind till Cynthia's advent. When with Cynthia or thinking of her he is a caged animal. But with Kamala he is man striving to be god, "raise me, raise me into the mystery's center."

Kamala is a gopuram, her tranquil brown eyes are "where the gopuram's shadow leaned in." In her the borders between the spiritual and the sensual melted away and the two worlds became extensions of each other. But Cynthia appeals only to Krishnan's intellect and not to his spirit. Because he is intellectual, he responds eagerly, gratefully. "His mind opened and the wave swept into him, the riptide of her sensuality seeming to wash it clean so that he was conscious only of the thrust of her loveliness, lingering and lissome." But satiation of body and mind alone are not enough. Fragments of the Dance add up to nothing. And even in his first embrace of Cynthia, Krishnan knows that "it wasn't a beginning, there were no stones to stand on, no welcoming soil to wade to with relief. He hadn't the sense of liberation . . . only of a strangely frightening freedom, all the more desolate because no longer hemmed in" (DD, p. 129). There is no bronze circle to give the movement the sweep of completion.

Krishnan has by now lost even intellectual contact with the Dark Dancer. He is an animal prowling about the cage, turning over the coin, calculating the plus and minus. Cynthia is worth ten aunts, twenty uncles and forty-seven grandmothers. Maybe, but he is not aware that the equation balances only because the sum total of zeroes is zero. He continues to love Cynthia and

even gets happiness out of the relationship because man, unlike the Dark Dancer, can live in fragments, and mind and body add up to a substantial fraction of a whole even though the fractions do not have anything to do with the Essence.

Once Kamala leaves for Madras, Cynthia becomes very like Kamala. There are sentences which sound as though they refer to Kamala:

> . . . the loveliness came out of a core of loneliness, and when he touched her now he could feel the core's profundity. (DD, p. 127).

> That was what fascinated him: the vivid and quite deep Indianness, and underneath it, yet in harmony with it, the exotic core of stubborn individualism, which he wanted to see take root in his reality. (DD, p. 132).

When Krishnan expresses his qualms about inflicting suffering on Kamala, Cynthia behaves exactly as Kamala would have. He has chosen for himself and he must continue alone so that he may grow (DD, p. 137). When Kamala leaves for Shantihpur, Cynthia initially behaves like an efficient Englishwoman, phoning the police and bustling about, but later she frequently becomes like Kamala when seen by Krishnan:

> What was it, he wondered, that made her so reassuringly self-sufficient, so that she was able to tend the private garden of her happiness, not in obliviousness to the world outside but with a renewed and personal understanding of its problems. (DD, p. 162).

> He had chosen her against all pressures, in his obstinate, lonely act of self-assertion, and out of the exactions of sorrow and of chagrin there had to come something of the truth in himself. She was the receiver of the only pure commitment, the act had

> been free, it was himself uncompromised, and in the reality which it planted, the meanings that he sought could stand and grow. (DD, p. 179).
>
> She had chosen him, not abandoning herself, but letting his possession of her shape him, revealing the certitude and clarity of her own strength. . . . In the end she had made him go back to himself. (DD, p. 180).

She is too like Kamala for us not to stop and wonder what is happening to Krishnan. In his despair at having lost both Kamala and Cynthia, has he lost sight of the distinction between the two? Have they merged in his mind? Or has he been idealizing both, seeing only what he wants to see, endowing both with qualities they do not possess, making each the bulwark of his commitment because he needed the idea of a bulwark and would make one despite reality? That is a possible but not plausible speculation, for we have seen and heard both Cynthia and Kamala, and seen Krishnan's interaction with them.

Obviously Cynthia does not have all these qualities that are attributed to her. She is not the only receiver of his only commitment, she is not very Indian particularly in the remarks she makes just before Krishnan calls her one, his choice was not an act of self-assertion but almost fatalistic acceptance, and she had made him go back to himself only in a momentary loss of self-control that she very soon regretted. Whereas all these qualities not only could be but have been attributed to Kamala, who has proven that she deserves the tributes; of Kamala whom he had

chosen in an act of self-assertion against family pressures and astrological verdicts he has said: (italics mine)

> She looked steadily at Krishnan with an intense tranquillity that seemed the dispassionate mirror of his loneliness. (DD, p. 32).

> "Kamala's Indian, intensely so, not simply in what she knows and does but deep down, in a way I can only sense and don't even want to understand." (DD, p. 81).

> Kamala accepted with an undeceivable innocence, as if she knew better than the giver the character of his gift, better than the demander the roots of his demand, as if by the force of her receiving she might bring what she accepted to its essential nature. (DD, p. 19).

Are those musings about Cynthia perhaps rationalizations of a man who just realized that he has exchanged a pearl beyond price for an inferior stone?

For, in between these encomia, Krishnan does feel a nagging awareness that something vital is being short-circuited in his relationship with Cynthia. At Cambridge, their intellectual communions had been a satisfying experience but perhaps only because tousle-headed, slim-hipped Keith had been there between them to protect Krishnan from any physical commitment. It is significant that their physical commitment is made on a physical level, not on the spiritual-sensual level it has always been with Kamala. Cynthia looked "at him possessively. . . . Her tongue flicked out, moistening the curve of her mouth. Then her arms reached up to him . . . circling

his indecision with finality, pulling him firmly, irrevocably down" (DD, p. 155). He enters this relationship with a greater sense of fatalistic doom than he felt that nuptial night when with the weight of resignation he was compelled "into the prescient darkness," which was "making him that which he was doomed to be" (DD, p. 32). In Cynthia's encircling arms the figure of the Dark Dancer is seen, motion within a circle, but it is distorted like an anti-Christ figure. It is also significant that when Kamala leaves for Shantihpur the bronze replica of the Dark Dancer leaves with her. The day she returns from Madras, as she stands at the dresser with the figurine in her hand, Krishnan is given darshan of the parallel, that Kamala bears within her the vital essence of the Dance, but Krishnan does not perceive. Like an undeserving Nanda he stands at the portal of the shrine where Nandi has moved aside to give him a vision of Nataraja, but he is too preoccupied with himself to receive the vision. And then Kamala leaves, taking with her all possible contact with the Dark Dancer.

Krishnan's affair with Cynthia runs its course as it must, and ends as it must in a blind alley. Krishnan next sees the bronze figurine at Shantihpur. While the wind sweeps through the room, and through Krishnan and India, the god himself

> . . . was still, as if the quintessence of motion were repose, as if only the reflections moved and maimed, and as if, beyond them, shaping them, discarding them, one could reach the source of change

> and its serenity. . . . It was not the catharsis of art--there was no purgation, no refinement, no transmutation of the strength of darkness. It was as if one were raised into the mystery's center . . . (DD, p. 225).

It is another abstract but illuminating flash, and it brings Krishnan nearer to the understanding of his beginnings, the beginnings in the Brahmin ethos and Hindu scriptures that he had earlier rejected. Through the ensuing traumatic experiences of communal bloodshed, sacrifice and bereavement, Krishnan becomes growingly aware of some basic values; from the M.O.'s fierce dedication and Kamala's silent strength he learns something about the Indianness and sense of belonging for which he has yearned all his life; and beyond that, something about detachment and right action for its own sake.

Parallel to this is the fratricidal struggle in India soon after Independence. Kurushetra was not and never shall be fought in vain. A meaning will emerge from the waste and carnage, and India shall rise again. The backward rolling of the Juggernaut will be stopped and then the chariot will be pushed up to the top of the mountain and India will worship at the newly dedicated shrine.

On the personal level, Krishnan's ordeal by fire is over. "Out of the ashes, he knew, would come more than ashes," and not only for Kamala. The rain has not yet come. But it will. V. S. Krishnan, five-seven,

brown-eyed, slim-waisted, nearing thirty, sets out from the Wasteland back to the strength of his beginning.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Nayantara Sahgal, Storm in Chandigarh (New York, 1969), p. 110.

[2]For further examples of Kamala Markandaya's ignorance of Hindu customs than are given in this chapter, refer to Shyamala Venkateswaran's article, "The Language of Kamala Markandaya's Novels," in The Literary Criterion, IX (Winter, 1970), 57-67.

[3]Nectar in a Sieve (New York, 1954), hereafter cited as NS; Some Inner Fury (New York, 1955), hereafter cited as SIF; A Silence of Desire (New York, 1960), hereafter cited as SD; Possession (New York, 1963), hereafter cited as P; A Handful of Rice (New York, 1966); and The Coffer Dams (New York, 1969).

[4]Frederic Morton, "New Truths, Old Values," NYT Book Review (June 29, 1958), p. 6.

[5]David McCutchion, "Le Style C'est L'Homme," Writers Workshop (May-June, 1961), p. 21.

[6]Prema Nandakumar, "The Achievement of the Indo-Anglian Novelist," The Literary Criterion (Winter, 1961), p. 160.

[7]V. Y. Kantak, "The Language of Indian Fiction in English," in Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, ed. M. K. Naik, S. K. Desai and G. S. Amur (Dharwar, 1968), p. 156.

[8]C. D. Narasimhaiah, "Why this Animus?" The Literary Criterion (Summer, 1966), p.

[9]See Too Long in the West pp. 58-59 and p. 89; The Dark Dancer p. 54; and The Illustrated Weekly of India (February 24, 1963), p. 58.

[10]Anon., "Indian Ink," TLS (May 19, 1961), p. 313.

[11]Balachandra Rajan, Too Long in the West (London, 1961), p. 62; hereafter cited as TLW.

[12]Balachandra Rajan, The Dark Dancer (New York, 1958); hereafter cited as DD.

CHAPTER V

THE LONE SURVIVOR: RAJA RAO

From time to time we hear of memorial pits being dug by people who fear a nuclear cataclysm and wish to leave intact forever and a day some relics of our present civilization. In a deep pit they bury a select number of articles, treasures garnered from various arts, crafts and scientific inventions, that represent a part or whole of national or world-wide cultures. If such a pit is dug and filled to preserve anything of what is called Indo-British civilization, and one had to choose just one novelist from Indo-English literature to be represented in the collection, one could without hesitation narrow down the choice to Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. The choice between the two is not easy to make. Anand has written more; his writings survey more spheres of Indian life; his fiction tells us more about Indo-British civilization; he is more consistent in his literary output and in quality. Yet, in the final analysis, Raja Rao comes out several steps ahead of Anand. Raja Rao's novels transcend the times they

portray. Even Kanthapura, which is very much a product of its times and deals with topical issues, transcends chronology and belongs to the ages.

Prawer Jhabvala has rightly said that the as-yet-unwritten ideal Indian novel

> . . . would be bits of prose-poetry, anecdotes, lots of philosophizing and musing, and oblique kind of wit, and an ultimate self-surrender, a sinking back into formlessness, into eternity . . .[1]

Raja Rao's novels come nearest to this ideal. His later novels, especially, have this paradoxical quality of serenity and inconclusiveness that comes with ultimate self-surrender. At the end of each novel, the main character reaches a transcendental level of experience but it is not conclusive. The words, "ultimate self-surrender, a sinking back into formlessness, into eternity," most aptly sums up the experience of both reader and character in his later novels. As Raja Rao himself said, the last page of a novel is not the end. The reader's mind continues to react even though the hero has reached the end of his journey. A good novel should have several blank pages after the last written word so that the reader, turning over the blank leaves, reaches a kind of serenity.[2]

Raja Rao will endure.

And because he will endure and be the subject of many more studies than he has been so far, no attempt is made in this study to give a general or chronological introduction to him or his fiction. Two aspects of his

novels are discussed--the theme of Shakti-worship in his fiction, and an allegorical reading of The Cat and Shakespeare; that is, the first part treats one of the themes that runs through his writing, and the second part interprets one of his novels through in-depth study.

Raja Rao has published three novels, Kanthapura (1938), The Serpent and the Rope (1960) and The Cat and Shakespeare (1965). Each is a great work of art. Kanthapura is relatively simple in its plot, structure, language and philosophy. It is set in the 1930's, in Gandhi's golden decade, when the spark of genuine nationalism and awakening, typically Indian in its yoking of social and spiritual values, swept through the country, razing all barriers--communal, religious and intellectual. The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare are far more complex. Raja Rao has moved from simple narration to complex analyses and metaphysical musings. The Serpent and the Rope, more clearly than any other novel, tells us the distinctive qualities of the Indo-English novel and warns us that the usual standards of prose criticism cannot be applied to Indo-English writers.

David McCutchion, in his critique of the novel asks:

> Is this a novel at all? . . . All the central concerns of the western novel are absent--social relations, psychological motivation, characterization, judgement, a passion for the concrete. . . . [3]

The answer is in Raja Rao's foreword to Kanthapura. He says the Indo-English novel often uses the traditional Indian form of story-telling where

> . . . we have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us--we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought.[4]

The same is true of characterization. Characters in Indo-English novels are seldom defined and would be called caricatures by the standard criteria of prose criticism. But, as Prawer Jhabvala says in the context mentioned earlier, there is not much interest in individual characterization because "here we are all part of one another and beyond and above that part of God."[5]

However all Indo-English novels are written in full consciousness of the western novel-form. We need to remember both these points, the Indianness and the borrowed form, in any criticism of Indo-English fiction and neither exonerate nor praise either quality to the exclusion of the other. The finest examples of this synthesis of forms is found in Raja Rao's work.

Several explications and commentaries have been published on The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare. Since criticism should be cumulative, the rest of this essay does not go into summaries and general criticism or even into the main metaphysical contemplations

and conundrums in these novels but, instead, traces a vital theme in Raja Rao's fiction, the theme of Shakti or the Female Principle.

"To worship woman is to redeem the world."

"The husband does not love the wife for the wife's sake, the husband loves the wife for the sake of the Self in her."

Taken separately the first statement epitomizes the ancient Earth-Mother cult and the second epitomizes the Advaita philosophy that all things in the universe are but projections of the Self which is One and Absolute. Taken together these two sentences from The Serpent and the Rope[6] summarize the attitude towards womanhood and love that is developed in Raja Rao's short stories and novels. Rama, the hero of The Serpent and the Rope, is basically an Advaitist, a follower of the Hindu creed that may be defined in Vivekananda's words: "As a man you are separate from woman, as a human being you are one with the woman; as a man you are separate from the animal, but as a living being the man, the woman, the animal, the plant are all one; and as existence you are one with the whole universe. That existence is God, in Him we are all one."

Applied to human love in Raja Rao's work the credo that emerges is: I am the Eternal Self even as a drop of water has exactly the same composition as the

ocean. Anything that helps me realize this, is good and therefore to be pursued. Blessed is he who finds such love.

Raja Rao's heroes see, in the women close to their hearts, Woman--mysterious, powerful, sensual, sensuous, compassionate, child-mother-bride-whore in one. Small wonder that the Freud-oriented westerner is moved to extravagant tribute or caustic contempt.[7]

This attitude of idealization is developed through successive novels till in his latest, The Cat and Shakespeare, Shantha becomes Woman not only in peak moments of philosophical contemplation or physical ecstasy but remains Woman throughout. This unquestioning and wholehearted acceptance of woman comes only after a long and soulful search by Rama in Raja Rao's second and best novel, The Serpent and the Rope. However, Rama never gets the complete vision of Woman that Ramakrishna Pai of The Cat and Shakespeare gets; in his tortuous wanderings through the mazes of his vast intellect Rama sees fleeting glimpses, and his imagination and idealism build upon these visions so that he sees in each woman who moves within his orbit a manifestation of Shakti, Earth-Mother. He goes beyond his personal experience and reinterprets mythology, history and politics in the light of his ideology. How far we can go along with him depends on our knowledge of the Hindu background

and our understanding of this strange philosopher-sensualist, but none of us is likely to go with him the whole way.

In this study I shall not comment on the impersonal generalizations[8] made by Rama or by other Raja Rao characters but shall confine myself to the picture of woman that emerges out of their minds and experiences.

As a student in France in the 1930's Raja Rao wrote several short stories which were published in 1947 under the title The Cow of the Barricades. The stories are not worth republishing in book form. In the Preface he says apologetically that he accepts authorship of them because one ought not disclaim one's children. Well, a considerate father ought not expose his crippled children to the critical eyes of the world, nor ought a good author foist his immature works on his readers after establishing his renown, but that is not the point at issue: although the stories are not worth reading as stories they are worth some attention as foils to his later fiction.

Of relevance to this paper are three stories in this volume, "The Cow of the Barricades," "Javni" and "Akkayya." They contain the nucleus around which his idealistic attitude towards woman was to develop. The title story is about Gauri, a cow that gives its life in the cause of the non-violent nationalism that Mahatma

Gandhi had started in the thirties. Gauri is symbolic of the power of love; the story is centered around not only the literal affirmation of the words, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, not only an affirmation of the belief that both "the speechful and the mute" are animated by the same divine spark of love that "Sweeps thro the dull dense world, compelling there, All new successions to the forms they wear" but around a more fundamental and familiar symbol to which Hindus respond readily, the cow as the Mother, Mother India and Shakti. To worship woman is to redeem the world, and Shakti never did betray the heart that loved her. She suffers with and for man that he may be redeemed.

"Javni" is an idealized portrait of an old retainer. Javni was a "little wrinkled beneath the lips and with strange, rapturous eyes. Her hair was turning white, her breasts were fallen and her bare, broad forehead showed pain and widowhood." Javni's characterization is typical of Raja Rao's technique which has remained basically the same from the beginning. It is not through her actions that we see her strength and devotion but through the narrator's reaction to her presence. In his later work Raja Rao evokes the reader's identification with the narrator; he fails to do so in this short story. We see only

a pitiable old servant though the narrator sees Woman. His sister, too, shares the halo. She has more in common with the servant than with her husband or brother. She says, "Men can never understand us. . . . You are too practical and too irreligious. To us everything is mysterious. Our gods are not your gods, your gods not our gods." This sense of mystery that separates the sexes but exalts both is carried over to The Cat and Shakespeare where Ramakrishna Pai does not understand Shantha but by being aware of the sense of mystery comes near to worshiping her gods by worshiping her.

In "Akkayya," Akkayya is an old woman who was widowed in girlhood. In The Serpent and the Rope we see her again as Aunt Lakshamma. "She was married to a minister once, and he died when she was seven or eight. And since then my uncles and their daughters, my mother's cousins and their grandchildren, have always had Aunt Lakshamma to look after them, for an orphan in a real household is never an orphan" (SR, p. 9).

To the village woman the household extends to the whole village. She knows the personal problems of all its inhabitants, their idiosyncrasies and their weaknesses; the single street along which the village houses stand is her courtyard, and there she works and harangues, there she joins the other members of the "household" in their rejoicings and lamentations, for all that is theirs is hers.

Achakka, the narrator in Kanthapura, is just such a village woman, and Kanthapura just such a household. Achakka is more articulate than her predecessors, indeed her garrulity is ear-splitting if taken in large doses; her narrative style is the novel's crowning charm and also the greatest threat to its success. Those familiar with the vernacular and with the circumlocution of Indian speech habits will be delighted with Achakka's narrative style and its gossipy digressions.

> Then there was cholera. We gave a sari and a gold trinket to the goddess, and the goddess never touched those that are to live--as for the old ones, they would have died one way or the other anyway. Of course you will tell me that young Sankamma, Barber Channav's wife, died of it. But then it was not for nothing that her child was born ten months and four days after he was dead. Ten months and four days, I tell you! (K, p. 3).

Voluble, with an infinite capacity for love and for passing malice, quick to spark into enthusiasm and into cynicism, the women of Kanthapura are more human than those created by Raja Rao elsewhere. They become Woman at certain times but there is no incongruity between their action and the author's claim. One realizes that the immanent Shakti rises in every woman at certain pivotal points of life.

Different forms of Shakti are manifested through the women of Kanthapura. Shakti's indomitable spirit possesses them in their Satyagraha (non-violence) procession against the British government. When the police

ill-treat them with their sticks and boots, the women think, move and act as one for they are one. More distinct and pervasive is the devotional aspect. Woman as the Eternal Devotee, Shakti kneeling in rapt adoration in front of Siva, reveals herself through them as they listen to Jayaramachar retelling epic stories and to Ramakrishnayya reading passages from the Scripture. The most touching example of their edifying faith is the narrator's musing on the ruins of Kanthapura. She dreams of a happy ending to a modern Ramayana where Rama (Gandhi) will return from his exile (visit to England) with Sita (India) who had been captured by Ravana (the British) and as he returns to Ayodhya (Delhi) Bharata (Nehru), who has been reigning as regent, will welcome him and there will be celestial flowers showered upon his aerial chariot.

From the simple-hearted, loud-mouthed, easily-enthused women of Kanthapura to the reserved, cold, intellectual Madeleine of The Serpent and the Rope is a big leap, but an understandable one. Raja Rao travelled a long and lonely way during those twenty-two years, and his second novel is autobiographical to a large extent; Rama's spiritual anguish and metaphysical questionings, his search for happiness and his yearning for a teacher echo Raja Rao's own sojourn in France, his return in 1940 to India and his long search that ended at the feet of Swami Atmananda, who became his spiritual mentor.

The Serpent and the Rope is more than autobiographical. It is allegorical, it is an intellectual treatise on East-West cultural tensions, and mainly, it is a metaphysical contemplation on life as experienced by a sensitive intellectual, Rama, and expressed in Advaitic terms of the serpent and the rope, central symbols for illusion and reality respectively. However, what is of relevance here is that it is a probe into the meaning of womanhood and marriage. In his search for the meaning of womanhood Rama does not have to travel far because the answer is within himself. His attitude towards womanhood is subjective, and he builds upon his preconceived ideal and never faces objective analysis. There is no room for disillusionment because there is no interaction between his subjective view and objective reality. He sees Woman in all the women who move within his orbit, and those who do not reflect Shakti are thrown out of his orbit. No matter how they look, act or talk, his intensely personal love endows look, act and speech with an ethereal glow. He never sees them as they are; he sees only the qualities that he wants to see; even if facts are brought before him he dismisses them as appearances, and claims to see beyond what is to what REALLY is. In other words, his faith endows reality on his fancy, somewhat like what Keats says of Adam's dream of Eve and what the Greek myth tells of Pygmalion's deep desire animating Galatea.

Sincerity and faith in their divinity make Rama's women divine. But only for him. We, the readers, see them as all too human, for Rama records their characters faithfully though he himself is blind to their human failings. Often we get impatient with his halo-weaving imagination; and unless we see his attitude in the light of the Shakti cult we will misunderstand him (as some reviewers have done) and see him as a lecherous, incestuous hypocrite who for some incomprehensible reason is made out to be a hero.[9] If the following passages are read without adequate background, who can say which of the four women addressed is the mother, which the bride and which the sister?

> Saroja's presence now obsessed me sometimes, like one of those nights with the perfume of magnolia. . . . I was intoxicated with Saroja' presence, like a deer could be before a waterfall, or an elephant before a mountain peak. . . . What a deep and reverential mystery womanhood is. I could bow down before Saroja and call her Queen. (SR, p. 52).

> . . . in that blank, that silent, wise blank between books and behind them I felt the presence, the truth, the formula of Savithri. She was the source of which words were made, the Mother of Sound, Akshara-Lakshmi, divinity of the syllable; the night of which the day was the meaning, the knowledge of which the book was the token, the symbol--the prophecy. (SR, p. 169).

> . . . and taking me into myself, I transpire as the truth, as though touched by itself, like the wave that sees itself to be the sea, like the earth that was spread out and was called Madeleine. But when I want to call her Madeleine, I have to say Rama--her lips are mine turned outward, her flesh mine turned inward . . . (SR, p. 161).

> She it seemed was my inmost center, the mirror of my life. With no word, or sometimes with just a word, she understood the curvatures of my silences and thoughts. (SR, p. 236).

One may well ask how one can sympathize with a man who goes almost straight from the bed of Madeleine whose flesh was his turned inward to the arms of Savithri with whom his union, he claims, was so perfect that he could not say he loved her "because it was like saying 'I love myself'," and who on next meeting Madeleine says of her, "She was the tabernacle of my habitation."

In order to appreciate Raja Rao it is essential to understand Rama's emotional constitution. Each of the apotheoses could have been addressed to any of the four women because all four are essentially one and the same. Rama addresses the Woman in each. Saroja, Savithri, Madeleine and Little Mother are at different times different facets of Shakti.

But not for us, alas! not for us. In this context of characterization, one is reminded of D. H. Lawrence's dilemma in Sons and Lovers, where there are what may loosely be termed two Lawrences, one of whom is a reporter recording incidents and the other a man empathically identified with the hero. This split is most noticeable in Lawrence's delineation of Walter Morel and Miriam and his reinterpretation of them through Paul. In The Serpent and the Rope, Rama is both reporter and interpreter though he himself is often unaware of the purport of his reports and observations. This is most evident in his relationship with Saroja and Savithri.

Saroja, his sister, is a rather opprobrious character who resents her step-mother and has vituperative and satirical phrases for all around her. The Saroja we see is mean and prejudiced and stubborn, but the Saroja that Rama sees is entirely different. She is Shakti in her most primordial form--the Waiting Womb. In her presence he feels as though he were in a temple sanctuary, as though Saroja carried within her the sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, at the touch of which golden wheat would sprout on barren fields. "When a girl would become woman," he tells Catherine, "there's a whole universe that rebels in you, as though a kingdom, a sovereignty were to be lost, as though some demon were at your cavern door, and you would lose the all, in fear, in blood, and in anguish" (SR, p. 157). Thus he sings his encomium on puberty and virginity, and in doing so he feels exalted. What does it matter if Saroja is, in actuality, a vain and pompous creature? She is the medium through which Rama sees a manifestation of Shakti, and it is Rama with whom Rama is concerned.

In Little Mother, Shakti appears in her gentle, passive form, far more compassionate and pure-minded than in her Kanthapura manifestation. Little Mother is a tender portrait and even one less prone to metaphysical visions than Rama can feel the divinity of womanhood in her presence. Her capacity for love, loyalty, worship

and understanding is boundless. The third wife of an old man, she accepts her husband unquestioningly, "A woman has to marry. . . . Her womb is her life, and we cannot choose our men" (SR, p. 260). She bears a son, and within a year is widowed. With childlike trust she consigns her husband's ashes into Mother Ganga's hands, and it is only when she crosses the bridge that takes her away from the sacred river that she feels widowed and weeps for herself and her orphaned child. But not for long does she despair. Her husband has left her with certain responsibilities and she feels she can revere his memory only by shouldering them bravely. Saroja accuses her of being self-centered, as usual without offering any example or explanation. But here is Little Mother writing to Rama, "But it gives me such pain in the heart, I know not why. Saroja somehow thinks, and it is a natural thing to think for a girl of her age, a girl and a step-daughter, that I am her enemy" (SR, p. 236). She worships Rama with a devotion that one could misinterpret as sexual love if one is alien to a culture where the head of the house is idolized.

Savithri, like Saroja, is idealized out of all proportion. Here again appearance, conduct and speech do not warrant worship. However, Savithri does not jar upon our moral sense, only our aesthetic sense is somewhat jolted. Like Rama at their first meeting we are

repulsed by this too-modernized Indian who smokes cigarette after cigarette, fixes dates and dances, and obstinately flouts her parents. She refuses to accept Pratap, who has been chosen by her parents as her prospective husband, for no reason except that she wants to be wilful. Rama's repugnance changes to ardent love but ours does not. We cannot go along with this homely, chubby, short-sighted, talkative Cambridge undergraduate; we cannot imagine what is so scintillating in her looks or speech that a group of brilliant fellow-students would follow her and consider it a privilege to bring back her mislaid purse or spectacles from pubs where she has had beer with Communist companions. "Here is a very clever person, but she never says anything that really matters," Rama thinks at their first meeting; one wonders what alchemy there is in Rama's eyes and ears that so transforms a clod of earth into a heavenly being. Rama the faithful narrator records numerous facts that make Savithri a most unappealing female, but Rama the idealist-lover is stone blind to the facts and sees only Woman--beautiful, virtuous, perfect.

Savithri is a plain-looking young woman, plump and myopic. She is clumsy and forever about to drop or trip over something. She has the "sweep and nervousness of the modern girl," the narrator records. The lover says, "Even when she went to speak on the telephone one felt she

had a rich, natural grace, and one longer for her to be back" (SR, p. 33). She spoke rapidly, and, as far as we can see, inanely if not crudely. There is no music in her speech as there is in Rama's and Madeleine's.

> "I enjoy being in Europe. I love the activity, the singleness of purpose, the sense of freedom," she said and laughed. "But I am such an inveterate lazer that when I sleep I almost need a red-hot needle to awaken me. To me sleep is the most important of biological phenomena."
>
> "I am sorry it is so late," I said.
>
> "Nonsense, I meant that when I sleep I sleep. So, don't expect me before nine in the morning. I shall sleep like a buffalo." (SR, p. 134).

The same raucousness is present even in the most intimate scenes. Yet Rama says, "She spoke rapidly, and in between her amusing chatter was a space of sorrow, large as her eyes; you could almost breathe and know that this came from no single act or thought, but from some previous karma, the sorrow of another age" (SR, p. 124).

She had the humility of a saint, he says, but we never see it. We see only her callous brushing away of extra male friends to each of whom she had promised a date for the same evening, and her proud rejection of Pratap. "Savithri always talked of Pratap as one talks of one's secretary. . . . If she talked of him with a touch of condescension it was not because of social differences, it was just because she liked to be kind to something . . . such as a lame horse in the stable or it might be an old bull, fed in the palace yard till it dies" (SR, p. 199). It was of this person that Rama

thinks, "Savithri had such a sense of reverence for things--were she picking up a spoon, or holding your pen in hand . . . " (SR, p. 176).

Once Lakshmi, Savithri's friend, tells him to see Savithri objectively, "I cannot understand how Savithri can go about with so many men at the same time. You'll hate me for saying it, but she's such a flirt" (SR, p. 189). Rama silences her with the words, She is a saint.

Savithri has numerous male admirers and seems as flirtatious an undergraduate as ever walked the halls of Girton College. But it was this woman, Rama claims, who made him see into the center of Silence and perceive the orb of centripetal sound which explains why Shakti is the daughter of Himalay. They go through a symbolic marriage, and he says, "We were not married that morning, we discovered, we had ever been married" (SR, p. 215). To him Savithri is the manifestation of Shakti in her entirety, and she makes him Siva. "There is only one woman, not for one life, but for all lives." It is a profound Hindu belief that Shakti, parted from Siva, has been incarnated on earth many times but her spirit is eternally with Siva and her body, even when earthly, has never been another's. Raja Rao extends this to say that Shakti appears in mortal women from time to time, but since she is Siva's from all Eternity to all Eternity

the mortal man with whom she unites is also for the time being an incarnation of Siva. Or in other words, when the divine in a woman rises, the divine in her man also rises, and thus a man is made Siva by the Shakti in his woman. This idea is more explicitly brought out in The Cat and Shakespeare.

The quality that characterizes Rama's relationships with women is the utter lack of interaction at an external, objective level. Rama's Midas-touch imagination makes them the personification of Womanhood for him. There is so little interaction that they never come to know the extent of Rama's worship, and he never comes to know how deserving or undeserving they are of it. It is only with Madeleine that Rama comes near interaction. Madeleine too is highly idealized, but the idealization springs from a more substantial basis. Rama sees many aspects of Shakti in her, and she is at different times child, mother, bride and mistress; always she evokes a spiritual response from him. He seems to have the insatiable lust of a Casanova and the spiritual yearning of a Donne. Even in the tremulous stretching out of physical climax he is a devotee crying out to God, "Except you enthrall me, never shall be free/ Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me." His physical frenzy is imbued with spiritual overtones:

> The night has ended, the dawn has not yet broken.
> It's the time for ablutions, for the murmur of
> prayers and the road to the temple by the river.
> The God knows you and you know the God. . . . For a

> moment you had gone beyond the body, and Oh, how sad it is to come back--to bear this heavy limb. . . . I give it to you Madeleine, but you are where you are, and I am but nowhere. . . . Oh, give it to me, give it, give it! Oh, give that! Madeleine do not cry. Oh Madeleine, do not suffer . . . let me squeeze the juice out of you, let me lick you like a dog . . . let me smell you, smell the you of me and the I in you. . . . Why do you cry so Madeleine, did I hurt you, did I awaken you, did you rise and did I fail? (SR, p. 161).

Love in all its brutal inadequacy is here:

> A woman hates a male when he withdraws. She cannot accept his defeat--his defeat is the defeat of her womanhood . . . and she lifts him up and takes him into herself, like a mother a child. Then you want to take a cactus branch and beat her and scratch her all over. You want to bite her lips and pull the breast away from her chest, and taste the good blood of her wounds. (SR, p. 165).

And there is protectiveness:

> I pressed Madeleine, on those nights, with the warmth and tenderness of a mother for her child--I would have suckled her if I could . . . (SR, p. 243).

and rededication:

> Beloved, my beloved, don't you see, I am near you? That which is within you is mine; I am mine and you, Madeleine, are--a chunk of truth, a reality . . . (SR, p. 244).

and a sense of lostness:

> She was not mine, maternity had given her an otherness. . . . I wondered what I had done. (SR, p. 237).

Aching or brutal, tender or beseeching, there is always an overtone of worship. Madeleine once writes to him, "I spoke especially of the respect you show to me--for you a woman is still the other, the strange, the miracle.

You could never show the familiarity European men show towards their wives. You worship women even if you torture them" (SR, p. 100).

Through Madeleine Rama comes near experiencing man's highest state--that of Self-Realization. Spiritualizing of physical union is a step towards realizing that as a man he is separate from woman, but as a human being he is one with woman. Fulfillment of spiritualized love leads to the next step, "the wind blows, wave after wave of it, and mountains move. . . . I transpire as the truth, like the wave that sees itself to be the sea, like the earth that was spread out and was called Madeleine . . . " (SR, p. 161). Here he realizes that as a man he is separate from the animal, but as a being, the man, the woman, the animal, the stone are all one.

In Madeleine Rama sees Woman in various forms. Why then is their marriage a failure? The answer is not far to find though Rama never finds it. Marriage involves interaction and Rama's essential weakness is that he cannot survive interaction. Rama lives within his illusory realm, a snake-charmer piping tunes to serpents that dance as and when he wills them to. Madeleine is the rope, the only reality that intrudes upon his insular world. He builds a romantic image of her also, but the very state of cohabitation makes continuous idealization impossible. This trait in Rama's characters precludes

ideal marriage, and since he would not have been satisfied with anything less, no marriage could have brought him happiness.

Marriage with Madeleine proves doubly exalting and doubly disastrous because she is a forceful personality in herself. Given Rama's romantic sensibility and Madeleine's metaphysical propensity they could not but be attracted to each other; equally inevitable is the alienation. Madeleine's preoccupation with theological questions catalyzes the reaction and gives their marriage a strange and psychic ending. What divides them is not the difference in cultural background as casual readers and reviewers hastily conclude but their own individual attitudes. The minutiae of their relationship is fraught with numerous ironies. The pervading irony is that of their antipodal views on basic values.

They have diametrically opposite views of womanhood. Madeleine is a Catholic[10] and the idea of Original Sin is so deeply imbued in her that human love can never be pure for her. She is attracted to Rama because of her misconceptions about Brahmanism and India. India is a cause to be loved and Rama is a symbol of the cause, a means of identifying herself with the cause. She was a virgin when she met Rama and she was ready to surrender her virginity to him only because he was a Brahmin and she knew that Brahmins were disciplined to revere the

sense of touch. True, Rama has the brahmanical reverence for the body, but he also has the idea that physical union is divine, that love, be it physical or spiritual, within or outside marriage, can never be impure. Madeleine does not understand this. Her Catholic morality sees only bestial sensuality in his ardor; after being transported to spiritual ecstasy when Rama asks with enraptured solicitousness, "Madeleine, did I hurt you, did I seek you too far, and too long?" she rejects him peremptorily, "Leave me alone. I do not belong to the man kingdom." Madeleine is essentially a nun. We are not surprised when she drifts towards Buddhism and becomes a Buddhist novice.

It is ironical that just when Rama, moved to admire Catholicism, says, "To wed a woman, you must wed her God," Madeleine starts moving from Catholicism to Buddhism, which she thinks, ironically enough, makes her more Brahmin! Rama hopes that marriage with an intellectual equal would give him a companion. Madeleine marries a Hindu because "I like to be tortured and to be made your slave." Ironic too that a sensuous, life-loving devotee of Shakti should be wed to a marble Diana, and wed academically to the study of the Cathars who abhorred sex and committed individual and racial suicide.

Madeleine is essentially, as mentioned before, a nun. There is no place in Hinduism for a nun. In

rejecting man, a woman rejects Womanhood and Creation, and thus condemns herself. Once, an epic lore tells us, there was a contest of prowess between Shakti and Siva. They were equally matched, and for every exhibition of power, beauty and creativity by one the other had a fitting reply. Suddenly Shakti said, "I am Supreme. Shakti can live without Siva but Siva cannot without Shakti." And she turned away from Siva and even as she turned she fell dead. In accepting Buddhism Madeleine turns away from marriage and in doing so turns towards death.

Though she adopts a negative attitude towards her own life, her contributions to Rama's life are positive and potentially great. She is the medium through which Rama invokes and is visited by Shakti. Through interaction with her Rama could have reached out for Self-Realization. In his serpent world Madeleine for a time was a rope, the only rope, but Rama ignored it. In Madeleine's serpent world there was no rope at all at any time.

"Without the Mother the world is not," says Ramakrishna Pai, Rama's alter ego in The Cat and Shakespeare. Pai has gone a step farther than Rama. He knows. What the sophisticated intellect of the scholar-sensualist consciously aspired for and failed to grasp, the poor Revenue Board clerk in Trivandrum knows as a matter of course.

The primary theme--"Allow the mother cat, sir, to carry you"--and the story woven around it with a cat giving evidence in court are so circumambulatory that we wonder whether it is profound or merely meaningless. However, the continuing theme of womanhood is unmistakable.

Pai's wife, Saroja, like Madeleine, has rejected the man-kingdom. But unlike Madeleine who lives in the spirit-kingdom, Saroja lives in the thing-kingdom. She is concerned about possessions, attached to her coconut groves because they brought money, and has scant respect for her husband because he did not. When Pai was transferred to Trivandrum from Pattanur, she remained behind so their daughter, Usha, could finish that school-year at Alwaye of which Pattanur is a suburb. And when Pai fell ill at Trivandrum, she and Usha came one morning and, though Usha remained with her father, Saroja left that same evening. "She had boat repairs to inspect--boats had to carry away coconut shells."[11]

His transfer to Trivandrum brought Pai freedom. He could live as he pleased, and he did not have to listen to Saroja's vaunts about her grandfather who escaped the dominance of the Dutch who took away their neighbors to fight or turn Christian. . . . Pai has only total indifference for Saroja, and the few times he feels anything at all, it is either vague animal violence ("In heat I strike. I struck my wife only twice and have left marks

on her face,") or vague contempt ("My lineage smells of chilis and cardamom and tamarind as my wife's does of coconuts. But then my wife's people had two or three boats that plied the canals, and banditry and pilfering can make a lot of difference with prices.")

Soon after coming to Trivandrum, a woman comes to Pai's office in connection with some legal problem that required files maintained by Pai's section of the Revenue Board. And she, Shantha, "knew me to be her man the moment I went and stood against the filing ladder. For a woman love is not development. Love is recognition." And soon she became his mistress. "If she became my mistress it was because she felt wife. She remained a wife. My feet were there for her to worship. My weaknesses were there for her to learn; my manhood, at least such as I possess, for her to bear children" (CS, p. 22).

Shantha is Shakti-as-Mother, and has a more positive and unambiguous role than the mythical mother cat. Shantha is mother first and mother last. She is pregnant for the most part of the novel. The cat, actual and symbolic, is always carrying her kittens. And the refrain of the story is, Blessed is he who finds a mother cat to carry him. In Shantha's presence Pai feels safe as a kitten carried by the cat, "The kitten when its neck is held by its mother, does it know anything but the joy of being held by its mother?" (CS, p. 9)

He does not worship Shantha, Pai claims, it is the woman who worships the man; only by worshiping her man does she become a wife; and only when she is wife can she be mother; and when she is mother man is protected. "You could not be without a mother. You are always a child. The wife is she who makes you the child" (CS, p. 33). For love, protection and strength man looks to his mother-wife-devotee. And a devotee who has all the attributes of Shakti, what is she but a goddess? Woman worships her man. Shakti always worships Siva. Here, Pai, like Rama, becomes Siva and worthy of worship because the woman makes him so. "Shantha is not just a woman, she is woman."

About Shantha's appearance we know nothing except that she had a "skin that shone like black ivory," a long nose, and black hair that she wore in a flat chignon. This is one of Raja Rao's devices to stress the paramountcy of the spirit. In none of his novels do we get enough verbal description to sketch a portrait of any of his characters except Savithri, and her he makes plain--short, plump, myopic. His male characters are no Adonises either. Rama is tubercular. Georges is a cripple. Lezo is a bulging mass of red flesh. Pai, though "Brahmin-fair" is stricken with ugly buboes. Throughout it is the soul that speaks and is spoken about, even at the acme of physical intercourse, even in the convulsions of bodily weakness.

Shantha's spirit recognizes its mate in the clerk who rises from his seat to sort out her files. Shantha's soul (it is his child in her, she says) leads her to him when he is ill. And Shantha's intuition knows that Pai wants to buy a house, and so she buys it for him. She, like other characters in the book, speaks in Sphynxian language. When Pai asks her where they are to find a mate for their cat, Shantha answers, "She knows herself where it is to be found. She knows the self. So she is the self" (CS, p. 91). Shantha too knows. She has been beyond the wall, she says, and seen herself seeing herself seeing herself.

It is significant that she is of the Nair community. The Nairs have a matriarchal culture and so Shantha is not worried about marriage. When one is not guilt-ridden about marriage a new vista of morality opens out. One becomes a wife in the true sense of the word, Pai thinks, one gives and gives and gives. Giving is motherhood, motherhood is Womanhood. All true women are mothers from birth. Usha is a true woman even though she is only six years old. She knows that she, like the ladybird, will one day have eggs; she dreams she is growing eggs and the next day she is reluctant to go to the latrine lest she throw out the precious eggs. "Women feed the child in their womb whether the child be there or not" (CS, p. 103). When Shantha's baby is born "Usha

looks after him as if it were her own child. A child for a woman is always her own child" (CS, p. 107).

Towards the end of the novel the mystery and protectiveness of motherhood is embodied in the cat that Pai adopts. She becomes the representative of Govindan Nair's mythical mother cat who guides the destinies of men. The cat leads Pai to an attic one day and there he was a vision of the supreme stage of self-realization. Exalted, he sees life anew, and the novel ends with another symbolic vision of Earth-Mother's endless powers of procreation. "Suddenly I hear the music of marriage. I must go."

It is fitting that the novel should end on an epiphanous note. Like Kanthapura, The Cat and Shakespeare is a thunderous affirmation of life in Hindu terms where life is the merging of the self into the Self, the paradoxical victory through surrender. The surrender is not an act of blind faith, though faith is, undoubtedly, a cardinal virtue that sustains the women of Kanthapura. Rather, the surrender is the result of revelation; it is by an intellectual act of volition that Rama sets out in search of a Guru: it is by an act of instinctual knowledge that Ramakrishna Pai recognizes the beatitude of Woman. But whereas Rama strives in anguish for a revelation, Pai gets it without effort. This difference in their attitude and experience is

the result of the author's own anguished experience that culminated in serenity under Swami Atmananda's tutelage; but while the reader can sense the power of the serenity that permeates The Cat and Shakespeare, he is nevertheless perplexed by the seeming haphazardness of the course of events in the novel.

In The Serpent and the Rope, Rama is an intellectual pilgrim yearning to see into the truth of things, to understand the meaning and purpose of life. He says, "If you see deep and long at silence you perceive an orb of centripetal sound which explains why Parvati is daughter of Himalay" (SR, p. 171). In his wanderings he stumbles into depths of spiritual obfuscation and drags himself through mazes of metaphysical syllogisms into the Advaitic realization that all things in the universe are identical in terms of the Absolute and Eternal Self. Though one may not be able to go the whole way with Rama, one can understand and sympathize with him because in his questionings and sufferings he is a human being, a man aspiring to be God. But it is not easy to comprehend or go along with the pontifical sayings of Govindan Nair or the mystic cryptograms of Pai in The Cat and Shakespeare. The author and his characters sound as though they have looked into the heart of Knowledge. One wonders whether they have, perhaps, looked too long at silence and thus lost touch with the

language of men. Like the ancient seers and commentators of the Hindu scriptures, Raja Rao uses language that abounds in nuances and inner meanings. But one may wonder at times if Raja Rao is not, after all, building a facade of profundity in front of a non-existent nucleus, like the neo-classical writers who came after Panini had formalized Sanskrit grammar.

The Cat and Shakespeare is like the couplets of the Sanskrit poets where a re-reading with a change of stress yields the opposite meaning, or like those paintings which present two different scenes when viewed from two different angles. Within the novel one can find ample evidence for either of two antithetical views--that it is a stringing together of conundrums and quibbles, and that it is a meaningful story with spiritual overtones. There are passages that are admirable for their crisp precision; there are also crisp statements that are stylistically overdone. There is a mythical mother cat in whose mouth men are kittens carried safely from point to point; there is a real cat that takes over the story midway and splits the novel, making the second half a parody of the first. There is flippant handling of weighty experience; there is high philosophizing of trivia. In short, one could at first reading dismiss the work as an uneven mixture of well-written and ill-written passages with no organized framework, but a careful reading shows that it is a

metaphysical work of the highest caliber that has the bite of satire as well. Raja Rao calls it a "metaphysical comedy" and "all I would want the reader to do is to weep at every page not for what he sees but for what he sees he sees."[12]

Whether or not we can join Raja Rao in weeping in spiritual analysis and self-awareness we can and do weep at the ways of the world that are revealed by his satire. Exposure of moral corruption stands out from every page. The venom is all the more potent because of the casualness with which the characters accept the conditions. The ration office is a den of bribery. John builds a house on the proceeds obtained from blackmarketing ration cards ("Two rupees a ration card is the official black-market price."), though he claims he got the money from his wife's grandmother. Velayudhan Nair's wife "has an array of gold bangles on her hands. She inherited some money from her aunt." Govindan Nair is arrested on a charge of bribery. By sheer association we are led to wonder how Pai, a divisional clerk earning about fifty rupees a month manages to buy a house for seventeen thousand rupees. Govindan Nair and Pai take others' unethical practices so calmly that we conclude that bribery and blackmarketing are accepted in their way of life. The Ration Office is a microcosm of contemporary society. Everyone is a victim or beneficiary of this corruption.

"Doctors are expensive--even government doctors. They don't take fees, but they like gifts" (CS, p. 40). We may well weep at the cancerous organism that is Indian society.

The tragedy is that all these clerks are essentially good-hearted men, friendly, helpful, considerate. If they engineer black-market traffic they also make gifts of ration cards to the needy poor. Many people claim to have more children than they actually have and obtain extra rations. These clerks acquiesce in the fraud. Govindan Nair issues a card to a bawd's dead husband in a scene that is touching despite its obscenity. One sees that women, bawds though they be, had to live, and a single ration quota of thirty-two ounces per week is not enough for survival. It is the age-old question in ethics, "Was Jean Val-jean morally culpable?"

There are other institutions which are satirized unequivocally. Raja Rao idealizes the Nairs and downgrades the Brahmins. He ridicules some of the attitudes held by believers; for instance, he relates the story of the hunter to whom Siva manifested himself because the hunter accidentally dropped bilva leaves on an image of Siva. This is a well-known myth (beautifully presented in Manjeri Isvaran's Sivarathri) to which Raja Rao gives a caustic twist: "For it's not the way you worship that is important but what you adore" (CS, p. 7). The British

shopkeeper-mentality, the crass Indian inefficiency, the meaninglessness of marital fidelity are ridiculed precisely and concisely. His method is impassive; like an expert axeman he walks into the social forest, fells institutions with a single stroke, and passes on without comment or backward look.

Raja Rao's metaphysics is more enigmatic that his satire. What does he mean by the cat-kitten analogy? Be like a kitten, Nair says repeatedly, there is no greater bliss than to be a kitten carried by its mother, all men are kittens but few realize it. "Some, who are lucky (like your hunter), will one day know it" (CS, p. 8). Here he says that all men are carried by the mother-cat irrespective of their like or dislike, knowledge or ignorance. But later his words are: "Learn the ways of the kitten. Then you're saved. Allow the mother cat, sir, to carry you" (CS, p. 72). This implies volition and acceptance.

What, then, is the mother cat? It is not Fate. Govindan Nair does not advocate fatalism. He wants Pai to build a three-storied house for Shantha's unborn child and he takes the necessary steps to realize the desire. Nair is a man of action despite his declamations. It is Pai who is the defeatist and fatalist. Pai does nothing about the purchase of the house, nor even about his infectious buboes that spout pus all over his body.

Nair calls the medicine man. Nair negotiates with the landlord. Nair helps Velayudhan Nair when his son is unwell. Therefore if Nair is a kitten, the cat is certainly not Fate.

Nor is it absolute Faith. Nair does not surrender himself to any god. Nor does Pai whose claim is that he does not worship anything, not man, not god, not even money. When little Shridhar falls ill it is only Shantha who prays apprehensively. Pai thinks of Shridhar as a kitten.

> What is death to a kitten that walks on the wall? Have you ever seen a kitten fall? . . . when they are about to fall, there she is, her head in the air, and she picks you up by the scruff of your neck. (CS, p. 66).

Like Rama's, Nair's and Pai's reactions to death seem callous. When Rama hears that his wife had given birth to a son who died soon after, he laughs and takes his sisters to the movies. Pai, while watching the funeral preparations for Shridhar, says:

> The bamboos were already in the courtyard. Death had come. It spoiled the nice courtyard, with flowerbeds of roses. (CS, p. 66).

When Bhoothalinga Iyer dies of shock at having Nair's cat jump on his head Nair affectionately takes the cat home and later Pai adopts and treasures it as the living representative of the Mother Cat. This should not be interpreted as sadism on the part of Raja Rao or the characters, but as a symbolic way of saying that life

is continuous, that death is just one of the doors to the realization that one exists forever in the Universal Self, but it is an unfortunate way of saying it. It is by such artistic lapses that Raja Rao can at times very nearly forfeit the reader's sympathy for the characters.

When talking of Lakshmi the bawd, Nair tells Pai that in life one can get all one wants if one knows what one wants. "Do you really know? Mister, that is the problem" (CS, p. 51). It is not enough to know that you are a kitten; you need to be a kitten that knows what it wants. Ask, and it shall be given. This leads us to another metaphysical problem. Did John get a house because he knew he wanted one? Did the Mother Cat give Velauydhan's wife jewelry because she knew she wanted ornaments? Is the Mother Cat a "bottle imp," an Aladdin's genie from beyond the realms of ethics? Or is this an inconsistency in the writer's thought? If so, the lapse is more serious than the inconsistency of having Pai's age as thirty-three at the beginning of the action and twenty-one a little later. One can see that Raja Rao moves on, leaving aphorisms and cryptograms in his wake; we perhaps do him an injustice in assembling the pieces and accusing him of giving us more pieces than the frame needs. Raja Rao does not cut the jig-saw puzzle after drawing the picture. It is more as though he paints parts of a picture on individual pieces. He is not

concerned with the technicalities of novel-writing in this book, where he is a metaphysician using the novel-form. He asks his questions through Pai and Nair. Sometimes he arrives at the answer and sometimes he does not; sometimes he arrives at the answer but does not bother to elucidate it; sometimes he leaves the answer ambiguous.

It is my conclusion that the identity of the Mother Cat is to be understood in the light of the philosophy of karma. In its simplest definition karma is causal continuity. As you sow, so shall you reap. Virtue and vice are cumulative; they are also independent of each other as far as the reckoning is concerned. Only a suitable reward can annul the existence of a good act. Only meet punishment can annul the commission of an evil act. The cause of every fortune and misfortune is oneself though the causal connection might not be apparent. This philosophy satisfactorily explains the most obvious discrepancy in other theological systems; it explains why good men suffer misfortune. They are being punished for acts of evil committed in this or previous lives. This is not to be taken as fatalism. Fate is blind. The law of karma is scrupulously just. Every occurrence is an effect and at the same time a potential cause. That John gets a house is the effect of the punya or merit that he has accumulated in his past life, or lives; but in the process he has blackmarketed ration cards and thus caused

a future punishment. Pai gets a house because of his past punya but since he does nothing either positive or negative about it, he has only wiped out certain good acts of the past. Shantha gets a house for her past punya but she does positive good in making it a home for Pai and his daughter and so, though getting the house has cancelled out some of her merit, she has used it to replenish her store of merit and thus accumulated future rewards.

Ultimate salvation, or freedom from rebirth, can be gained only when one transcends beyond all commission, good and evil. One has to make oneself superhuman to reach that stage; most human beings content themselves with trying to amass as much punya and as little pahpa, or sin, as possible, so that they can improve their position in this and future lives.

So, as I see it, the mother cat is karma at work. We are all kittens, that is, karma controls our life; be a kitten that knows what it wants, that is, be a man who knows that his goal is Self-Realization; if you are lucky you will know that you are a kitten, that is, you will become aware of the workings of karma and will act in your own spiritual interests so that karma must necessarily free you of mortal coils and release you into the Self.

This is the metaphysical analogy. Raja Rao has used the novel form to express his metaphysics. There

is enough mastery of novel techniques and of philosophy to make the combination interesting but not enough to make it successful. The novel lacks cohesion. I am not referring to the frequent and irrelevant digressions into abstruse analyses, or the experimentation in style and language which I view as virtues rather than as shortcomings; I am referring to the splitting of the story midway by the introduction of a real cat. Till the cat comes in, the story is a fine admixture of irony, metaphysics and a peculiar literary style. It moves slowly but the pace is consonant with the life and characters portrayed. Pai and Nair emerge as twin personalities; Pai is so greatly influenced by Nair that he speaks and thinks like him without being aware of it. At other times he endows Nair with his own traits. For instance he says that Nair's style of speaking is a mixture of The Vicar of Wakefield and Shakespeare and quotes as an example: "Hey there, be you there at home?" Actually it is Pai and not Nair who uses be in this manner. Pai attributes an extravagance of verbal embellishments to Nair: "He never says come and go. He will always say: 'Gentleman, may I invite myself there? Will I be permitted into your presence?' (CS, p. 8) This is not an apt example because Nair is not prone to extravagance of words but extravagance of thoughts, as Pai later puts it:

> If I said, for example, the bilva tree, his mind would not think of Shiva and the hunter, as it would occur to you and to me, but he would think of the manure the tree must have had . . . and of the man who planted it and was it morning or evening when it was planted. (CS, p. 94).

Pai shares this trait of meandering through associations and counter-associations of thoughts. Both Pai and Nair are uninhibited in their language and consecrate earthiness as innate purity. Their ruminations give the novel its peculiarly Indian literary style. There are marked Indianisms in the language. The use of this Indo-English dialect (called "Babu English" in the lingo of Indian critics) is obviously intentional; Raja Rao excels in speaking the language of his narrator. The leisurely, gossipy pace of Kanthapura is a transmutation of a village woman's vernacular style; in The Serpent and the Rope the scholarship and intellectuality of the narrator is reflected in his language; in The Cat and Shakespeare the narrator is a "Babu," a clerk, and Raja Rao captures many of the phrases and usages current in the world of clerks. In all three novels, and especially in The Cat and Shakespeare there is a very definite flavor of the Sanskrit masters' seeming simplicity of style:

> Water is our best protection against sin. To smell is sin. To do is no sin. To gulp is sin. To purge is bounty. . . . Disease is unnatural. Death is natural. (CS, p. 19).

After reading Raja Rao one realizes why Whitman's earthy sublimity is so well understood in India. Pai muses:

> The cattle see me, and urinate. The smell of dung and urine of kine is sweet to me. Purity is so near, so concrete. Let us build the house. Lord, let me build the house. (CS, p. 11).

Continued in this circumlocutory manner around a static nucleus, the novel would have lacked the traditional frame but it would have had an essential unity. But Raja Rao introduces a real cat as though to exemplify Nair's philosophy and it is made to reveal evidence which acquits Nair from the charge of bribery. The cat is ludicrous. John brings it in a rat trap as a gift for Nair. It becomes the centre of attraction for all the thirteen clerks in the Ration Office. It runs all over the place and Nair philosophizes over it. Later Nair enters Iyer's office with the cat and asks the boss to tell him a story.

> "What story?"
> "Any story."
> "I know no story."
> "I'll tell you a story," said Govindan Nair, and lifted the cat and placed her on his shoulder.
> "Once upon a time," he began, and before he could go on, the cat jumped on to Bhoothalinga Iyer's head. Bhoothalinga Iyer opened his eyes wide and said, "Shiva, Shiva," and he was dead. He actually sat in his chair as if he could not be moved." (CS, p. 87).

Poor Iyer for no reason I can find, metaphysical or comic, is made a butt even in death. At the trial Nair slanders the asthmatic old man who died of a heart attack caused by his cat. Nair invents a story about a big-bosomed prostitute who was the object of Iyer's extra-marital propensities. He swears that Iyer gave him a hundred and nine rupees to be given to the woman.

He invents the story but insists that it is true because he was a man who "if he saw black and found it brown, could prove it was brown because he saw only brown" (CS, p. 95). It turns out that the documents were in order, after all, and that Nair was innocent all along. The cat which is called in by Nair as witness to the transaction between Nair and Iyer stands witness to nothing. It merely walks between feet and jumps on the clerk's table. A mystical aura is built around it just as a slanderous aura was built around Iyer:

> It went right over to the Government Advocate . . . as if it were going towards itself. . . . One had no doubt the cat was there. And it knew everything. (CS, p. 103).

It is not even remotely responsible for the judge finding Iyer's signature on the document.

The trial scene is comic, no doubt, but it is not tied in harmoniously to the metaphysical theme, and the cat seems to parody the Mother Cat idea. Yet the parody is not intentional, for the cat is meant to be a symbol of the Mother Cat. Once the trial is over it takes its place as a symbol. Like a deity it is fed only on the milk of a white cow, and its finickiness and independence are respected. In its presence Pai's world opens out, as it were, and he is not self-centred any more; he even visits his neighbours who live on either side of the long wall on which the cat promenades. The cat

becomes a constant reminder of the workings of karma and in his relations with the world Pai is humane and friendly.

One day the cat leads him to an attic (symbolic of Pai's spiritual ascent) and Pai has a vision of the Self. He explains the experience in these words:

> . . . eyes seeing eyes seeing, I saw ears curved to make sound visible. . . . I could walk into the fire and be cool, I could sing and be silent, I could hold myself and yet not be there. . . . I found death was at my door. I woke up and found that death had passed me by. . . . Then where was I? Death said it had died. I had killed death. When you see death as death, you kill it. When you say, I am so and so, and you say, I am such and such, you have killed yourself. I remain over, having killed myself. (CS, p. 113).

Nair once says:

> You only see what you want to see. But you must see what you see. Freedom is only that you see that you see what you see. (CS, p. 107).

To translate this into the language of common men: Freedom is gained when you reach that stage where you see things as they really are and not as they appear to be to eyes prompted by preconceptions or desires. Complete detachment is essential for complete Self-Realization.

The cat leads Pai beyond the world of appearance to the world of the Real; it shows him for a moment the point where karma ceases to operate, where all forces, good and evil, having been wiped away, the grand equation of reward and punishment stands at zero. This is the

realm of the Self, the orb of centripetal sound which tells you why Parvati is daughter of Himalay.

To sum up Raja Rao's stature, one might say he has given us a Blakean trilogy with Kanthapura as the day of Innocence where man is sinless and protected, The Serpent and the Rope as the night of Experience where man in self-division and anguish nevertheless reaches out towards unity, and The Cat and Shakespeare as the eternity of Higher Innocence where man is sinless and protected because he has become as a little kitten held by the Mother Cat and thereby won for himself the kingdom of heaven.

It is fitting that this dissertation should end with a study of Raja Rao for he is the foremost of those whose work has placed Indo-English literature on the map of world literatures. He has shown that the English language can be used successfully to convey the idioms and speech flow of the vernacular. He has successfully experimented with the novel form and shown that this western genre can be adapted to the episodic and metaphysical narrative tradition of classical Indian literatures. Most important, Raja Rao has proved that the novel form though intimately related to time and place at the narrative level is also a medium for the expression of experience that transcends the limitations of

geography and history. These are his most significant contributions to a literature that started diffidently and apologetically as an adulatory imitation of English literature but is now a literature that rings with confidence and individuality.

Political circumstances, which unfortunately have played a prominent role in the making and breaking of Indo-English literature, have decreed that this slow-blooming flower should have its petals nipped just as they had started to unfurl. Whatever the future holds, it may confidently be asserted that such writers as Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Kamala Markandaya, whose works have been studied in this dissertation, have already established a respected place for the Indo-English novel in India and abroad.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Prawer Jhabvala, as quoted in M. E. Derrett, The Modern Indian Novel in English (Brussels, 1966), p. 94.

[2]Raja Rao said this in a private conversation at the Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Languages Studies in Jamaica, January, 1971.

[3]David McCutchion, Indian Writing in English (Calcutta, 1969), p. 72.

[4]Raja Rao, Kanthapura (New York, 1963), Foreword; hereafter cited as K. The novel was first published in 1938.

[5]Derrett, Modern Indian Novel, p. 94.

[6]Raja Rao, The Serpent and the Rope (New York, 1960), hereafter cited as SR.

[7]The review in Time (February 22, 1963) makes it clear that the reviewer's scant sympathy is liberally punctuated with contempt. Of The Serpent and the Rope the reviewer says, "The female reader will be pleased. The western male, however, may feel as mixed up as the lady who called Rama a 'lecherous eunuch.' . . . While conceding that it (the epigraph) probably sounds better in Sanskrit the bemused westerner can only reply, 'Sentences are nothing but words. So are novels.'"

Lawrence Durrell, on the other hand, praises the same novel, saying, "You not only do India great honor, but you have honored English literature by writing in our language." (Back cover of The Cat and Shakespeare)

Gerald Sykes reviewing it in New York Times Book Review (April 14, 1963) sees in Rama "a Brahmin who is equally attracted to East and West, commutes frequently between the two, and dramatizes in his own person their irreconciliable conflict. . . . He is a man of our own

time who longs to be a hero." But he cannot comprehend the psychological workings of Rama's mind. When Rama "receives word that his wife has had a miscarriage--which means that no child will now bind him to her--both he and his creator seem unaware of the cold cruelty which makes him rejoice at the news . . . "

One of the best critiques of this novel is to be found in K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's significant contribution to Indo-English literature, Indian Writing in English (Asia Publishing House, New York, 1962), pp. 312-320.

Two other critiques of note are M. K. Naik's "The Serpent and the Rope: The Indo-Anglian Novel as Epic Legend," in Critical Essays, op. cit., C. D. Narasimhaiah's review in The Literary Criterion (Winter, 1962).

[8]Some of the statements he delivers with oracular emphasis are:

> To deny woman is to deny life and self-realization.
>
> Buddhism died in India because it became ascetic.
>
> Those who hate woman commit suicide, racial suicide as the Cathars did.
>
> The ascetic world of Queen Victoria disintegrated into many man kingdoms, the last of which was the one created by Gandhi who treated women as sisters and not mates.
>
> Man kingdoms may reach high peaks but the peaks are barren.
>
> When the Mother of God replaced the Son of Man, Catholicism became a universal religion.
>
> Nazism failed because Hitler was the representative of the male principle; Communism succeeded because Stalin was a representative of the female principle.

[9]See footnote 7.

[10]To those who emphasize that the conflict lies in the East-West polarities I would say that a similar conflict would have taken place had Madeleine been a Roman Catholic of Indian origin. Her ignorance of India enhances the irony and tragedy of the situation but is not responsible for its occurrence. The inherent differences in the outlook adopted by Roman Catholics on one hand and Hindus on the other is far more significant.

[11]Raja Rao, The Cat and Shakespeare (New York, 1965), p. 32, hereafter cited as CS.

[12]Ibid., Author's note.

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