AFFLUENCE, INTERCONNECTIONS, LITERARY MEDIOCRITY : A STUDY OF THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITER IN ENGLISH

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Affluence, Interconnections, Literary Mediocrity : A Study of the Contemporary Indian Writer in English" submitted by Prabha Mahajan in partial fulfilment of eight credits out of total requirement of twenty four credits for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of the University, is her original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

(MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE)
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C O N T E N T S

PREFACE

Being an avid student of Indian Writing in English (IWE) for almost two decades, its gradual advent in the university syllabi was at first for me a matter of great elation. However, the recent spurt in this field has also brought to the surface an aspect which is highly unsettling. Almost without exception, the new breed of writers are persons who hail from an elitist background and very often manage to attain media eminence by forces other than their literary achievements suggest. Monographs or critical articles on their works usually list the merits and concentrate on textual analysis. A closer appraisal of the situation led me to the conclusion that in the case of IWE extra-textual factors (generally ignored or bypassed, deliberately or otherwise, by the IWE teacher) invariably creep in. Since these elements overwhelmingly determine the writers' inclusion/exclusion both from the IWE canon and the campus curriculi, they then become the focus of my study. I would hesitate to label my dissertation as literary criticism, nor would I call it a work of sociology. It cannot be called literary criticism because it is concerned with the study of socio-cultural forces that go to make an author in an Indian environment. It cannot be called sociology because its main concern is evaluation of a recent body of works in this branch of literature. Midway between the two, my study may be described as an example of socio-literary criticism.

Lives of western writers are open books to us. In the case of IWE, whereas particulars of writers hailing from humbler background are known, the detailed biographies of the affluent writers intriguingly lie concealed. To my mind, it is essential to excavate the past of a writer before he is taken up as a subject of study.

The writer's personal life is as much for public display as his name and work is. Public fame has its own obligations in the case of any celebrity. My approach, therefore, may seem unconventional, and at places, a bit uninhibited. Not only how an author writes but how he lives, is important in the Indian context. If one can decipher many meanings in a text, one can also decipher many meanings in the life of the writer of the text.

The scope of my study generally excludes writers who are not Indian citizens or have chosen to stay abroad. But there is a category of writers who often make global peregrinations and are widely discussed over here both in the groves of academe and in the media. As leaving them out would have made the dissertation less substantial, their inclusion was but ineluctable.

Chapter I

RIGHT START, WRONG TURN : FROM DEROZIO TO AUROBINDO

It will be chronologically correct and in the fitness of things, although so much has already been written about it, to revert to the beginnings of Indian Writing in English (IWE) in early nineteenth century. No literature develops in a vacuum. Themes, forms, assumptions, attitudes and even rhetorical styles are determined and given directions by the socio-cultural forces that shape the environment in which the writer lives and to which he or she responds. In British India of the first two decades of the 19th century the reading of literature becomes an expression of a society in transition with an opaque, textured history. More than two decades prior to Macaulay's Minute of 1835, Indians had already started writing in English. As widely known, the cause of English education found its ablest champion in Raja Rammohun Roy. In the discovery of India's past some of the officials of the East India Company played a significant role.

Charles Wilkins' translation of the Bhagvad Gita, Wilson Jones' admiration for Indian literature specially his rendering of Kalidas' Sakuntalam, and a renewed acquaintance with the Hindu epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - divided the British administration and scholarship in two different camps. One of these camps was for continuance of education in Sanskrit and Arabic as before. The other was for imparting English education mixed with lessons from the Bible. As for the Hindus themselves there was no

doubt in the minds of most of them as to which way the wind was blowing. The Bengalis had taken to persian with the Muslim conquest. It was obvious now with the arrival of the British that a switch to English was called for. A Calcutta brahmin, Baidyanath Mukhopadhyaya told the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Edward Hyde-East, that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner. H.H.Wilson, a sympathetic orientalist, however, observed, "The project of importing English literature along with English cotton into India and bringing into universal use must at once be felt by every reasonable mind as chimerical and ridiculous." (as quoted in Chopra, 1974 : 249). His advice went unheeded and English literature was imported.

IWE's founding father, a true plebeian, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) was the son of an Indo-Portuguese father and an English mother. He was employed as a clerk in Calcutta, after completing his schooling. Sometime later he joined an indigo plantation at Bhagalpur which he left subsequently. He went through a passing stint of journalism as well. Not finding any of these vocations substantial enough to support him he applied for a teaching job. Hindu College, which was founded in 1817 at Calcutta and was to become the nursery of Indian writing in English, accepted him as a lecturer. A fiery scholar by temperament, intolerant of orthodoxy and religious bigotry, he took upon himself the task of imparting his ideas and his westernised learning to the Hindu Bengali students under him. Whereas he only denounced certain Hindu religious practices, particularly the Sati system, several of his

disciples renounced Hinduism altogether. One such example is that of Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-1885), a poet and a prominent Christian convert of the day who outdid the missionaries in their missionary zeal to convert Hindus to Christians. In his very short span of 22 years Derozio published two poetical works: Poems(1827) and The Fakir of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems (1828). Although derivative in style and form Derozio manifested pioneering qualities in his verse that established his Indian identity. The Fakeer of Jungheera is a narrative tale woven wound a high caste Hindu widow, Nuleeni, and a robber chief. It is a tragedy that castigates the custom of widow-burning. Derozio is the first of the poets to use Hindu myth and legend and native diction for versification. At the same time his work is imbued with deep love for his land, its history and its people. He was metrically accomplished and knew all the rules of prosody. Praising The Fakeer of Jungheera M.K.Naik says, "In this fast-moving tale, Derozio skilfully employs different metres to suit the changing tone and temper of the narrative. He uses the iambic four-foot couplet for straight-forward narration, but adopts a slower line for the descriptive passages and the anapaestic metre for the spirited account of the battle, while the choruses of the chanting priests and the women round Nuleeni's funeral pyre are in trochaic and dactylic measures" (Naik, 1982 : 23).

A point to note about his character. He was primarily interested in enthusing his disciples for two things - for liberal European outlook in learning and for socio-religious reforms in the Hindu society. There is no evidence that he expressed a desire to

go to England either to settle down there or to return to India as a brown sahib. He carried no supercilious airs about him. All these points become relevant when we consider a host of Indian writers in English and English teachers who have followed him.

Four years after the death of Henry Derozio, Lord William Bentinck in a Resolution (of 7 Mar 1835) put into effect the recommendations made by Macaulay in his Minute dated 2 Feb 1835. The consequences of this were far reaching. Henceforth Indians would be educated not in Sanskrit and Arabic but in English. However, both the Sanskrit College and the Mudrassa at Calcutta would continue imparting instruction as before but the students in those institutions would not be entitled to any monthly allowances. The printing of oriental literature through government finances would cease. These funds would be diverted towards the promotion of English education. Macaulay also felt that it was impossible for the British government with their limited means to attempt to educate the whole population of India in English:

> "We must", he said, "At present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicle for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population." (Selections from Educational Records, Macaulay's Minute : 116. Underlining mine).

A dozen years before Macaulay drafted this Minute, Rammohun Roy already laid the foundation for this argument. In his letter dated 11 Dec 1823 written at Calcutta to William Pitt he observed that it would be wrong for the government to go ahead in establishing a new Sanskrit School in Calcutta for the purpose of improving education of the natives. He makes a fervent plea that the government must "promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus" (Selections, 101. Underlining mine).

What followed was a class not of physicists, chemists and mathematicians as both Macaulay and Rammohun Roy had intended, but a sect of grotesque apes who took to European classical learning, British history and writing in English language. English missionaries and educationists such as Charles Grant and Alexander Duff further hastened their growth. With these as wet nurses and with the Hindu College as their cradle, the upper class Bengali babes now frolicked upon the carpet of our social history. Having no inclination to learn the sciences and, in turn, to diffuse and disseminate them into the regional languages, they fell headlong for the specious western mores and manners. Instead of imbibing Faraday and Newton they crammed the Bible and Milton. Little wonder that this class could not produce a Srinivasa Ramanujan, a C.V. Raman or a Jayant Narlikar. Several of them embraced Christianity

or sailed to the west turning their backs on their own people.

That the Bengali Hindus were in the forefront of English education is borne out by H.T.Prinsep's reply to Macaulay's Note:

> "It is the Hindoos of Calcutta, the Sirkars and their connexions and the descendants and relations of the Sirkars of former days, those who have risen through their connexion with the English and with public offices, men who hold or who seek employments in which a knowledge of English is a necessary qualification." (Selections, Prinsep's Note 15 Feb 1835 : 125).

As already stated, the institution that was at the apex of English education was the Hindu College to which the 'bhadralok' thronged (Later the same College became the Presidency College, Calcutta). In 1836 Macaulay himself had examined the students of this college and had this to say: "Indeed it is unusual to find even in the literary circles of the continent any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos." (Selections, Macaulay's Minute : 115). It will not be far-fetched to compare the products of Hindu College of that time with those of St. Stephen's College, Delhi, today. If Delhi is the capital of India now, Calcutta was the capital of India then. And just as the scions of the glitterati flock to St. Stephen's here, they then flocked to Hindu College there. And just as this segment of society is enamoured of the liberal arts and humanities today, so it must have been for the upper caste Bengali Hindus of those days. But more of it later.

What made it easy for such people to hijack society was the provision in Macaulay's Minute itself ("We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern ...") conferring on them a special status to lead the unlettered masses. Their knowledge of English literature, their espousal of Christianity, their connections with the British and their voyages to England facilitated them to grab the plums of office as well as dominate the socio-cultural scene. Out of such circumstances that prevailed was born later the Indian Civil Service. A mere glance at the gazettes of yore will reveal the preponderant number of 'bhadralok' that graced this august service.

The nursery of Indian writers in English was the Hindu College. In its early days two distinct streams were discernible. The first belonged to the well-meaning nationalistic prose-writer and the second and more dominant one, to the westernised and alienated writer who took to poetry and fiction. In the first category were Ram Gopal Ghose(1815-1868), a pamphleteer, actively associated with various cultural and political organisations in Calcutta; Hurish Chunder Mukerji(1824-1860), edited The Hindoo Patriot and championed widow-remarriage; Rajendra Lal Mitra (1824-1891), an antiquarian and indologist; and a few others whom the nation remembers gratefully. But our concern is with the westernised shadows that haunted our literary landscape for almost a hundred years.

Kashiprasad Ghose(1809-1873), a product of Hindu College, published a volume of verse The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems

(1830), two years after Derozio's The Fakeer of Jungheera. Hailing from a wealthy family Ghose indulged in verse more as a pastime of the rich to be able to flaunt westernised airs. Singularly untalented his work is fit only for a decent burial. Matching in such mediocrity are also Rajnarain Dutt's Osmyn: An Arabian Tale (1841); and Shoshee Chunder Dutt's Miscellaneous Poems(1848). Bengalis of the younger generation under the impact of the educational reforms and christian missionary activity turned renegades denouncing Hinduism. Some of them were so smitten by inferiority complex that they chose to rename themselves. An example, Michael Madhusudan Dutt(1824-1873), who wrote a narrative in verse, The Captive Ladie(1849); and The Athenaeum in the manner of Scott and Byron. In his Visions of the Past, the fresh convert gives a 'desi' version of Adam and Eve. A poem invested with 'sublime' diction in the manner of Milton, its Biblical theme of temptation and fall of man sounds factitious and forced in the extreme.

Indian poetry in English had a tinge of the comic and the ridiculous when an anthology of poems The Family Album appeared in 1870. The book contained contributions by three brothers and their cousin. The Dutt clan were high caste Hindus who had now changed to Christianity. One of the four poets, Govin Chunder had been to England with his family and had thought of settling down there permanently. The verses of Hur Chunder had also appeared separately as Fugitive Pieces(1851) and as the title suggests he wallowed in sloppy sentiment as an escape route. Greece Chunder (no kin to Homer yet happy in sounding so) kept Wordsworth as his model and

lines like 'peaceful thought and calm delight/And soothing hopes and sadness mild'(Sonnet:Like A Great Temple). Omesh Chunder, the cousin, dreamed of the exploits of our native princes in the manner of Sir Galahad and the Grail in his poem 'The Chief of Pokurna'. It will be futile to pause longer on these apish creations.

It is unfortunate that Toru Dutt(1856-1877), the so-called forerunner of Indo-English poetry,had to be sired by one of this clan - Govin Chunder Dutt. Toru Lata, the third and youngest child, born a Hindu, was baptised along with other members of the family in 1862. At a tender age she came to be taught English and took to reading and music in her cloistered upbringing. The westernised father despatched his darling daughter to France for studying French when she was barely thirteen years old. She was shifted to England after one year. One of her earliest creations was an unfinished love story 'Bianca', set in 19th century England. The heroine has a Spanish parentage. A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields comprises 165 lyrics by about a hundred French poets, translated into English by her and her sister, Aru Dutt. Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan(1882) published posthumously deals with archetypes of Indian womanhood and Hindu myths. A recent Christian convert living in a half-anglicised environment at home, she betrays her upbringing more than once. In 'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind' she is tempted at the end to read a christian sermon on Divine love to the reader, thus missing the point of the original tale in the Vishnu purana which seeks to emphasize the need to concentrate all one's thoughts not on a worldly being, but on God, at the moment of death.

Commenting on the undeserved praise the young lass has received in the literary history, David McCutchion says, "Poets and journalists who in England would never find their way beyond the school magazine or provincial newspaper are not only made part of literary history but elevated to the rank of masters." (McCutchion, 1973 : 29).

The poetic career of Manmohan Ghose(1869-1924) is a classic example of how lack of roots stunts the growth of an artist cursed with an exile's heart in his bosom. Admitted to Loreto College, Darjeeling, initially for his primary education, Manmohan along with his mother and brothers, Aurobindo and Benoy Bhusan, were sent to England for education (the fourth brother Barindra Kumar was born there). Manmohan studied first at Manchester Grammar School and was subsequently shifted to St. Paul's, London. Later he qualified for a graduateship at Oxford where he read Metaphysics and Greek Classics. His works include Love Songs and Elegies, Perseus, The Gorgon Slayer, Nollo And Damayanti and Adam Alarmed in Paradise. The verse is typical of the mood of world weariness and yearning. It is steeped in colourful aestheticism of the 1890's. Perseus was merely a pastiche and so also Adam Alarmed. The thematically native Nollo and Damayanti fails miserably. Manmohan's career is a sad story of arrested artistic development, a case of 'xenalgia' doomed to inflict the IWE again and again, the latest casualty being Dom Moraes of whom we shall talk at length in a later chapter.

Aurobindo Ghose(1872-1950), his younger brother, was educated at Cambridge. His long poetic career spans 60 years. However, his reputation mainly rests on Savitri, an ambitious project of 23,813 lines in 12 Books and 49 Cantos. This establishment-labelled masterpiece, nevertheless, has not been accepted as such by some leading critics. P.Lal condemned Savitri as 'greasy weak-spined and purple-adjectived' and concluded,"We think that poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience" (Lal, 1969 : ii). Reviewing Iyengar's book in the Sunday Standard, Nissim Ezekiel denounced Savitri as 'a confused unconscious parody of the worst features of English rhetorical style grafted on a degenerate Eastern mysticism' (Sunday Standard, 14 Jul 1967).

To continue with the dominance of the affluent upper-class anglicised Bengalis one has three more establishment-propped names to contend with - Sarojini Naidu, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya.

To deal with the last one first. Harindranath Chattopadhyay (1898-1990) is Sarojini Naidu's younger brother. His work is marked by an imagery that is artificial and affected and he clings like a limpet in a sea to the rock of Romantics. In my opinion, he is more effective as an actor than as a writer. But the Sahitya Akademi has another view of the author - probably because of his lineage. When he died in 1990, the Akademi brought out a special issue of his novel Lotte - a mushy tale of love that is best left unread.

Sarojini Chattopadhyaya(1879-1947) was the daughter of the founder and principal of Nizam College, Hyderabad. A doctor of science from Edinburgh University, he was very much in the mould of K.D.Ghose (father of Manmohan and Aurobindo) who was also an M.D., but from Aberdeen University. The comparison is made to emphasise the upper-class Bengali directions of the late 19th century. If Ghose could send his sons to England merely to learn the Greek classics so could Aghorenath send his daughter Sarojini to King's College, London and Girton College, Cambridge. Like Toru Dutt before her, this girl also fell for the English Muse and wrote to the perennial friend and patron of young Indian poetesses, Edmund Gosse, "While I live, it will always be the supreme desire of my soul to write poetry - one poem, one line of enduring verse even. Perhaps, I shall die without realising that longing which is at once an exquisite joy and an unspeakable anguish to me." She has four books to her credit - The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time, The Broken Wing and the posthumously published The Feather of Dawn. However, she was simply not equipped for the task. One may be lulled by her melody and pretty phrases but there is very little thought in her verse. Her work is made up of such adolescent stuff as snake-charmers and champak blossoms. Through her high birth and political connections the lady was conferred the undeserving title of The Nightingale of India.

Rabindranath Tagore(1861-1941) was again a product of the Bengali aristocracy. His father Devendranath Tagore hailed from a princely land-owning class, and along with Keshab Chunder Sen, was considered a renowned son of Bengal. It was he who founded

Santiniketan in 1863. Rabindranath, therefore, was in the limelight the day he was born. But one is concerned here with Tagore as an original writer in English. His reputation here stems from the fact that the Nobel Prize awarded to him was for his own English-translated Gitanjali. Bengali critics, by and large, lose all sense of objectivity while assessing Tagore's work either in Bengali or in English language. Let me quote just two such examples: Sudhindranath Datta, "Judged by the totality of his creative output, Rabindranath should head the list ... Tagore made Shakespeare himself dwindle into insignificance" (Datta, 1970 : 233). Buddhadeva Bose who could say that 'Indo-Anglian poetry is a blind alley, lined with curio shops, leading nowhere' (Bose, 1963 : 178), has this to say about the English Gitanjali:

> "It has been rightly praised by the world: it is the quintessence of Rabindranath and a miracle of translation. The miracle is not that so much has survived, but the poems are re-born in the process, the flowers bloom anew on a foreign soil. Denuded of the sensuous metrical arrangements of the original and the more than Swinburnian rhymes they are more quiet in English, more docile, the surrender more utter. ... Gitanjali is more than a great work in English, it is the work of a great English poet." (Bose, 1948 : 6).

The inordinate claims made by such critics have been noticed by many scholars, among them C.D.Narasimhaiah: "To the Bengalis he is the very 'God of letters' and a greater God they haven't known after Kalidasa" (Narasimhaiah, 1990 : 48). Later

the same critic compares the first poem of Gitanjali with the first stanza of Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland, as both are in the nature of devotional hymns:

Tagore: Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel, thou emptiest again and again and fillest it ever with fresh life.

Hopkins: Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread
World's strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

Any reader skilled in verse can discern that 'The Tagore piece sounds passive, banal, and devoid of passion.'

More examples: 'Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes'; and

'Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light'.

Such commonplace spiritual outpourings comprise the body of English Gitanjali. There is not even the vaguest hint of any originality or freshness of diction. Equally interesting are his experiments of English translations of his Bengali plays. Not only are they far removed from the world of the present as far as their themes are concerned, the artificial language of dialogue belongs more to the realm of rhetoric and declamation. In retrospect, one can say, the award of Nobel prize to Tagore was more or less an historical accident.

By way of summing up, the malaise affecting upper-class Bengali writers in the form of victorianism and sentimentality debilitated their work and reduced it to the level of imitative mediocrity. Tagore was himself romantic and sentimental and the standards represented by him dominated public taste in Bengal for a long time. In a land perpetually beset with famine and flood, poverty and disease, social injustices and exploitation, the entire corpus of the upper-class Bengali Indian writers in English verges on the escapist and is out of place. They scrupulously avoided issues which could bring them into conflict with the British. Far from any seditionist writings like that of Premchand these upper class Bengali writers, including Tagore, went out of their way to woo the British and even to visit England recurrently as if it was their homeland. The most blatant example of this misplaced zeal is that of Manmohan Ghose: "There is nothing I dread so much as going back to India. I feel quite at home with my surroundings here ... There I should be utterly out of sympathy with everything. I know neither the people nor the language - all is strange and alien. I am fourfifths an Englishman, if not entirely one; and it is in England I should do the most good to my country and to myself." (as quoted in Lotika Ghose, 1970 : 196).
But the most intriguing part of this sorry episode in our literary history is how this long line of unworthy successors to a worthy progenitor (Henry Derozio) was given so much publicity and patronage after independence. A systematic study reveals that it were the organs of the government themselves which became the organs of their publicity. The Sahitya Akademi, headed by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee for a very long time, published monographs,

biographies and works of these Bengali authors from time to time. Just two glaring examples - Selected Poems of Manmohan Ghose, 1974; and again another title, Manmohan Ghose (Modern Indo-English Poet), 1976 - both edited by Lotika Ghose, the poet's youngest daughter. The other institution which has been spending colossal amounts on propagating Tagore as the Indo-English writer is the central Viswabharati University under the leadership of the late Sisir Kumar Ghose. And, of course, again another central Pondicherry University at Auroville, which has been churning out reprints of Aurobindo's magnum opus Savitri year after year. It is inconceivable how writers like Tagore, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu could have put pen to paper without reflecting the sense of the age and the spirit of the times. Could an Indian writer in English be so naive as to overlook the fire that raged through the length and breadth of this land which released the energies of men and women slumbering for centuries and roused their conscience against our degrading submission to imperialism? Where is this evident in English Gitanjali, Savitri or The Broken Wing?

In the next chapter I propose to trace the course of Indian Writing in English to an authentic start. The British rule did not uproot the writers in the region below the Vindhyas to the same extent as they did the upper class Bengali writers. The South Indian brahmin took to English with the same alacrity as his Bengali counterpart and attempted to modify this language to suit his native needs.

Chapter II

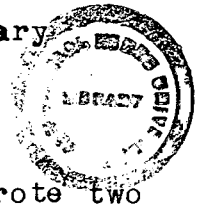
STRAIGHTENING THE KINK : THE MAKERS OF IWE

"It can be seen from the literature of other countries", says Meenakshi Mukherjee, "that a great national experience generally serves as a grand reservoir of literary material which can assume a significance beyond mere historical reality." (Mukherjee, 1971 : 35). The winds of change blowing steadily across the subcontinent after Mahatma Gandhi's return to India in 1915 left tell-tale marks on the political and social geography of the country. After undergoing a year's probation prescribed by his guru, Gokhale, Gandhi tested successfully his new weapon of non-violence in the Champaran campaign against the exploitation of the tenants of the indigo planters. In 1919, agitation against the Rowlatt bill led to the Jalianwallah Bagh slaughter. And a decade later, in 1930, Gandhi launched the civil disobedience movement. All these events had a profound effect on the psyche of the common man. In some it fired their imagination to write patriotic tales and novels. The lead came from the regional writers. Sarat Chandra's Pather Dabi (1926) which was proscribed on political grounds; Khandekar's Kanchan Mruga(1931) and Premchand's Karmabhumi(1932) dealt with the fervour of national feeling and the concern for one's motherland. In line with the regional writers the Indo-English writer also took up similar themes. And those who did so were not the genteel Bengalis who had been writing in English for almost a hundred years by now.

The works of K.S.Venkataramani, K.Nagarajan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao would not perhaps have been possible without the backdrop of the freedom struggle. It was during this period that Indo-English fiction discovered some of its compelling themes: the ordeal of the freedom struggle, the communal problem, the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor and the oppressed. Thus while the novel flourished to be followed by the short-story soon, the practitioners of Indian English verse such as Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya continued to compose in the romantic strain. Paradoxically, the poetry in the regional languages such as the lyrics of Kusumagaraja in Marathi or that of Iqbal in Urdu turned fiery, and full of nationalistic pride and zeal.

K.S.Venkataramani(1891-1951) is generally remembered by his two novels Murugan the Tiller(1927) and Kandan the Patriot(1932). The first is told against the background of the village of Alavandi in Madras with river Kaveri almost a living presence. The novel contrasts the lives of two Tamilian friends Kethari and Ramachandran. Kethari is a shallow and worldly-wise person who comes to ruin by his own venality, whereas Ramachandran is shown to be a public-spirited man who attains prosperity after an indifferent start. The work tries to show an interplay of character and circumstance besides pitching the urban against the rural settings. His second novel is set against the background of the civil disobedience movement. The story centres round Kandan the protagonist. It begins at the toddy shop in Akkur - a scenic spot on the branch-line from Mayavaram to Tranquebar(tarangambadi). Kandan is an Oxford educated

Indian youth who resigns from the Indian Civil Service to plunge into the freedom struggle and finally succumbs to a police bullet. The public meeting takes place in Tarangambadi where the police has imposed a ban on assemblage. Rangan is a speaker invited at the meeting. Chokkalinga Mudalier, a business magnate of the locality has given up his life of ease and thrown himself into the freedom struggle. He is among those who have organised the meeting. The police open fire. Kandan is hit fatally and dies with "the sea before his very eyes and its endless lapping waters." Other works of Venkataramani include Paperboats, The Next Rung - two collections of essays, and On The Sand Dunes, a collection of poems. It is to be noted that Venkataramani published all his books privately besides doing a lot of pamphlet work at his own expense. This becomes all the more significant when we realise that he did not have large funds at his disposal to finance his literary projects. There was practically no readership in English of the kind of work he wrote and his lone relentless pursuit of literary goals stands as a shining example to the commercialised jet-set mercenary Indo-English writer of today.



Again from Tamil Nadu, Krishnaswamy Nagarajan wrote two novels of outstanding merit - Athavar House(1937) and Chronicles of Kedaram(1961). The first work depicts the story of a joint family. It is an uprooted family migrated from Maharashtra to Tamil Nadu generations ago. The novelist spans it over a single generation of Vaishnava brahmins and conveys the conflicts of the older members with those of the younger generation and their economic struggles in an India seething with the ferment of Gandhian unrest.

The second work Chronicles of Kedaram is set in a Coromandel coast town during the 1930's. It does not directly deal with the nationalistic movement although in one of the town's religious feuds the novelist brings in Gandhi himself to mediate. The manners and morals of the coastal town are vividly drawn. The history of Kedaram is related not by the author but by a sharply dramatised character Gokarnam Shastri, an orthodox brahmin. Pompous and self-righteous, Gokarnam is yet a character with whom the reader can easily sympathise. The world of Nagarajan comprises ordinary people involved in ordinary happenings of those times and his work attains a fine synthesis of theme and technique.

The plebeian status of the two novelists dealt with and their non-westernised upbringing is reinforced in the case of R.K.Narayan, a Tamilian, who has spent the major part of his life in the quiet city of Mysore. Narayan is the son of a school-master and except for brief stints of working as a school teacher (NOT college don) he has devoted himself exclusively to writing. It was difficult for him to make both ends meet for the first fifteen years of his writing career. Even his younger brother, R.K.Laxman, perhaps the world's greatest living cartoonist, joined Times of India at a salary of Rs 50 per month in 1946. C.D.Narasimhaiah's comments on Narayan's background while rereading Swami and Friends are pertinent:

> "R.K.Narayan has not been educated in any of the older or the more modern redbrick universities of England or America, no, not so much as visited them until 1951, and, I believe, had scarcely left South India; had learnt English mostly from Indian teachers, themselves ill-equipped for their calling;

spoke Tamil at home, a sort of Kannada in the streets and English with a South-Indian accent in educated circles; did not pass examinations at school or college with any credit to himself or the institutions which are now seen contending to own him as their product." (Narasimhaiah, 1969 : 135).

The focus of his attention has been the South Indian hoi poloi. His tales about them are hardly ever written for readers British or American but mainly for the English-knowing people of his own country, specially from South India itself. Contrast this with the novels of Nayantara Sehgal perpetually characterised by a cultural cringe with the conscious object of reaching the foreign English-speaking worlds. Himself belonging to the middle class, Narayan never steps out of his bounds. He shares their views and opinions, mores and prejudices and shows an uncanny understanding of their mannerisms and peccadilloes; and while writing about them laces these with comic effects. Various landmarks within the municipal limits of Malgudi make up the locale of almost all his novels: Nallappa Grove, the Lawley Extension, Kabir Road, The Albert Mission School, the spreading tamarind tree, the river Sarayu, the Mempi Hills. Contrast this with the novels of Amitav Ghosh. His locales read like the itinerary of a globe-trotting tourist: Dhaca, London, Calcutta, Al-Ghazira, El Oued; and within London itself, Lymington Road, West End Lane, Henrietta Street, Brick Lane, Oxford Street and so on. Not only geographically, but also metaphorically, one realises where Indian Writing in English has travelled to, now.

Running the risk of being called prudish, R.K.Narayan, in conformity with the Indian middle class ethos of artistic expression whether it be a Ray's film or a Laxman cartoon or a Hussain painting is never salacious or overtly obscene. His novels are successful without being sexful - unlike some of the recent perverse creations depicting tribady, fornication, masturbation and harlotry for market considerations as in Kamala Markandaya's Two Virgins, Namita Gokhale's Paro, Upamanyu Chatterjee's English August, and Khushwant Singh's Delhi respectively.

Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar in 1905 in a Hindu coppersmith family. His father joined the Indian army as a JCO and was a Head Clerk in Dogra Regiment. During his college days he took part in the national movement and was briefly imprisoned. He ran away from home at the age of twenty and sailed to England. He defines his 'operative sensibility' in his Apology of Heroism(1946), "Any writer who said that he was not interested in 'la condition humaine' was either posing, or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism." (Anand, 1946 : 20). Like Premchand and Yashpal he is "determined to write with a view to discovering the causes of the mental and material chaos in India and of the failure of his own generation" (ibid., 71). Further, he is "committed to a commitment outside the merely aesthetic scope of literature and accepts the doctrine of art as the criticism of life." (ibid., 89). Anand's first novel Untouchable(1935) describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcast colony of a North Indian cantonment town. The novel could only have been written by an Indian who has not only moved in this society but

also has a fund of compassion for this underprivileged class. No Indian writer in English discussed in the previous chapter, generally hailing from the upper classes, could dream of tackling such a topic. Saros Cowasjee, an Indian teaching at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, while trying to ascertain the choice of the students between Mark Twain's Huckleburry Finn and Anand's Untouchable, said, "There are sixty million untouchables in India! It means that three times the total population of Canada is subjected to the fate of Bakha, the hero of the novel. It worked. At the end of the hour I took a vote and found the students preferred Untouchable to Huck Finn." (Cowasjee, 1978 : 414). Writing is a social activity. The Indian writer in English cannot write in a vacuum nor can he be oblivious of his countrymen and the social conditions prevailing around him. But how about the crop of contemporary writers? In My Son's Father, Dom Moraes asserts that the tombs of Greece influenced his poetry more by way of images of kings and burials than the ruins of India; and that the only memory he carries of the Belur temples is not of their architectural beauty, but of the courtyard behind the village full of excrement.

Coming from a very austere background, Raja Rao(1908-) belongs to a traditional brahmin family of South India. His ancestors count amongst the most venerated spiritual teachers and philosophers next only to Sankaracharya. Raja Rao was influenced by one of these great ancestors Vidyaranya Swami but more particularly his own grandfather. A number of other spiritual teachers in the south such as Pandit Taranath of the Tungabhadra

Ashram and Sri Atmananda Guru of Kottayyam have had a lasting effect on his mental and spiritual growth. A word about the pecuniary state of the author who left for France to do research in western philosophy in 1929. It may be remembered here that in those days the scions of the elite who bore unflinching loyalty to the British alone were sent to Oxford and Cambridge, atleast in the sphere of humanities. That Raja Rao had to go to France only shows that he came from a non-westernised breed who had mastered Sanskrit, French and English on his own. He eked out his meagre existence in France between 1929 and 1950 against the backdrop of world-wide recession, the Spanish civil war, the Second World War, occupation of France by Germany and the French resistance movement. Reviewing Tagore's The Home and the World(1919) E.M.Forster had observed: "In literature as in science they (Indians) must work over the results of the West on the chance of their proving of use and one expects that the younger writers will reject the experiment of The Home and the World and will adopt some freer form." (as quoted in Narasimhaiah, 1973 : 66). Raja Rao's Kanthapura, published in 1938, seems to have provided the 'freer form' as well as a new dimension of sensibility recognizably Indian. In his Foreword to the novel the author reveals his awareness of the need to find a creative approximation of the Western novel form to the Indian experience. It is said that Kanthapura is 'Itihasa' and 'Purana' both unified into a 'Kavya'. As 'Itihasa', it is packed with historical action of 1930's, the civil disobedience campaigns leading to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. As a 'Purana' it appeals to legendary memory and enshrines archetypal experience. As a 'Kavya'

the novel integrates imagination and experience into a vision of human destiny. Raja Rao calls his novel a 'Sthalapurana', a legendary history restricted to a specific locale. The sense of place dominates the novel: the Kenchamma Hill, the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the temple of Kanthapurishwari, the rivers Himavathy and Cauvery. The village has a Brahmin quarter, a Weaver's quarter, a Potter's quarter, a Pariah quarter and a Sudra quarter - a neat division typical of any Indian village. The people of the village are known by their picturesque names which are almost like kennings. The Serpent and the Rope (1960), besides being a spiritual autobiography of a learned modern intellectual is a sustained piece of symbolism and recreation of ancient Hindu myths. In its outward depiction of the East-West encounter (a theme which from now on becomes the sickening leitmotif of a horde of subsequent imitators, both male and female) it seems to become a fictional statement of the philosophy of Sankara's non-dualism. At the same time it appears to be a conscious attempt to create a truly Indian novel with roots embedded in native tradition and to forge an Indian English style which expresses its complex vision authentically. In doing so the author successfully grafts several features of the rhythms of Sanskrit speech on English. The style frequently sonorous and incantatory has an unmistakable Indian Vedantic colouring with bold importations from Indian speech into English. Typical structural elements are the 'Puranic' form of the novel blending story, philosophy and religion; the interspersing of the narrative with verses in the Sanskrit form, 'Campu' and pithy dialogue on metaphysical questions as in the Upanishads.

Govinddas Vishnoodas Desani(1909-) was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and ran away from home at the age of 18 spending his next 25 years in England where he worked as a newspaper man, small-time lecturer and occasional broadcaster. He came to India in 1946 and for the next 14 years he practised Yoga and meditation and even travelled to Japan in the process to get specialised training in Buddhism. From 1960 to 1968 he was on the staff of the Illustrated Weekly of India where for 18 months he edited a 'feuilleton', an opinion page called 'Very High' and 'Very Low' - a deliberately provocative piece of journalism. After 1968 he was invited to be the resident teacher of philosophy at Texas University. Here again we see an eccentric, auto-didact from an ordinary background. His literary reputation rests on just two works - All About H.Hatterr and Hali. Hatterr(1948) is a novel extremely complex in theme and technique. Hindustaniwalla Hatterr is a pseudonym of an orphaned son of a European seaman and a non-christian woman from Malaya. The name suggests both: sahib(topiwalla) and the mad Hatter from Alice in Wonderland. At the same time it should not be forgotten that Hatterr has had a head injury in boyhood and is warned that he might develop mental disorder. He's shown as a simpleton deceived by seven sages of the East whom he approaches reverentially. He is also cheated at the hands of women, a circus manager's wife and a washerwoman. Hatterr, nevertheless, is not the perpetual fool. He is also Man in quest of a viable philosophy of living. Desani has created some unforgettable characters viz., Bill Smyth and his wife Rosie, Banerrji, Jenkins the dog, Sage Always Happy, Sage Master Ananda Giri-Giri and so on. The novel carries the weight of its complex structure lightly because of its effervescent comedy.

Words frisk and bristle on every page. Dancing round the pile of his own clothes, while himself dressed in a dirty towel marked GIP Railway, Hatterr says: "Making tremolando sounds with my lips and palms, laughing, shouting, barking, and yelling war cries ... and ... bowing low to the pile when I completed the circle and on again gabbling and snorting. ..." (Desani, 1972 : 53). Throughout the novel we find a plethora of devilish puns, cockney and Babu English, slang pidgin, stage rhetoric and the ebullient jargon of docks and slums. All About H.Hatterr is a comic extravaganza which has not been equalled for its linguistic range and situational humour in the past four decades. It has passed into the history of Indo-English literature as a genre of its kind, perhaps, never to be surpassed.

According to Desani, if Hatterr is to be taken as his preoccupation with the common man, then Hali is to be construed as his image of the excellent man. He is sinless and there are no ethical or moral lapses in him. Faced with sorrow and defeat, his search is after peace. Most men and women, are not able to do away with pursuit of money, progeny and status; and if ever they are able to do so, they then seek peace. Hali's tormentor, a voice within himself, promises him freedom. In Desani's own words:

> "I need readers with soul, and very special sensibility, to understand Hali and its very special idiom. Its fewer than six thousand words, published in 1950, have occupied me for years. I last revised the work in 1964. ... I am convinced that the genuine approach to my deliberately contrasted two profiles of man, the common and the excellent, is to recognise them as

contradictions in my own personality. In order to communicate this impersonally, I have chosen the craft of writing." (Desani, 1978 : 406).

That laity continues to be the nursery of the makers of IWE is borne out by the antededents of Nirad C.Chaudhuri(1897-). Chaudhuri's life was one of consistent failures until he won recognition as a writer quite late in his life with the publication of The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian(1951) at the age of fifty-four. Critics and academes who generally proclaim him as the most outstanding Indian prose writer in English omit to highlight how he learnt English. It would be worthwhile to quote from Passage to England where while thanking the publishers, Chaudhuri says, "Last of all, I am grateful to my publishers, in this instance as in the case of my first book, for having taken care of the English of a man who has learnt the language only from his Bengali teachers and from books."

Chaudhuri in the Autobiography states, "It is more of a national than personal history, more of an exercise in descriptive ethnology than autobiography. ...(I've) written the book with the conscious object of reaching the English-speaking world." (Chaudhuri, 1964 : ix). This claim of his is often contrasted with Nehru's in his Autobiography, "My object was, primarily for my own benefit, to trace my own mental growth." (Nehru, 1962:596). And, "I write down my past feelings and experiences in the hope that this may bring me some peace and psychic satisfaction." (ibid., 208). Also, " (I am) not writing deliberately for an audience, but if I thought of an audience, it was one of my own countrymen and

countrywomen." (ibid., xi). Literary critics traditionally berate Chaudhuri for his egotism based on statements such as these which abound in the work; and Nehru comes in for fulsome praise for his stance of public humility although the latter work is miles inferior to Chaudhuri's magnum opus. But let us go on to the essential distinctions of the work before we renew this argument. Nirad's Autobiography is an invaluable social document. The picture of life in a small East Bengal town in the early twentieth century is drawn most evocatively. The author is all the time drawing parallels of his characters and situations with those from various histories and literatures which seem to be at his fingertips. He exhibits prodigious scholarship. Not only does he quote from half a dozen European languages including Latin, French, German and Italian, there also seems to be no branch of learning with which he is not acquainted. The working of the Hindu mind interests him as much as the working of the steam engine and he seems to be as much equipped with genetics as with gunnery. Most of all what astonishes one is the originality of his historical thesis, which in substance has infuriated a whole body of Indian intellectuals and academics. Compared to this monumental achievement, Nehru's Autobiography pales into insignificance. It is dreary, unoriginal and partial account of Indian history. If the book has gone into more than a dozen editions it is not because of its charm and readability but because of liberal government funding - as in the case of all works of Tagore. The book covers the first 25 years (only 36 pages are devoted to it) and the last 25 years of his life very summarily. Mahadev Desai shrewdly observes, "We have a feeling of something missing, something kept from us." Nehru

exhibits a public-school duplicity in what should be included and what should be excluded with a definite eye on posterity. The innumerable encomiums and plaudits by official publicists only testify to their intellectual dishonesty. Pitched against Nehru's niceties of Harrow and Cambridge on the one hand, and the barbs of mercenary critics on the other, Chaudhuri, the commoner, is left with no weapon but his egotism and aggressive posture as a safeguard for his intellectual survival.

Bhabani Bhattacharya(1906-1988) had a long stint in journalism and Indian Information Service before his first novel So Many Hungers(1947) saw the light of day. A writer strongly influenced by Gandhi, both his fictional theory and practice are rooted in social realism. In an essay 'Literature and Social Reality' the author maintains that "Art must teach but unobtrusively by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda there is no need to eschew the word." (as quoted by Chandrasekharan, 1974:3) In an interview with Sudhakar Joshi in The Sunday Standard, 27 April, 1969, Bhabani Bhattacharya said, "A novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view." So Many Hungers is set against the background of the Quit India movement and the Bengal famine of the 40's. The novel deals with the theme of exploitation - political, economic and social. Kajoli is seen as a symbol of female victimization in the form of a destitute rustic girl housed in a Calcutta brothel. Another character, Samarendra, represents the capitalist class. Truckloads of refugees being thrown out of the city, children with

distended bellies fighting with mangy dogs for scraps of food in garbage bins, emaciated men scooping out the chewed food from other mouths and putting it into their own or hunger-driven women raped by soldiers are the heart-rending scenes which fill the pages of this novel. The Second World War was at its height and the Allied army was getting a beating from the Japs in the jungles of Burma. Under such circumstances one can quite imagine the ineptitude of the local administration. Besides being a compassionate work of fiction the novel remains etched in the reader's memory as a horrendous social document of our times. His other works include He Who Rides a Tiger, Music for Mohini, Shadow from Ladakh and A Dream in Hawaii.

The eight writers described in this chapter(Venkataramani, Nagarajan, Narayan, Anand, Rao, Desani, Chaudhuri and Bhattacharya), to my mind, constitute, more or less, the makers of IWE. It will be fruitful to seek the points of commonality between them, and thereafter, bring out the contrast with the set of Indo-English writers who preceded them.

All these writers learnt their English initially from non-native speakers of English. They did not have the benefit of public school education in their formative years nor were they Oxbridge products. Generally they all hailed from non-genteel backgrounds. None of them were teachers of English in colleges or universities in India or abroad. It is interesting to note that both Raja Rao and G.V.Desani taught Philosophy not English in Texas University, Austin, USA. None of them were members of the Indian Administrative Service or the Indian Foreign Service nor

were they progeny of high-ranking officers, bureaucrats, business magnates or top corporate executives. None of them had embraced Christianity.

Now let us have a passing glimpse at the antecedents of their forbears. Barring Derozio, each one had a haute bourgeois origin. Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo Ghose and Sarojini Naidu were all educated in England. Manmohan Ghose taught English at Patna College and at Presidency College, Calcutta. Derozio was first a poet and then a teacher. His two published collections of poems, in fact, won him the teaching post. Then, too, he was a teacher for only a year and a half at Hindu College, Calcutta, and had the honour of being thrown out, less for his objectionable teaching, more because of his uninfluential working-class background. Romesh Chunder Dutt, a cousin of Toru Dutt, was an ICS officer. Govin CHunder Dutt, father of Toru Dutt, descended from an aristocratic background, got converted to Christianity and had taken his entire family to England even before Toru was born. The grandfather of the two brothers, Manmohan and Aurobindo, was a civil servant in the East India Company. Their father, Krishna Dhan Ghose, joined the Bengal Medical Service as a house surgeon in Calcutta Medical College. He had a roaring practice right from the start, so much so that he could leave his wife and two sons under the charge of an English governess, Miss Pigott. In England, he joined the Aberdeen University where he took his M.D. degree. After returning to India he became a Civil Surgeon of Rungpore, and later of Khulna districts. At the age of ten, Manmohan along with Benoy Bhusan, Aurobindo and their mother, were taken to England

where their youngest brother Barindra Kumar was born. Dr K.D.Ghose left his three elder sons in England under the charge of one Mr Druette, a non-conformist clergyman of Manchester. Mr Druette was a sound Classical scholar for it appears that while Manmohan and Benoy Bhusan were sent to the Manchester Grammar school, Aurobindo was educated at home by Mr Druette who laid the foundation of his classical scholarship. Manmohan later joined Christ Church College, Oxford. Rabindranath Tagore's father, Devendranath, came from a princely land-owning family. For several years, the son acted manager of his father's vast sprawling estates in Shillidah and Sayadpur, personally collecting revenues and rentals from the local residents. After winning the Nobel prize in 1913, the British conferred a knighthood on him in 1915. For the next 25 years or so of his life, Tagore went on extensive lecture tours all over Europe, the Americas, China, Japan, Malaya and Indonesia, sharing nothing of the tumult and turmoil the nation underwent in those days - a fact seldom highlighted by his Bengali fans and the official agencies. He is, perhaps, the precursor of the present-day globe-trotting university teacher. Sarojini's father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, was Doctor of Science from Edinburgh University, and was the founder and principal of Nizam College, Hyderabad. As already stated, at fifteen, Sarojini was sent to England where she studied at King's College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge.

Since the bulk of Indian writing in English in the first half of twentieth century,as we have seen, is in the form of fiction, a prefatory note on Indian poetry in English (IPE) should suffice. "In examining the phenomena of Indian verse in English", says

R.Parthasarathy, "One comes up first of all against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India." (Parthasarathy, 1976 : 3). Henry Derozio, the editor of East India and the expelled Hindu College teacher, gave Indian poetry in English a right start by deviating at least in themes and concerns in his slender body of verse. The Bengali upper-class poets who followed him could not improve either in technique or content upon their progenitor. Nissim Ezekiel and P.Lal, in the fifties, ushered in a new era in the domain of IPE. Ezekiel's A Time to Change appeared in 1952 to be followed by Sixty Poems(1953) and The Third(1959). His best-known works are The Unfinished Man(1960), The Exact Name(1965) and Hymns in Darkness (1976).

Simultaneously P.Lal in 1958 founded the Writers Workshop in Calcutta which proclaimed the manifesto that it was made up of a group of writers who agree in principle that English has proved its ability as a language to play a creative role in Indian literature and the group was devoted to creative writing with preference to experimental work by young and unpublished writers. It was concerned with practice not theorising, helpful criticism not iconoclasm. Initially it performed its role admirably and gave an unprecedented impetus not only to IPE but also to translations of works from Indian languages into English. As a publisher, P.Lal has carved out a niche for himself and the history of 20th century Indian poetry in English will be inextricably interlinked with Writers Workshop, Calcutta.

To Ezekiel goes the credit of pioneering modern sensibility in Indo-English poetry. His verse marks a departure in themes, tone and diction when compared with the works of poets preceding him. His antiromantic stance with a touch of irony and a feeling of detachment gave a lead to succeeding poets - two significant examples of which are Keki N.Daruwalla and Arun Kolatkar. The subsequent growth and development in Indian poetry in English, however, have shown aberrations similar to those of the novel and these will be taken up in Chapter VII.

Chapter III

THE ORIENTAL AND THE OCCIDENTAL : A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE WRITERS' MILIEU

After going through the personal particulars of the Bengali writers, our IWE ancestors, and that of the subsequent multilingual group of eight writers, one is led to the hypothesis that the socio-cultural milieu a writer comes from is almost inversely related to his quality of writing. That is, the more affluent a writer, the less significant his writing. And the less affluent a writer, the more significant his writing. I wish to substantiate my hypothesis with examples from regional literatures in my country and those from the west conforming more or less to the same period in history.

A cursory glance at our ancient literatures in Sanskrit and Tamil will tell us that our greatest writers such as Valmiki, Kalidasa and Tiruvalluvar came from the lowliest homes. This tradition remained unbroken even in the medieval times. Both the Bhakti and the Sufi group of poets - Surdas, Tulsidas, Namdev, Tukaram, Kabir, Rahim, Raskhan - sprung from similar origins. That the poor are making meaningful literature even today is borne out by the example of the Dalits.

Dalit literature in this country has come of age within a short period of two decades. Most Dalit writers are from among first generation learners for whom university education became possible only with the opening of colleges by Dr B.R.Ambedkar.

Oppressed and suppressed for ages Dalit life is stranger than fiction. Dalit writers' plea is that for them form or craftsmanship is not so very important as the content. Their creative expression need not have a bridal make-up about it; rather it should have the primeval form of the aboriginal. This accounts for the colloquial language in dalit poetry. Social commitment is at the root of dalit writing, placing man at the centre. And since the immediate oppressive environment is what surrounds them, the provincial becomes the universal. For Dalits like Daya Pawar, Yeshwant Manohar, Laxman Mane and Shankarrao Kharat, social realities hang heavily over their heads and they make no secret of being committed writers shaping out a literature of protest.

The Malayalam scene provides us with novelists like Basheer, Kesava Dev, Uroob, S.K.Pottakatu and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai who have come from humble origins and produced works of excellence. Thakazhi's Chemmeen, Rantitangazhi(Two Measures), and Thottiyute Makan(Scavenger's Son); and Kesava's Odayil Ninnu(Out of the Gutter) are considered classics in the genre of socially-conscious and proletarian writing.

Yashpal(1903-1976), one of the finest modern Hindi novelists, born in a modest home, received his early education at Gurukul Kangri, Hardwar. A close companion of Chandra Shekhar Azad, he was initially imprisoned for life and suffered a lot for the cause of India's freedom along with his equally fearless wife, Prakashwati. His novel Jhoota Sach(False Truth) is a masterpiece depicting his humanism and social values. Sahitya Akademi chose to confer its annual award on Yashpal in 1976, the year of his death

when he was 73 - the decision may have been hastened by the news of his fatal illness. This is generally the fate of the regional writer located in the periphery of influence. Reverse is true in the case of young upstarts like Vikram Seth who bag their awards not at the age of 73 but 37(Sahitya Akademi award, English,1989) for a work(Golden Gate) which has no relevance in our context. Was it because the author has been educated at Doon School and Oxford, with a mother as Justice of the Supreme Court, to boot? (Presently she is the Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh High Court at Shimla).

And here is the story of Premchand, probably the greatest writer India has produced in modern times, in his own words:

> "I was born in 1880. My father was a postal employee, my mother an ailing woman. I also had an older sister. At the time of my birth my father was earning about twenty rupees a month; by the time he died his salary was forty. ... When I was fifteen he had me married. And scarcely a year after the marriage he died. I was studying in the ninth grade. In the house were my wife, my step-mother, her two children and myself, and there was not a pice of income. Whatever savings we'd had were used up in my father's six month illness and funeral expenses. And my ambition was to get an M.A. ...I insisted on going on with my studies. The chains on my ankles were not just iron but of all the metals together and I wanted to walk on the mountain tops!" (Premchand, 1988 : 250).

Subsequently Premchand narrates how he narrowly escaped conviction because of his seditious writing:

> "Until 1907 I had not written one short story. The title of

my first story was 'The Most Precious Jewel in the World', published in Zamana in 1907. After this I wrote another four or five stories. In 1909 a collection of five stories was published with the title Sufferings of the Motherland. At this time the partition of Bengal had taken place; in the Congress the radical faction had developed. In these five stories I praised devotion to the country.

At that time I was a deputy inspector in the department of education in Hamirpur district. One evening, six months after the stories had been published, while I sat in my tent I received a summons to go at once to see the District Collector, who was then on his winter tour. I harnessed the bullock-cart and travelled between thirty and forty miles through the night and reached him the next day. In front of him was placed a copy of my book. My head began to throb. At that time I was writing under the name of Navabrai. I had had some indication that the secret police were looking for the author of this book. I realized they must have traced me and that I was being called to account.

The Collector asked me, 'Did you write this book?'

I told him I had. He asked for the theme of each one of the stories and finally losing his temper said, 'Your stories are full of sedition. It's fortunate for you that this is a British government. If it were the Mughal Empire, then both your hands would be cut off. Your stories are one-sided, you've insulted the British government.' The judgment was that I should give all copies of the book into the custody of the

> government and that I should not ever write anything else without the permission of the Collector. I felt I'd got off lightly. Of the thousand copies printed hardly three hundred had been sold. The remaining seven hundred I sent for from the Zamana office and had them delivered over to the Collector." (Premchand, 1988 : 254-255).

On the other hand, we have Tagore, who wrote nothing of significance about the Partition of Bengal nor anything that would offend the British. Historical evidence points out that he kept on the right side of the British to keep out of trouble. The Encyclopaedia Britannica even mentions that he did not favour independence for India. His Nobel Prize seven years after the Partition of Bengal was, I think, sop to assuage the ravaged psyche of the Bengalis. The knighthood which followed merely confirms this view. It is in this country alone, perhaps, that a writer of a lesser calibre but belonging to the 'haute monde' is accorded all the honours during his life-time and critical opinion is not revised posthumously. Even death makes no distinction between the quality of his writing and that of a better writer but from a subaltern background. For the order of precedence remaining unchanged in posterity, it is the cultural mafia and the academic community which must squarely take the blame.

Probably the greatest story writer of the subcontinent, Saadat Hasan Manto(1912-1955) was born in Sambrala in the Indian state of Punjab. He failed his school leaving exam twice in a row. Ironically, one of the subjects he was unable to pass was Urdu, the language in which he was to produce such a powerful body of work

in the years to come. He entered college in 1931 in Amritsar and there failed again and dropped out. Three years later, through the influence of a friend, he managed admission in Aligarh Muslim University where he used the time to write and publish stories for magazines. Soon thereafter, he was out of Aligarh as well, suspected of having tuberculosis. Later he moved to Lahore to take up a job with an Urdu magazine called Paras. It was here he got the idea of writing for the film world in Bombay - a feat easy to accomplish since there was already a community of muslim artistes and writers there. His first collection of stories was published in 1940, some of which had already been broadcast on All India Radio. In 1942 he joined the AIR.

His work deals with the low life in Bombay and the Punjab. His locale, the dingy alleys and lanes; his characters, prostitutes and their clients, pimps and madames, waifs and drop-outs - the jetsam and flotsam of society. On two occasions Manto was prosecuted for obscenity. He detested bourgeois values and the pretentiousness of the respectable and one finds no memsahibs or foreign service officers and no princesses or metro-wogs. His themes are not alienation, not East-West encounter but the lives of ordinary people trying to keep their humanity intact in a world brutalised and turned upside down by communal blood-letting. 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Mozail', 'A Question of Honour' and 'A Man of God' are some of his unforgettable tales dealing with the holocaust of 1947.

In comparison with the meagre fare dished out on the subject of Partition by Indo-English writers like Khushwant Singh,

Manohar Malgonkar and Chaman Nahal, much more substantial and authentic partition fiction has come from the pen of Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi writers - Manto, Krishan Chander, Ismat Ghugtai, K.S.Duggal, Bhisham Sahni, to name but a few.

Belonging to a muslim clan no more or less respectable than that of Hasan Manto, the prodigious creations of Ismat Chugtai spread over four decades are no less significant. Her stories include 'Lihaf', 'Chaid Chaad' and 'Chauthi ka Jora' - the partition film Garam Hawa being based on this last-named story. Referring to the affluent women writers as 'pom pom darlings' she accused them of coming from an elitist background, writing about tea gardens, orchestral music, candlelight dinners in clubs, holidays in Europe and jobs in the foreign service. In effect, about people with not much to worry about. To Ismat that was not relevant and she was more at home writing about wife battering, prostitution, dragging daughters by the hair, 'qasaiis', 'halwaiis','naiis', 'dhobis' and families on the footpath. Ismat Chugtai was perhaps one of the few writers who displayed an aversion to money. In her last years (she died in 1991) whatever monetary remuneration she received out of her literary productions she would distribute it among the poor. It is also said of her that her flat in Bombay was open to the so-called fallen women of society who came to her for financial help and advice.

A Partition refugee, Bhisham Sahni, arrived penniless in Delhi in Aug 1947. He witnessed at first hand the carnage of that time which is graphically evoked in his novel Tamas, a searing

chronicle of the times, and later produced as a TV serial under Govind Nihalani's sensitive direction. His rail journey in the last train that left Lahore for India has been recapitulated in the story titled 'Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai'. Sahni could write so powerfully about the trauma of partition simply because he lived through it. His works include Mayyadas ki Madhi and Basanti (both novels) and the play Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein, a landmark in Hindi theatre. Despite his many successes and literary awards he remains a simple man dedicated to his art and exudes an air of humility.

A writer-journalist who refused to kowtow to the existing supercilious Hindi publishing world, Sharad Joshi(1931-1991) went out of his way to lampoon the high and the mighty - politician, bureaucrat, professional. He left no stone unturned in excoriating the Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, coterie(Arjun Singh, Ashok Bajpeyi et al). His works of satire constitute Jeep main Sawar Illiyan (Worms In Jeeps), Do Vyanga Natak(Two Satirical Plays) and Ek tha Gadha(Once There Was An Ass - a play). A native of Ujjain, he truly appeared as a humble and homespun Malwa peasant unlike the capital's pampered Hindi writers with their overweening contumely and insular sophistication. To wit: Nirmal Verma (A St. Stephen's product), Mrinal Pande, Krishan Baldev Vaid. A free-thinker, courage and healthy irreverance were the hallmark of Joshi's daily column of comment, 'Pratidin' in Navbharat Times.

The 66-year-old Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi, is a woman of uncommon substance and a novelist of immense power. But above all she is a social activist of unbreakable tenacity. The

dense web of injustice, exploitation and hunger that envelops the world around her fills her with intense pain and indignation. "By merely handing over the reins of political power to the oppressed masses you cannot solve their problems. It is the warped collective mindset of a well-ensconced class of exploiters that has to be changed first," Mahasveta Devi observed at Sahitya Akademi 'Meet The Author' forum convened on 14 May 1991 at India International Centre, New Delhi. And what happens when the writer himself comes from this class of exploiters? - a typical predicament of the contemporary IWE scene.

Mahasveta Devi continues with quiet determination to write about and work among the harried tribals of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Some of her works include the celebrated Hajar Churasir Maa, Aranyer Adhikar, Chotti Munda Evam Tar Teer and Agnigarbha. Tribals and bonded labour apart, martyrs interest Mahasveta Devi as a writer. Her oeuvre is replete with freedom fighters, tribal heroes and Naxalites. Hajar Churasir Maa traces, through a shocked mother, the life of a Naxalite who is lying dead in a police morgue. Aranyer Adhikar revolves around Birsa Munda who led a historic revolt against the British at the turn of the century in the Chhotanagpur belt of Bihar. Agnigarbha is a tribute to the young man who laid down their lives for the Naxalite cause. "I admire anyone who fights for the rights of the deprived multitudes - be it Rani Laxmibai, Birsa Munda, the Naxalites, Gaddar, Baba Amte or Ela Bhatt"," she remarked. For the past two decades Mahasveta Devi has been actively involved with field work in tribal areas. Her involvement with social work began when she was only sixteen, through relief operations during the Bengal

famine. Then there was the 1942 movement and the last stages of the Tebhaga agitation. But in 1947 she was married to IPTA's Bijon Bhattacharya, the author of Nabanna, which later inspired K.A. Abbas' neo-realist film, 'Dharti Ke Lal'. This early exposure to social issues led to her lifelong commitment to the wretched of the earth. She now runs a welfare centre in Purulia, West Bengal, where tribals are given education, training in handicrafts and health care. The traditionally exploited tribals are not mere characters in her books - they are now an integral part of her life. Accepting that a writer is free to address himself to burning issues of his time or to confine himself to subjective ruminations, Mahasveta Devi said at the same forum, "Every writer need not highlight the plight of the tribals. But it is imperative for him to take a stand on issues affecting his society. Should a creative artist divorce himself from the reality around him, that would be the beginning of his end." And this, indeed, is the malaise that is afflicting most of the recent Indian writing in English. To name just a few: Khushwant Singh's Delhi, Amitav Ghosh's Circle of Reason, Shadow Lines and An Egyptian in Baghdad, Arun Joshi's The City and the River, Gurcharan Das's A Fine Family, Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay, Nayantara Sehgal's Rich Like Us, and the latest award-winning Trotternama, a family history of seven generations, by I. Allan Sealy.

It will be unwise to make a universal statement that the not-so-affluent segments of society generally provide a more fertile ground for the birth of literary and artistic geniuses. But there is no harm in examining the situation, as the data

attests in the Anglo-American and the European context of the nineteenth century.

Jane Austen's(1775-1818) father was only a rector of a small Hampshire village of Steventon. She was the second daughter and seventh child in a family of eight: six boys and two girls. Her closest companion was her elder sister, Cassandra, who also remained a spinster. And not a single novel of hers was published in her own name during her lifetime.

George Eliot(1819-1880) was the daughter of a man who was an agent to the owner of an Estate in Warwickshire. After her father's death in 1849 she was still unmarried and was left to fend for herself on a meagre allowance of 100 pounds a year.

Charles Dickens'(1812-1870) father was a clerk in the navy pay office. His extravagance and ineptitude brought the family to financial embarrassment and disaster. In 1824, the family touched rock bottom. Charles was withdrawn from school and was now put to manual work in a factory, and his father went to prison for debt. Descending into the working class he began to gain inside knowledge of their life and privations that informed his writings.

The father of England's foremost provincial novelist, Thomas Hardy(1840-1928) was a master mason in Dorset. The writer was the eldest of four children who was admitted to school at the age of eight and left it in 1856, when he was sixteen. He could not go to college because he had to have a job and became assistant to an architect. His first novel <u>The Poor Man and the Lady</u> was

rejected on the ground that it was too socialistic.

And now let me recapitulate a few lines about the fortunes of a family which produced a famous American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne(1804-1864). Cursed or not the Hawthornes declined in prominence and prosperity during the 18th century while other Salem families were growing wealthy from the lucrative shipping trade with China. When Nathaniel's father died during one of his voyages, he left his young widow, Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne, without means to care for her two young girls and the boy aged four. And that is how Hawthorne grew and struggled all through his adult life combating debt and anonymity.

The life of Edgar Allan Poe(1809-1849) is too widely known for much elaboration. Son of an actress, Elizabeth(unlike film actresses in India, stage actresses were not highly paid in 19th century America) who died early, Poe was taken into the home of one John Allan and his childless wife. He went to school in Scotland and England and came back to the States to continue his studies in the University of Virginia. His gambling losses there forced his guardian to disown him. Poverty made Poe join the army, which he left. John Allan then readopted him. Soon he joined as a cadet at the Military Academy, West Point. Again he was thrown out for indiscipline. Thereafter he kept on leapfrogging from job to job - never truly free from poverty and want.

When Allan Melville died in New York in 1832, he left his wife and three sons in dire straits. The eldest son, Gansevoort, took charge of the family. Herman Melville(1819-1891), the second son, and the subject of our discussion, joined as a

bank clerk and later as a farm hand on his uncle's farm in Massachusetts. When Gansevoort went bankrupt and there was no way out, Herman was arranged to be shipped out as a cabin boy. Throughout manhood and old age financial hardship stared Melville in the face. In Pierre, an intensely personal work, Melville reveals the humiliating responses to poverty that his youth supplied him plentifully.

Emily Dickinson(1830-1886), the second of three children, was of middle class origins. Her father was a treasurer at Amherst College. The parents were not close to their children. Both Emily and Lavinia, her younger sister, never married and not a single volume of her poems was published during her lifetime. Higginson, a caller, who later edited and published her poems posthumously called her, "a little plain woman, with reddish hair, dressed in white ... and speaking in a soft frightened breathless childlike voice." (Dickinson, 1890 : x).

The case of Walt Whitman(1819-1892) is another piece of evidence as to how a man of humble origin is best suited for creative writing. His father, a carpenter, failed in his attempt at farming and moved his family from Long Island to Brooklyn in 1923. He schooled for just five years, before taking up an apprenticeship in the printing trade. For some years he edited a weekly newspaper and led a totally Bohemian existence. Later he took up the post of a paymaster in Washington, then that of a clerk in the department of the Interior, from where he was dismissed as the authorities considered Leaves of Grass obscene.

To all appearances, Henry David Thoreau(1817-1862), the American transcendentalist who came from a petit-bourgeois background, lived a life of bleak failure. His neighbours viewed him with familiarity verging on contempt. He had to pay to have his first book A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers printed. When it sold a mere 220 copies, the publishers dumped the remaining 700 copies on his doorstep. His second book was Walden : Or Life In The Woods. It fared less badly but still took five years to sell 2000 copies. He was imprisoned for not paying the tax. Later he became an ardent social activist helping to speed fleeing slaves north on the so-called Underground Railroad.

To Samuel Langhorne Clemens, a boy of eleven, the village graveyard of Hannibal, Mississippi, was ominous and foreboding. One of his sisters had died when he was four, his ten year old brother had died when he was seven, and now his father came to be buried there. This little boy, like innumerable poor children of our country, started supporting his family - as a delivery boy, grocery clerk and a blacksmith's assistant. When his brother, ten years older than him, established the Hannibal Journal, Clemens who was to be known as Mark Twain(1835-1910) became a compositor for that paper. He left this job as well and became an apprentice to a steamboat-pilot, plying upon the Mississippi river. For the next four years, Twain came in close contact with the human flotsam - professional gamblers, conmen, itinerate stevedores, indigent raftsmen quick with fist, knife or derringer. He also came across negro children from broken homes, truant lads from schools and adolescent scalawags fishing, pirating or waging gang wars. Out of this grist was born Tom Sawyer, Hucklebury Finn, Life on the

Mississippi and The Innocents Abroad. In between, Mark Twain laboured night and day to become rich by his writings and lectures, then became bankrupt through unwise speculation in mining and a typesetting machine. And his trials and tribulations never really ceased until his death.

The French literary scene of the nineteenth century would never be complete without taking into cognisance the monumental achievements of the French symbolists. Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mellarmè, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue - the five who constitute this movement initiated a world-wide wave. Their work is the first major manifestation of what has since been called modernism. It simulated a renaissance in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking worlds of both Europe and Latin America. Their influence became manifest in the poetry of Ezra Pound, Eliot and Yeats, and Rilke of Germany. A peep into the lives of these poets may help to strengthen the argument that it is the sans-culotte that form the backbone of a nation's culture.

Charles Baudelaire(1821-1867), perhaps the greatest French poet of the 19th century, author of Les Fleurs du Mal, leader of the Symbolists was prosecuted for obscenity and blasphemy during his lifetime. In straitened circumstances from the age of twenty onwards, he became an addict of opium and hashish and contracted venereal diseases. In 1862 he was declared bankrupt. Baudelaire was involved equally in his publisher's failure and to escape his creditors fled to Belgium on a lecture tour, which too, turned out to be a fiasco. In 1866 he became seriously ill, was brought back to Paris where he died.

Stéphane Mallarmè (1842-1898), the author of Hérodiade and L'Après-midi d'un faune was an ordinary school-teacher whose financial situation was never sound. Almost penurious, he sought to engage himself in part-time activities, such as editing of magazines, to make both ends meet. To make matters worse he lost his son when the boy was only eight. Mallarmè himself had a traumatic childhood, losing his mother when five, his younger sister when fifteen, and his father when he was twenty-one. In his poetical works, therefore, the escape from reality became a perennial theme. To analyse the nature of the ideal world became an obsession - the poet's task, to perceive and crystallise these essences.

Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), who is remembered for marking a transition between the Romantic poets and the Symbolists, published all his books at own expense or through the charity of his relatives and friends - Poèmes Saturniens, for example, by his cousin Elisa, and Romances Sans Paroles, by his friend, Edmond Lepellitier. Estranged and separated from his wife and child, and having an unnatural infatuation for poet Rimbaud, whom he shot at, in a violent quarrel for which he suffered two years' imprisonment, Verlaine misspent his life in drink, debauchery and deprivation.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was born of parents who had separated from each other. The outbreak of Franco-Prussian war in 1870 ended his schooling. In August he ran away to Paris but was arrested for travelling without a ticket and spent some days in prison. His schoolmaster rescued him and paid his fine and had him sent to Douai. But he ran away again. At the age of seventeen, Rimbaud claims to have seen 'visions' and formulated his new

aesthetic doctrine expressed in two letters called Letters du Voyant. Subsequently he sent his poems to Paul Verlaine - among them the epochmaking 'Voyelle' and 'Le Bateau Ivre'. But money was never to come his way as he made his life a series of voyages and misadventures, finally dying of cancer at thirty-seven.

Jules Laforgue(1860-1887) was brought up by relatives. He worked as a low-paid secretary to an art collector and dealer and subsequently as a reader to Empress Augusta in Berlin where he wrote most of his books including Les Complaintes and Le Concile Feerique. Later he came to London, married an English girl of humble origin, and returned to Paris. Poverty dogged him all along and he died of T.B. there in 1887.

The nineteenth century Russia has bequeathed to the world immortal works of literature through the writings of Dostoyesky, Tolstoy and Chekhov. The lives of these writers are as stimulating as their creative productions.

Fyodor Dostoyesky(1821-1881) entered the Military Engineering School at St Petersburgh but shortly after graduating took the bold step of resigning his commision to devote all his time to writing. He had hardly any financial means - his mother had died and the father, murdered by serfs. Soon after the publication of his second novel The Double, he was arrested for subversion being a member of the Petrashevsky circle - a political organisation which was spreading the ideas of the French utopian socialists. Along with 20 others he was condemned to be shot. The sentence was changed to four years of hard labour in Siberia and

then four years of service as a soldier in the ranks. Only in 1859 was he allowed to return to Petersburg after an absence of ten years. Two years earlier he had married a consumptive widow with one son. Between 1864 and 1865, his wife died and the magazine that he was editing collapsed due to mounting debts. Threatened by debtor's prison, he fled to Europe with an advance on a novel borrowed from a dubious publisher. At Wiesbaden, he lost all his money at roulette and was reduced to pawning his clothes. In 1866, Crime and Punishment brought him money to clear away part of the debts but he still risked several financial penalties for failure to fulfil another contract with a publisher. He hired a young steno and wrote Gambler within a month. The next year he married her and again went abroad to escape creditors and remained in Europe for four years. They lived in abject poverty moving from country to country. His young wife endured his epileptic seizures (a gift of his Siberian imprisonment), incessant gambling and the tragic death of their first born. It was only in a year before his death in 1881 that he was recognised as one of the world's greatest novelists - the Brothers Karamozov finished just in time.

Leo Tolstoy(1828-1910) belonged to the landed gentry and was born on his family's estate at Yasnaya Polyana. Though an individualistic aristocrat, he tried desperately to lead the life of a poor peasant and propagated rejection of property. At the age of twenty-three, he volunteered for a life of soldiering in the Caucasus and later took part in the Crimean War, the exploits of which were described in Sevastopol Sketches - here he contrasts the simple heroism of the common soldier with the false heroics

of the military leaders. Several of his stories concern the harm a materialistic society inflicts on the natural, unspoilt man. In his old age he believed that no one should depend upon the labour of others, dispensed with his servants, cleaning his own room, working in the fields and making his own boots. He organised relief-work during famine and ran a school for the education of peasant children. He abjured the copyright of all his works before 1880, but his wife had the copyright transferred. What is of note is not Tolstoy's high birth then, but his concerns as a writer and human being. Out of such artistic and compassionate vision Tolstoy gave to the world, besides the two masterpieces War and Peace and Anna Karenina, some of the most memorable moral tales ever written.

Often regarded as the greatest of all short story writers, the modest parentage of Anton Chekhov(1860-1904) is little publicised. His father was a struggling grocer who had been born a serf. During the last three years of his school, Chekhov supported himself by coaching younger boys, his father having gone bankrupt. He found admission in the medical college at Moscow through merit and subsequently graduated from there as a doctor in 1884. He was to become the mainstay of the family - the father being almost out of employment and two older brothers, Aleksandr and Nicolay, a journalist and artist respectively, leading Bohemian lives - and two younger children still in school. After his move away from Moscow, village life became a leading theme in his work. He had already been providing portraits of the intelligentsia earlier, but his later work presented the Russian peasantry in a new light. The range of his characters, in totality, provides a panoramic

study of the Russia of his day and one so accurate that it could even be used as a sociological source. It was, after all, the work of a scientifically trained observer. Overwork and tuberculosis consumed him in 1904 - just when he was forty-four.

The picture that emerges of the great twentieth century writers is not dissimilar to those of the previous age as far as their financial circumstances are concerned, specially during their infancy and the early part of their careers.

George Bernard Shaw(1856-1950) was brought up in grinding poverty along with his two sisters by a mother who left her husband in Ireland to eke out a living on her own as a stage actress. Poor George often went without food as he watched her from the wings of the theatre. One of the two older sisters, Agnes, died of neglect and starvation in London. Shaw spent his afternoons in the British museum reading room, writing novels, and reading what he had missed in school. His fiction failed him utterly - five novels in a row which repelled almost every publisher in London. Unlike our metro parvenu who may happen to hand over their manuscripts to David Davidar this evening to be turned into galley proofs next morning. And the day after they may stare at you as glossy Penguin paperbacks from Galgotia's plate-glass show-cases.

Shaw founded the Fabian Society that aimed at the transformation of English social system not through revolution but through permeation of the nation's intellectual and cultural life. With passionate objectivity he exposed the high society and the New Emancipated woman. As a critic he poured all his scorn on the

undeserving mediocrity that had monopolised the art and literary scene of that time.

John Butler Yeats, who sired W.B.Yeats(1865-1939), never earned enough as a portrait-painter. For that, indeed, was his trade - and the poet's mother hailed from a common merchant's family. In a number of early poems, one can hear the soul of the young poet cry for release from circumstance - which improved only with the award of Nobel Prize in 1923 when he was fifty-eight.

Conditions could not be more uncongenial in the atmosphere in which James Joyce(1882-1941) was brought up. Joyce Sr. drank, neglected his affairs and borrowed money from his office. Later, authorities found deficiencies in his accounts, which he eventually met by mortgaging his property. During the years that followed, the Joyce family sank deeper and deeper into poverty. Ten children survived infancy and they became accustomed to conditions of increasing sordidness, subject to visits from debt collectors having household goods frequently in pawn, shifting to another house, leaving the rent and tradesmen's bills unpaid. Joyce never overcame the penurious state of his existence right till his death. To support himself while writing, an activity that was uninterrupted and relentless even during his periods of total blindness, he wrote book-reviews, gave tuitions, even worked in a bank. Along with poverty, he had to contend with the mental disorder of his daughter, the doubtful fidelity of Nora Barnacle, his wife, and a series of twenty-five eye operations between 1917 to 1930 for iritis, glaucoma and cataract. To top it all, Ulysses was banned and Finnegans Wake completed in 1939, two years before his death, received an indifferent response.

Unjustly hounded out of Cornwall as a German spy during the First World War, the biodata of D.H.Lawrence(1885-1930) is a fascinating chapter in the chronicles of twentieth century literature. He was the fourth child of a coal miner(It will be some years before we hear of any progeny of a coal miner, say, of Dhanbad or Jharia, becoming a writer in our country). After working as an ordinary clerk at Eastwood, he became a teacher at the Davidson Road School where he also began writing. His marriage to Frieda Weekley of German descent in 1914, marked an event in his life that was to create much hardship and misunderstanding throughout his career as a writer. He went with her to Germany and then returned to England in 1915. The military authorities in Britain tried to enlist him into the army but found him medically unfit. The police then stepped in, suspecting him to be a German mole, and ordered him to leave Cornwall. He spent the rest of the war in London and Derbyshire. Rainbow, one of his finest novels published in 1915, was banned as obscene. Women in Love was savagely attacked and branded as a loathesome study of depravity. Ill-health and premonitions of premature death haunted Lawrence while his pen poured out a flood of creativity: The plumed Serpent, St. Mawr, The Man Who Died, and the infamous Lady Chatterley's Lover. Tuberculosis made him its victim on 2 Mar 1930, when he had barely inched past his fortieth year.

One of the great novelists of the first half of 20th century, George Orwell(1903-1950) volunteered to lead a life of wretched want and destitution to impart a mode of stark reality to his writings. Born at Motihari, Bihar(India), in 1903, as Eric

Arthur Blair, his father was a minor official in the Indian civil service. The parents' pretensions to social status had little relation to their income. Orwell was thus brought up in an atmosphere of impoverished snobbery. Later he joined as an officer in the Imperial Police Service in Burma where his experiences led to a revulsion of British imperialism and he resigned his service soon after. Having felt guilty that the barriers of race and caste had prevented his mingling with the Burmese, he thought he could expiate some of his guilt by immersing himself in the life of the poor and outcast people of Europe. Donning ragged clothes he went into the East End of London to live in cheap lodging houses among labourers and beggars. He spent a period in the slums of Paris and worked as dishwasher in French restaurants. He tramped the roads of England with professional vagrants and joined the residents of London shanties in their annual exodus to work in the Kent hop fields. These experiences gave Orwell the material for Down and Out in Paris and London. They also gave his prose an authentic window-pane transparency. Matching Down and Out in Paris and London with Nectar in a Sieve, Handful of Rice and In Custody one gets the feeling that the latter are inauthentic literary productions not emanating from obscure hamlets and over-crowded lanes but from boudoirs and drawing rooms of the metrovillas. As in the case of Keats, Chekhov, Kafka and Lawrence, consumption claimed Orwell, too, in January 1950.

The biographies of major literary personalities of America reveal in a bewildering variety how works of imagination emanate from human beings hailing from improvident backgrounds

and sustained in private vicissitudes. Foremost among these looms the figure of Eugene O'Neill(1888-1953) who was born in a hotel in New York city. Not only his plays but his own life seemed to derive provenance from the tragedies of ancient Greece. His father James O'Neill was a touring actor and the son spent his childhood in a nightmare of insecurity - in dingy hotel-rooms, on trains and backstage. Leaving school at the age of 18, he shipped to sea, lived a derelict's existence on the waterfronts of Buenos Aires, Liverpool and New York, submerged himself in alcohol and attempted suicide. Recovering briefly at the age of 24, he held a job as a newspaper reporter but soon came down with tuberculosis. Confined to a sanatorium in Connecticut, he confronted himself soberly and decided to write plays. Success came slowly after a series of one-act plays which were enacted on Broadway between 1916 and 1920. Later he won four Pulitzer awards and the Nobel prize for literature. But his life was an unending thespian's drama, part of which he portrays in Long Day's Journey Into Night. Here he shows the agonizing relation between his father, a frustrated professional actor, failed husband and father; his mother, a defeated drug addict; the elder brother James, a bitter alcoholic; and O'Neill himself as a tubercular, disillusioned youth. O'Neill married three times. One of his sons committed suicide, another drifted into a life of emotional instability, and his daughter, at the age of 18, married Charlie Chaplin who was O'Neill's age. In his final years a crippling illness ended his ability to hold a pencil. Unable to work he longed for his death and sat waiting for it in a Boston hotel - a more broken and tragic figure than he had ever created for the stage.

An often-reiterated emphasis in the work of John Steinbeck(1902-1968) is the essential worth of natural man, close to the soil or other palpable reality, contrasted with the commercial dehumanisation that confronts him. Such a philosophy was born because the writer, himself the son of a miller, had worked at farms, sugar-beet plantations and road constructions as a common daily-wager. The Grapes of Wrath is a big, angry novel telling the tragic story of the travels of poor farmers from the dusty plains of Oklahoma to the fertile valleys of California. Of Mice and Men is a story of two homeless wandering farm workers(Which post-independence Indian writer in English has even thought of writing about the Bihari immigrant labourers who descend in hordes at harvest time in the ripening fields of the Punjab year after year - some in the process getting massacred by the terrorists?). For two winters Steinbeck also performed the duties of a watchman of a wealthy man's estate at Lake Tahoe in the High Sierra Mountains. Only in his sixtieth year was he conferred the Nobel award - six years before his demise.

The following passage from A Farewell to Arms helps to highlight the enigmatic personality of Ernest Hemingway(1899-1961):

> "If people bring so much courage it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure that it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry."

An ambulance driver in the First World War, then a war reporter,

a deep-sea fisherman and a big game hunter, Hemingway's harvests of these experiences were A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Death in the Afternoon and The Old Man and the Sea. As much in love with life as with death he took his own life with a shotgun in 1961.

Unlike our IWE poets who are either campus dons(Ezekiel, Shiv K Kumar, Mahapatra, Mehrotra, Parthasarathy) or Oxbridge gentry (Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawalla, Vikram Seth), Robert Frost(1874-1963) worked as a farmer, a bobbin boy, a shoemaker and a teacher in many country schools. He lost his father at the age of ten and his mother was an ordinary school teacher. From the age of twelve on, during his school vacations, he worked in the shoe shops of Salem , New Hampshire, nailing shanks and cutting heels, helping on the farms with haying, and pushing bobbin wagons in woollen mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Not until he was thirty-eight did his first book of poems A Boy's Will see the light of day - twenty years after his maiden poem was published in a high school magazine.

In the case of Franz Kafka(1883-1924) the question whether to earn one's living or to live one's life proved to be insoluble. A creator of visionary fiction which has become a symbol of 20th century anxiety and the sense of alienation pervasive in Western society, he left behind a testament for his friend Max Brod forbidding publication of his manuscripts - The Trial, The Castle and America. During his life Kafka found employment in an insurance company - a job which he deemed to be an excruciating torture and which took up all his day time. But so compulsive was his urge that his nights were frequently consumed in writing. Kafka's nisus for anonymity is poles apart from that of the Indian writer

in English, say, Ezekiel, Moraes, Jussawalla, Khushwant Singh and Anita Desai who are obsessed with keeping themselves in the public eye.

An examen into the lives of some European artists may enable us to cohere our views about the socio-cultural antecedents of this community which makes up for all that is western art over the last 200 years.

J.M.W.Turner whom John Ruskin called the greatest landscape painter of all time was a London barber's son. Paul Gauguin, a castaway from French bourgeois society forsook his home and family and sailed to Tahiti to devote himself exclusively to painting. Here though he lived in poverty and disease, he never abandoned his relentless pursuit of art, dying there in 1903, almost in anonymity. Europe woke up later to his innovative style inspired by primitive and natural forces working upon his personality. Van Gogh, who ended his life at the age of 37 left behind 800 oils and 700 drawings, only one of which he could sell during his life. Always desperately poor he was sustained by the generosity of his brother Theo. Holland places his work alongside Rembrandt.

Similar lives of want and turbulence have been led at various stages by Rodin, Picasso, Kokoshka, Klee and Chagalle. And in the world of cinema, who can forget the most miserable childhood of Charlie Chaplin? Somehow it has always been that the man who suffers is the man who creates. But what is happening nearer home? The next chapter mirrors the domestic scene.

Chapter IV

GOVERNING ELITE AS THE CULTURAL ELITE : AN OVERVIEW OF THE PREVAILING SCENE

A study of the contemporary Indian writer in English has to be a more than a purely literary exercise. Literature is but one of the forms of artistic expression. In addition, we have the fine arts and the performing arts, cinema, the documentary film, TV, print media, photography and so on. Despite the multifarious problems that our nation faces today, say, of over-population, poverty, disease and illiteracy, there seems to be a substantial groundswell of cultural activity in all states, particularly so in the capital. Generally the audiences who go to attend a musical performance at Siri Fort Auditorium or a Bharat Natyam dance at India International Centre or a play at the National School of Drama are passive participants. Only a miniscule number will have a strong feeling for or against the performing artiste. This would usually constitute the insiders. A connoisseur, however, can scarcely carry out a critical evaluation of the artiste's performance without a sociological approach. Let me elucidate.

Let us say there is a Kathak dance competition and one Ms Shovana Narayan is declared the winner. A dance critic who waxes eloquent in a national daily about her performance without divulging her origins, chair and official status would be misinforming the public. A discerning reporter would be one who writes that Ms Shovana Narayan, Director, Rajya Sabha Secretariat,

an officer of the Indian Audit and Account Services, distant niece to the late President Rajendra Prasad and a Padma Shri awardee was pronounced the winner. Such a critic's write-up alone would constitute a comprehensive review.

In 1956, the government of India set up the department of Culture at Ashok Hotel. Its purpose was to display the rich art forms of the country during international conferences that are intermittently held at the hotel. The department started but immediately ran into unforeseen problems. Artistes, without reservations about their creativity being displayed in the profane environment of a five star hotel, were difficult to find. Until, the great Udai Shankar stepped forward. Persuaded by then Prime Minister Nehru he agreed to perform at the Ashok, on condition that no food or drink was served during the show. And naturally the evening was a great success. Reminiscing about his late father, Anand Shankar said that he was a trend-setter in every way. Four decades later, the trend that Nehru and Shankar seemingly pioneered reached an astounding crescendo. Culture, per se, had gradually shifted its venue from the open-air shamiana of yesteryears to the comfortable plush surroundings of a five-star hotel. Atleast in Delhi - a city where this phenomenon has become blatantly obvious.

What makes Chhau exponent Daksha Seth perform on the lawns of the Maurya Sheraton, Mallika Sarabhai dance at the Taj Mansingh, or Hari Prasad Chaurasia blow his exquisite flute in the interiors of the Oberai Grand? And such maestros like Ravi Shankar, Yamini Krishnamurthy and Samjukta Panigrahi, all take turns to give grandiloquent recitals, at the theatre of the

Ashok hotel. Is it just the lure of money, glamour, fame or a more endearing quest for a new patron of the arts?

In fact, the classical arts have become elitist, for how many can afford the high ticket rates? A majority of afficionados stay away from five-star venues owing to stiff entrance requirements - either monetary(an average ticket for a show costs Rs 200 per head) or status-linked(most recitals are on invitation only) - the question of what makes our artistes perform in such high places becomes even more important. Specially when in the words of Sarod-master Amjad Ali Khan, "It is the audience that matters, not the place of performance."

In Delhi, the audience that matters are a handful of invitees comprising mainly hotel patrons, the sponsors' clients, the coveted press, the capital's elite, a sprinkling of upper-class counterfiet culture buffs and senior bureaucrats. These people are less interested in the nuances of classical dance or music, more in eating, drinking and socialising.

The artists in the West, as we saw in the previous chapter, emanated from the fringes of society. Some of them could sell only a picture or two during their life time and trade their other works for daily meals. What is the scene in our country? Vivan Sundaram, son of an ICS officer; Anjolie Menon, wife of a senior naval officer and niece of Tara Ali Baig; Ghulam Sheikh, head of the Arts Department, Baroda University, and his wife, Neelima Sheikh; Jatin Das, Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Akbar Padamsee, Nalini Malini, Tyeb Mehta, Jahangir Sabavala - all upper class gentry that embellish our painting scene. They receive both

corporate and Establishment patronage through contacts. One of their obsession is to replicate Christie's and Sotheby's in the metros to fetch astronomical sums for their oils at auctions. Presiding like the deities over them all are the figures of Krishen Khanna and Padma Vibhushan M.F.Hussein. Though the latter started as a painter of film posters, he seems to have now forgotten his daily wage past. One of his horse paintings bagged a controversial award.

Works of art talk like the good fairies in tales. Their voices get muted, almost unrecognisably, when they are messed up with the bestowal of state awards or honours. What kind of value attribution accompanies these awards? It all ends up as an exercise in alienation - the kind of alienation that is experienced when a horse chooses not to neigh but to speak a language that does not belong to it. This is not to deny that art does not need patronage; it does so, as much now as it did in the past. Patronage acts as an expedient; in the conditions obtaining in our country, it is a necessary expedient for survival. Not the expediency of a race - for competition is for a horse, not artists. Though, among artists there are many horses fit only for competitions. For them competition is synonymous with reputation - they must be seen running, as a basic epistemological condition for existence. When a dark horse acquires referentiality through an award, all he needs is cultural space where he is seen and talked about. Our bureaucratic state, in the absence of a mass culture, has turned art into the totalitarianism of the kitsch. The distribution of patronage expresses its logic of consuming art; and since an unseen

bureaucracy runs the state it appears as the ultimate lord who guards an artist's entry into the post-modern world.

As against the self-consuming values of the post-modern (Hussein, Khanna et al), there are several horses who refuse to run. Running and winning races is for horses; these artists belong to the quietitude of their studios. To mention only a few of these. From Andhra, P.T.Reddy. The well-known young turk of the forties refused a British scholarship to study art in London because it was inconsistent with his nationalistic ethos. From Gujarat, Santokba Dudhat. She is seventy-five - toothless, wrinkles and all. Her life's mission, transporting the Mahabharata on canvas. The mega scroll on which she works has consumed 1000 metres of specially treated cloth already. The magnum opus will consume atleast 4000 metres in all, according to her son, Bhanu, who took a loan from the State Bank of India to finance the project. Kanwal Krishna and wife Devyani live in a small house in Bharti artist colony in East Delhi. Now in his eighties, Krishna has painted more than a thousand landscapes of the Himalayas and Tibet.

To round off the argument, most art grows outside state patronage from a hard struggle. Here the situation is quite the opposite. The so-called artists from the affluent class sponge on the Lalit Kala Akademi and deprive the laity of legitimate patronage.

Next, theatre.

What happens when a five-star hotel decides to use theatre as its latest marketing vehicle in an attempt to pick up sagging sales? Supper theatre at the Taj is not quite what Cafe theatre

in the West is. It caters to a target audience of the busy executives, managing directors, chairmen of Companies, embassy staff and so on - the genteel folk who would not like to go to Kamani and then find dinner elsewhere. Some of the directors who have presented their productions are Amal Allana, Rael Padamsee and Faizal Alkazi. The themes of the plays are racy and entertaining. For instance, the first play staged was an adaptation of 'The Stronger' by August Strindberg. Rael Padamsee's 'Family Ties' was an adaptation of Neil Simon's 'Come Blow Your Horn', a Manhattan musical masala. Faizal's 'The Murder Game' dealt with a racing car driver who decides to have an affair with a famous actress, much to the chagrin of his millionaire wife. The relevance of such tinsel shows is for all to see.

Leading theatre personality, unable to stem the rot, cries hoarse against five-star theatre, it being the antithesis of what the theatre is supposed to be - a vehicle for social transformation. The directors mentioned above and their actors and actresses all hail from ritzy backgrounds and yet corner grants from INTACH(Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), ICCR(Indian Council for Cultural Relations), Sangeet Natak Akademi and National School of Drama. Contrast this situation with the poor players of 'Jeevan Ki Gadi' performed by railway platform waifs. It is an extraordinary play enacted by street children and gives an extremely disturbing account of their lives and their fight for survival. The actors themselves keep changing and they in turn change the words around which does not matter because there are really no lines for them to memorise. 'Jeevan Ki Gadi' is

trying its best to create an awareness among government bodies for whom these children do not exist.

What has happened to art is happening to Indian classical dance. Almost all the danseuses who receive disproportionate media attention are highly connected. One hears of an Indrani Rehman, a Swapana Sundari, a Protima Bedi or a Shovana Narayan. A typical case is that of Padma Bhushan Sonal Mansingh. The young Sonal Pakvasa grew up in the aristocratic lap of her famous grandfather, Mangaldas Pakvasa, the erstwhile Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar. Her persona can only be understood against the backdrop of her unconventional upbringing. At the various Raj Bhawans occupied by her grandfather, she heard some of the finest musicians of the day - Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Omkarnath Thakur, Siddheshwari Devi, M.S. Subhalakshmi and others. She was noticed by Nehru when she was barely four. Her impressionable youth was spent in the midst of such leaders as Sardar Patel, C.Rajgopalachari, Rajendra Prasad. She married Lalit Mansingh, an IFS officer posted at Geneva(whom she subsequently divorced). It was through her first marriage that she was introduced to the Odissi idiom that is her forte today. Her father-in-law, famous Oriya poet Dr Mayadhar Mansingh, introduced her to the legendary dance-guru Kelucharan Mahapatra. Through her second marriage to Dr Georg Lechner, director Max Mueller Bhawan, she promoted her dancing career in Germany. Dr Charles Fabri, a foreign dance critic, launched her as a dancer of substance in the West.

It will be of interest to know the fate of one of her gurus. If a list is ever drawn of names that fashioned the dance

form known today as Odissi, the name of Guru Pankaj Charan Das should head it. The grand old patriarch who taught and made famous high society artistes such as Indrani Rehman, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Rita Devi, Yamini Krishnamurthy and Sonal Mansingh, was abandoned to the dust of oblivion just because he was a peon in an office. His highly connected disciples received accolades and awards decades ago and performed in every part of the globe. Today after years of neglect the Sangeet Natak Akademi has bestowed on him a belated Padma Shri, almost as an afterthought, when the old man has one foot in the grave.

Often business houses sponsor Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi and Kuchipudi recitals but not Kathakali or Kutiyattam. Why so? It is difficult to say how far audiences are literate in the grammar and aesthetics of the dance concerned. Most people find a pretty face and the music diverting - their appreciation does not go beyond. Such is not the case with these two. Kathakali is more than dance - it is a dance-drama that is highly stylised and more difficult to perform. An astute critic may see in it affinities with the theatre of cruelty and the theatre of terror because of its exterioration of violent passions. Moreover it is a male preserve giving little scope to the distaff elite. Kutiyattam is at its last gasp. Nobody seems to be concerned about it - not even the Sangeet Natak Akademi. When Mani Madhava Chakyar, the Kutiyattam exponent died nobody shed a tear. So much for our interest in our cultural traditions.

Yes, festivals and mahotsavs are held, but great systems of dance, ancient systems, are allowed to decay and perish. The

sacred kuttampalams, the temple theatres of Kerala, do not echo to the beat of the great drums. The kuttu or dance is now meant for business. It is no longer a votive offering. It no longer moves deities other than those in power. The female terpsichorean performers are as glamorous as movie actresses and can be as temperamental. They are all the time striking an attitude and are truly prima-donnaish in behaviour. Like politicians and film stars they are much sought after by journalists. Nowadays, one reads so much about what they do and do not do; how they bat their eyelids or blow their noses; or how they preen themselves before the mirror. Is their art any longer a way to moksha, to liberation, an overture to Nataraja, a submission to the Lord to banish their nescience?

From Dance to Design.

The most sought after designer in the capital happens to be one Ms Sunita Kohli, another Padma Shri. From restoring rooms of state at Rashtrapati Bhavan and Hyderabad House, Prime Minister's office at South Block, Race Course Road residence of late Rajiv Gandhi, and making furniture for the Bachchans, to designing luxury hotels, Sunita Kohli has emerged as an unannounced but ubiquitous arbiter of good taste. However, her name has frequently been dogged by speculation suggesting that her affiliation with congress leaders helped her win government contracts. Anil Verma, a companion in the same trade, has similar links and is also the winner of the Aga Khan award for architecture.

According to Prof Dhar, head of the Landscape Department of Delhi School of Planning and Architecture, "Some experience in civil work and the right contacts is all that is needed to become a landscape designer." Two such hi-fi professionals are Haneela

Singh and Raveena Kaul. Their work lies in Delhi's outskirts among the undulating farms of sybarites. It is the gizmos that fill the garden which ultimately push the owner further up the social ladder. The settings are straight out of filmland. Waterfalls, gurgling streams, rock gardens, mountainscapes, machans, pagodas, gazebos, conservatories, barbeque areas and, of course, a swimming pool to complete the effects. It takes 300 truck loads of Badarpur sand to mould the land into shape for that undulating effect. And lots of Mexican turf bought at twelve rupees a square foot to make it lush. It takes another 300 truck loads of rocks to give the waterfall that natural look. Half as many truck loads of pebbles carted all the way from Haridwar, are a must to form the dry river bed effect interspaced with exotic foliage bought at equally exotic prices.

A genuine landscape architect of the calibre of Nek Chand (of Chandigarh rock garden fame) who could scavenge on the garbage dumps for his material is certainly not part of the prevailing cultural scene.

The zoom in glossies and the exposures that magazines now afford have opened up the field of photography to the professionals, the nouveau riche and the cultural nabobs. S.C.Sekhar, a chartered accountant who works for Welcome Group, manages an exhibition for himself titled 'Images of India' at their Shrishti Art Gallery, Maurya Sheraton. His pictures are splashed in their magazine 'Namaste'. Raghu Rai, scion of a royal house, who does not have to earn a livelihood, keeps shooting from his Pantax and

Nikon and finds it easy to palm off his frames to his pals in the media circle. Ashok Dilwali, Mukul Kesavan, Sanjeev Saith, Avinash Pasricha - all from uppish backgrounds have similar passion. They are but a part of a larger elitist tribe who deprive the lay photo-journalist of his just wages and awards.

Travelling along with the camera one arrives at Mandi House. It is proclaimed ad nauseum in interviews, seminars and on other public platforms, that the endeavour of Doordarshan is to telecast better programmes to counter the recent 'starry' attacks from different lands. No efforts are to be spared to telecast enlightening entertainment. And yet when someone deserving knocks the doors of Mandi House, they remain absolutley shut. Mandi House is not impressed with merit and experience alone. A little lubrication is required to help open these unyielding doors(A CBI inquiry is already in progress on the mode of selection of serials). Countless examples of mediocre serials making into prime time can be cited. One can forget excellence, there is not even competence. We have reached a stage where we are left to compare two bad serials and figure out which is better. Mediocrity is being celebrated.

And how about music? Take Vinay Bharat Ram. He is the Chairman and Managing Director of the DCM Group. But he shares the public platform as a vocalist with the likes of Bhimsen Joshi and Kishori Amonkar. Another so-called musicologist is R.P.Sinha, joint secretary in the Scheduled Caste Commission. By virtue of his official status he is able to direct programmes and even compose music for All India Radio and a few telefilms; while an unsung maestro like

Pandit Arolkar, now in his eighties, is only known through a few concerts on All India Radio, Bombay. He is a recluse who has few basic needs because he leads a spartan life. According to Dilip Chitre, he is the greatest philosopher of Indian music this century has produced and it is a shame that his exposition of the spiritual and aesthetical tradition of Indian classical music is not even recorded for posterity yet. Somehow one has a feeling that Arolkar's greatness could not be adequately influential in our times because ours is not the age in which musician-sanyasis are considered the equals if not superiors of musician-bureaucrats.

Cultural circles all over the country are in turmoil over the latest controversy around Bharat Bhavan, the prestigious cultural institution in Bhopal. Also by a strange twist of irony the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), an institution set up to conserve the country's endangered cultural and natural environment is itself in need of conservation. A note presented by B.B.Vohra, a member of its governing council, outlines several irregularities in the working of the eight year old organisation. The troika consisting of Ms Pupul Jayakar, B.K.Thapar and Martand Singh assumed control of INTACH and embarked on a crazy spree of organisational experimentation and expansion without regard for administrative and financial proprieties. Mr Thapar's emoluments were increased to Rs 8000 per month while Mr Martand Singh enjoyed perks such as unlimited air travel, accommodation in five-star hotels and telephone facilities.

An entity to reckon with in the field of culture has been

the high-profile Festival of India Directorate with Ms Pupul Jayakar as its cultural advisor. One of the reasons why our nation faces such a financial crunch is due to the profligate Festivals of India held in U.K., U.S.A., France, Hapan, U.S.S.R., and Germany - which together cost us around two hundred crores in foreign exchange. The officials holding key appointments make it a point to utilise these opportunities to exhibit their own works. For instance, Girish Karnad, Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, staged his own play Naagmandala in Germany. The play was put in the docks by German critics at a theatre seminar in Berlin, who questioned the very point of this kind of international experiment. A clear example where the governing elite in their aspiration to be the cultural elite have let down the nation. A sort of secrecy invariably surrounds the criteria for selection which has resulted in festivals being dogged by protests and controversies.

Reverting to the episode of Bharat Bhavan, under the charge of Ashok Vajpeyi, an IAS officer and former cultural secretary to the Madhya Pradesh state government. A poet and literary critic in Hindi, Vajpeyi had already made a mark on the literary scene by appropriating a Sahitya Akademi award. He has been accused of excluding from Bharat Bhavan prominent figures like Amjad Ali Khan, Pandit Jasraj and Sharad Joshi of Nav Bharat Times because the latter had lampooned the bureaucrat. Being an IAS officer, Vajpeyi's attention was often diverted by the need to be in good books of the political bosses of the day. That he did it effectively is borne out by the fact that he was not transferred

from Bhopal for eighteen long years. An old protege of Arjun Singh, the present Minister for Human Resource Development, Vajpeyi has now assumed office as joint-secretary in the Department of Culture at Shastri Bhavan under him.

The Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for 1986-87 has devoted an eleven-page chapter on financial irregularities in Bharat Bhavan affairs, of which both Arjun Singh and Ashok Vajpeyi were life trustees. Its characteristic insensitivity to the sentiments of the gas victims of Bhopal was also one of the focal points of controversy. Within days of India's greatest ecological disaster which killed thousands of persons in Bhopal in December 1984, Vajpeyi's Culture Department set out to organise an annual extravaganza 'Utsav', with Vajpeyi curtly telling his critics, "One does not die with the dead". Saner counsel, however, prevailed and the Utsav was consequently dropped.

So much for the prevailing cultural scene which logically leads one to the prevailing IWE scene, the focus of attention here onwards.

Chapter V

BELLES LETTRES AS A SOCIAL GRACE : THE RISE OF WOMEN NOVELISTS

We have seen that the milieu of the writers discussed in Chapter II(Straightening The Kink) is different from that of the writers discussed in Chapter I(Right Start, Wrong Turn). And this is reflected in their writings as well. The genre of the nineteenth century IWE writer was poetry. Although there were scattered attempts at capturing Indian history and legend in rhyme, a substantial body of their work dealt exclusively with Anglophilia, Bible and Christianity(Adam and Eve being a recurring topic), Greek myths and Hellenic lore. The makers of IWE, on the other hand, adopted fiction as their mode of writing and were enthused by the freedom struggle engulfing the masses. They also did not fail to notice social injustices and calamities that befell our people (Cf. Kandan the Patriot, Chronicles of Kedaram, Kanthapura, Untouchable and So Many Hungers). After the departure of the British, India joined a comity of nations which had newly gained independence. It faced its own problems beginning with the Partition both on its western and eastern borders. Though there have been about half a dozen novels on the Punjab, none have emerged surprisingly from the east. Independence took toll of the nation in many other ways. It threw up several challenges in the fields of development, in internal security and in the socio-economic sphere. It is worthwhile examining whether the new crop of writers that emerged in the post-independence era took up such themes or did not do so; and if they did, was it out of a genuine concern? Or, did

they choose to withdraw into their own subjective worlds? Also, can the raison d'etre of their themes be traced to their origins?

When the white rulers sailed back to their own shores, a sudden vacuum was created in our military, civil, corporate, academic and media circles. Overnight the senior ranking gentry in these services filled the vacuum and seized the reins of power. This native gentry started acquiring all the trappings of the coloniser and in almost all aspects outdid him. In the process of acquiring these accoutrements they resorted to means fair and foul - cultivating contacts with their old colonisers, appropriating scarce resources of the nation, bypassing normal channels of communication, often trampling upon the poor and the meritorious. As a result, a peculiar hardening took place, a kind of inhuman detachment that made them purblind to their surroundings. These attitudes percolated down to their homes and affected their female propinquity. The atmosphere in these homes nurtured eclectic pastimes in their convent-educated wives and daughters - one of them being creative writing in English. Thus was born the contemporary Indo-English woman novelist.

Kamala Markandaya(Ms Purnaiah, 1924-) is an expatriate married to one Mr Taylor, an Englishman. She left India over 40 years ago and writes from London. But she visits India often in connection with sale, publication and prescription of her books in Indian universities. Her first novel Nectar in a Sieve(1954) is probably the most prescribed text for study by students of Delhi University. It is included in the syllabus for English as a core subject for the BA(Pass) courses as well as in the syllabus for English

as a subsidiary subject for BA(Hons) courses in humanities, commerce, social sciences, physical and natural sciences. It is widely rumoured that the reason for pervasive presence of what is, at best, a mediocre production by a non-resident Indian from the leisurely class could be her mysterious nexus with the prescribing authorities. The novel's setting is a village in the south and the narrator, Rukmini, is a rustic woman. But then those who know their Indian villages will not fail to notice how contrived a picture of rural life it offers. Meenakshi Mukherjee, while discussing Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgonkar in The Twice Born Fiction says, "It may be significant that in Kamala Markandaya's first three novels there is no mention of any specific locality. The style of all these writers has the smooth, uniform ease of public school English, which is highly readable, but it is doubtful whether it is the most desirable style in fiction where one has to deal with particular human beings rooted in their narrow regional identities." (Mukherjee, 1971 : 175).

Nine other novels followed - each more flawed than the other, and in one of them (Two Virgins), she attempts to win her readership by offering a juicy bite of lesbianism.

Another woman writer hailing from the upper class is Santha Rama Rau. She is the daughter of Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau who has written her own autobiography titled An Inheritance. Santha Rama Rau happened to get married to an American, Faubian Bowers, probably because of her long stay in the US due to her father's posting at the UNO. In Remember the House, an autobiographical novel, the young heroine Indira's predicament is

the familiar East-West encounter - a theme so frequent that it runs across the entire gamut of modern IWE - from Raja Rao's Serpent and the Rope to Amitav Ghosh's Shadow Lines. The character of the mother who has renounced material possessions and that of the Malayalee headmaster are unrealistic. Indira, of course, is Santha herself. This malady of our female novelists to talk of their romances in nubile years and their marital maladjustments is the most dreary part of their fiction - to wit, Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury, Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer, Nayantara Sahgal's The Day in Shadow, Bharati Mukherjee's Wife, Kamala Das's Alphabet of Lust and so on. In the case of Rau's second novel, The Adventuress, which is incidentally her last, the protagonist is a Philippino girl and the locale, Japan, neither of which are of any particular interest to us, being outside the scope of IWE. Her contacts have taken her now to the TV and film world. She was given the offer to write the screenplay for David Lean's Passage to India; and also for Malgonkar's The Devil's Wind.

Nayantara Sahgal(1927-), the daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's first cousin, spent her childhood in Anand Bhavan, Allahabad, the grandiose ancestral home of the Nehrus, built by her grandfather, the late Motilal Nehru. She was brought up in an atmosphere of total luxury. After 1947, when Nehru became the prime Minister, her mother was given a series of ambassadorships to the UK, USA, USSR and UNO. The daughter travelled along with the mother and made lifelong contacts with the foreign media, publishing houses and world-renowned authors - especially in the USA and the UK. All these

things have helped her in her career as an author - opportunities denied to an ordinary mortal. Her novels may not have been noticed in the normal course by our teaching faculty but for the fact that she belongs to the Nehru family.* Even her Sahitya Akademi award could be viewed in the same light. Author of eight novels, her work suffers from a pronounced cultural cringe and she always writes with an eye on the western audiences. As an imaginative person, her epistemology is woefully scanted - generally, the politician in power and the high bureaucrat figure as characters in her fictive domain.

Anita Desai(1937-), born of a German mother and a Bengali father, educated in Miranda House, is the wife of a prosperous Gujarati industrialist. She appears to shift her residential premises between Bombay and Delhi. It is likely that she also has her own accommodation in the third big metro, Calcutta, which is her locale in Voices in the City. She is a mother of four daughters and the family vacations in the hills during summers. Three of the hill-stations which can be identified from her novels are Kasauli, Kalimpong and Darjeeling; and also, probably, Matheran and Khandala near Bombay. She also makes frequent trips overseas, specially Britain. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Most

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* Likewise Nehru's sister, Krishna Huthi Singh, makes her appearance in M.K.Naik's literary history even with her single ignorable novel, Maura (Naik, 1982 : 246).

of her books have been first published in the UK(Peter Owen and Heinemann - both London publishers). She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi.

In an essay titled 'The Indian Writer's Problems', besides disclosing the reason as to why she chose to write in English, Anita Desai said, "I started writing stories in English at the age of seven and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why" (Desai, 1982 : 223). Again, "It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels" (p. 225). So much for the actual world of Anita Desai which is elitist in the extreme.

Author of eight novels, though her settings are real and described deftly, the world peopling them appears to be made up of neurotics and psychotics; the hallunication-demented Maya in Cry The Peocock; the depressive-manic Monisha in Voices In The City; the schizophrenic Sarah and Adit in Bye, Bye, Blackbird; the family-estranged Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer; the self-fantasizing Nanda Kaul and the deranged Raka in the Fire in the Mountain; the irrational, egocentric Bim and her retarded younger brother, Baba, in Clear Light of Day. Inhabiting her world is like lodging within the precincts of a mental hospital. Yet a host of critics have gone loony in the claustrophobic wards of her fiction. How a female History teacher of Hindu College, Bim, keeps mouthing lines from Tennyson and Eliot, strains one's credulity. In the capital, which boasts of some of the most prestigious colleges in the country,

one rarely comes across a teacher of English who routinely declaims English poetry, leave alone a teacher of History.

Both her mode of perception and her techniques of narration are wholly westernised. Her characters seem to be lifted from Catherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolfe; and their behavioural aberrations echo the voices of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Her influences, besides these, are Kafka and Camus.

Both Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal show a more colonised mind than many other IWE novelists. Take for example, In Custody(1984). The book is dedicated to one Alicia Yerburgh. It is prefaced by two lines from Wordsworth's poem 'Rob Roy's Grave'. The jacket is illustrated by Leo Duff and the design is by Robin Rout. On the back of the jacket appear reviews of Clear Light of Day from Allan Massie of The Scotsman, from Victoria Glendinning of the Sunday Times, from Blake Morrison of the Observer and from Elizabeth Berridge of the Daily Telegraph. Knowing that the British public is generally not fond of reading novalists of Indian origin except perhaps Rushdie who has become controversial, no newspaper is going to waste its precious news-space for review of books by Indians unless the author goes out of her way to exhort and pester them from time to time.

Her latest novel,Baumgartner's Bombay(1988), was written at Girton College, Cambridge, on a year's Fellowship there. Again, the novel is prefaced by lines from T.S.Eliot's 'East Coker'. The Acknowledgment itself makes interesting reading:

"I wish to acknowledge my debt to Professor Alex Aronson and Sir Denis Forman for reading Chapter 4 and making many helpful

comments and suggestions; to Sybil Oldfield of the University of Sussex for providing me with much detailed information, and to Alicia Yerburgh for her patience and sympathy with yet another book." (Desai, 1988 : 5)

Further, its jacket announces that Clear Light of Day(1980) and In Custody(1984) were both shortlisted for the Booker Prize and The Village by the Sea won the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction in 1982.

Obviously, Desai writes with an eye on British awards and her cuisine is for the palate of the foreign audiences. One doubts if she considers the educated Indian as a worthy reader. Her social mixing at various levels - academic, publishing, literary - needs as much attention as her novels for correct assessment of her work. Her creative act and personal life is a closed book, and deliberately so: "To make it public, to scrutinize it ... is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder. It is something that must remain secret and silent ..." (Desai, 1982 : 223-224). On the one hand, she wants to distance herself from the critics and readers as far as her personal life goes (a vital aspect in the evaluation of IWE); yet, on the other hand, she adopts all strategies to keep herself in the limelight(an instance in point is her reappearance at 'Meet The Author' forum convened on 14 June 1992 by Sahitya Akademi at the India International Centre. The event was dutifully reported in Times of India dated 18 June 1992 by one Ms M.S.Roy).

Almost similar to Anita Desai is the case of Nayantara Sehgal. The cover of Plans for Departure is illustrated by Gwyneth Jones. On the back of the cover are extracts of the novel's reviews in The Times Literary Supplement, the Guardian and the Cosmopolitan. Her Rich Like Us is published under a grant from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C. The cover is designed by Peter Dyer. On the jacket's posterior are excerpts from New York Times Book Review, The Times, and recommendation by Benjamin Brown, Director, Center For International Affairs, Harvard University.

Who is Nayantara Sehgal writing for? At the end of the novel is the Glossary of such ordinary Indian words as Arya Samaj, ashram, bhangra, chappati, dal, chowkidar, dhobi, hai hai!, ICS, jalebiss, katori, kirtan. This is what is implied by 'cultural cringe' - term used while referring to her fiction. It is surprising that monographs and critical essays on these women novelists, written by teachers of English such as Jasbir Jain, Viney Kirpal, Usha Bande, R.K.Dhawan, M.K.Bhatnagar, Malashri Lal and so on are generally adulatory in nature - a sad reflection of the Indo-English critical scene. Even Shakespeare was adversely criticised by Johnson; and Keats, denounced by Lockhart. Unfortunately, the nature of my dissertation imposes constraints in dealing with these two novelists more exhaustively. At a later date, I intend to take up full-length studies to explode the mythical stature of these two pedestalled deities.

The relics of British memsahibs continue to survive in the guise of spouses of senior IAS, IFS and Service Officers. But

some of them taking to creative writing in English as a fashionable avocation is a phenomenon fraught with dangerous consequences in the context of a developing society. To begin with, we have Nergis Dalal, a brigadier's wife, a journalist-novelist who has spent all her life in a spacious bungalow in Dehra Dun. Out of her leisurely confines have emerged four novels - Minari, Two Sisters, The Inner Door and The Girl from Overseas. All four can be categorised as pulp with the usual masala of sex, foreigners, godmen and sylphs from high society.

Coming from the same class are two more Generals' wives, Shakuntala Shrinagesh and Veena Paintal. The former has only one book to her credit, The Little Black Box, an Anita Desai kind of psychological novel, a rather unconvoncing account of a rich woman's last days in a hospital. Veena Paintal resides in South Delhi with the usual trappings of meretricious bourgeois living. Talking about her work she says:

> "I have written books about the educated upper middle class women - stripping away the facade of chiffon sarees and cocktail parties - to delve into their lives and personalities and their particular struggles." (Paintal, 1982 : 202)

The five novels in which the lady has sought to expound this theme are Serenity in Storm, Link in the Broken Chain, An Autumn Leaf, Spring Returns and Midnight Woman. When mediocrity applies itself to creative tasks it generally makes a mess of it. In the case of Paintal, the influence of Hindi films is all-pervasive with crude and sensational bed-scenes, and contrived situations thrown in. Her cliche-ridden language and general lack

of command induces the reader to lay off after a dozen pages or so.

Wife of a senior IFS officer, Rama Mehta, has written just one novel Inside the Haveli which deals with the private lives of Rajput women behind their latticed windows('jharokhas') - a theme which has been tackled exhaustively by the writers of the region. Rama Mehta's work appears to have borrowed from it heavily without giving it any new angle or conceptual slant. Not surprisingly, it won the Sahitya Akademi award for 1979 when the writer's husband, Jagat Mehta, was the foreign secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs.

Two IAS/IFS officers turned writers are Suniti Namjoshi and Nina Sibal. Ms Namjoshi has left the Service and is now settled in a secluded cottage in Devon, UK. Nina Sibal, member of the Indian Foreign Service, has been deputy director-general in the ICCR(Indian Council of Cultural Relations), New Delhi. The haut monde has been monopolising the ICCR since its inception. Namjoshi's Feminist Fables and Sibal's Yatra, both inconsequential creative productions, have been published by the ever-inviting Women's Press, Britain.

That the antecedents of a writer must be impeccable seems to be one of the yardsticks for getting published from Penguin, India. If you happen to the daughter of a Minister you have more than an even chance - as proved by Kavery Bhatt's novel The Truth (Almost) About Bharat. Her dad was in Lal Bahadur Shastri's cabinet, we are told, and she went to Leeds to get her FRCS. Readers, on the basis of this are assured that they are staring at

a masterpiece - penned, that too, by a practising surgeon. The Ministers have a clout even with foreign publishers for there is the classic example of H.R.Gokhale(a onetime Minister of Law and Social Justice) who begot a female child who grew up into the author of Paro(Chatto and Windus, 1984). Yes, we are speaking of Namita Gokhale. A highly flavoured tale of the passions and jealousies of a group of North Indian upper-middle class women, written in a racy magazine style, Paro's erotic content and frank language came as a welcome shower to the parched Indian reader. Sex sells even in India, and sells well, as David Davidar, the Penguin editor may tell you when talking of Shobha De. But of that later.

Gita Mehta, daughter of J.B.Patnaik(the long-staying Congress-I Chief Minister of Orissa), now an NRI, is the author of two novels. Media coverage is easy for these women because they are news-worthy. Her first book Karma Cola related to the cult of flower-children. At that time she had married Sonny Mehta, the Sanawar and Cambridge educated editor of Picador and so Karma Cola sold well. Her second book Raj was brought out by Jonathan Cape when hubby moved on as Editor to A.Knopf - one of the biggest publishing houses of America based in New York. But the wife's book was nothing more than a tourist guide to the colonial India - replete with Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, Delhi Durbar, polo matches, viceregal balls and the topics of Sati and court intrigues thrown in as diversions. The book proved one thing - mediocrity is inherent among the upper classes.

Sonny Mehta's Knopf sometimes acts as a bucket to the tears of the lachrymose expatriate who is nostalgic for Mother India. Indira Ganesan, in The Journey(Alfred A Knopf Inc., 1990), recreates the memory of her South India childhood contained within her immigrant experience in America. If she chooses writing as a weapon against the threat of losing her identity, she blunts it by her self-conscious approach where plain dosa with sambhar metamorphoses into golden fried rice pancakes with lentil sauce; or chimps atop a frangipani turn into sacred monkeys on the holy jasmine tree. These publications insult the intelligence of the Indian reader.

Indira Mahindra of the house of Mahindra & Mahindra, the Jeep Manufacturers, got Bodley Head to publish her novel The Club - a narrative of mushy games of romance played among the Whites and the Browns with exotic Ooty as the backdrop.

The case of Bharati Mukherjee is diametrically opposite. An upper class Bengali woman, who first married and then jettisoned her 'desi' man, now shares her home and hearth with a Canadian author, Clark Blaise. A domiciled American, she asserts that she has come into her own as a writer by her ability to transcend her Indian past. On more than one occasion she disclaims herself as an Indian writer specially after she bagged the American National Book Critics Circle Award, 1988, for her collection The Middleman And Other Stories. She has even gone on record saying that of all the visitors Indians are the least welcome as they can never assimilate western mores. A lot of her foreign friends, she asserts have complimented her for her adaptability in internalising the occidental mode of living. Perhaps, she is the only American in New York now!

Despite all this, not a few of our campus teachers keep writing on her fiction and ingratiate themselves whenever she tours India to promote the sales of her books for, we may not be aware, even expatriate Indian writers are not widely read overseas - either in the UK or in the USA. Ironically, they are sold and 'taught' most here.

A journalist who rose from the lower middle class to wealth and fame(or notoriety) as a writer is Shobha Rajadhyaksha. Through sheer talent and hard work she managed to get into the weekly columns of all national dailies, and then branched out on her own editing Celebrity, Society and Stardust magazines replete with gossip of Bollywood and the top corporate world - facilitated by her two marriages, first to an industrialist, Mr Kilachand, and then to another one, Mr De. Her three novels to date are Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights and Two Sisters(all Penguin, 1989, 1991 and 1992). The first two may be seen as an indictment against the Bombay high society droves of viscerotones, their promiscuous life-styles, their vulgarity and professional corruption. While depicting this segment of people she employs the metro's bilingual bazaar English for the entire length of the book in a rather innovative style. In her avoidance of hackneyed themes such as East-West encounter, alienation, expatriate experiences, withdrawal and loneliness and marginalised elitist encounters, she is somewhat of a trend setter. Further, being herself a part of the nouveau riche, her stance of an insider-outsider comes as a breath of fresh air.

Chapter VI

THE LITERARY OLIGARCHY: CONTEMPORARY MALE NOVELISTS

In an essay titled 'The Novelist As Teacher' by Chinua Achebe, he poses the query, "What does society expect of its writers?" (Achebe, 1965 : 201-5). Later on in the same essay, he, being a novelist himself, answers the question in the context of developing Africa. The reply he gives is not so succinctly worded but in essence it asserts that the contemporary writer in Africa cannot be excused from the task of educating and regenerating his readers. Obviously then, writing for one's pleasure and entertainment, in the third world scenario, amounts to a meaningless whim.

Coming closer home, what have the male novelists handed to us in the recent decades? The clutch of writers who have surfaced on the contemporary literary scene make somewhat this kind of composite profile: he is English-speaking, blue-blooded, may be Doon school-St. Stephen's-Oxbridge-Ivy League educated, western oriented, pro-market, self-confident bordering on arrogance, globally inclined, metro-type.

A close examination of their lineage is traceable to their progenitor, Khushwant Singh. It may seem to be an unconventional approach, but in the general atmosphere prevailing (Cf. Chapter IV), excavating the past and the personal history of the Indian writers in English becomes the most vital aspect in evaluating their work - a facet that is generally ignored, perhaps

deliberately, while prescribing or reviewing or alluding to this flock.

One of the two sons of Sir Sobha Singh, the tycoon contractor and builder of the South and North Blocks at Vijay Chowk, Rajpath, Khushwant Singh was literally born with a silver spoon in his mouth in 1915. He went to Modern School and later to St. Stephen's College and King's College, UK, and then qualified in law as well. His brother joined the Army and retired as a brigadier. Khushwant Singh was appointed as advocate on behalf of the government at Lahore High Court. He took no part in the freedom struggle, did not concern himself with the Quit India movement, nor was he present on the scene when the Partition actually took place. (He was in London at that time, unlike the regional Partition fiction writer Bhisham Sahni, Cf. Chap. III).

Good life and booze came to him early as he himself confesses that during his lawyer-days he related his court experiences of criminal cases to his 'drinking companions'. His affluent background made it possible for him to abandon the legal profession and sail away to England. It is not known how he managed to procure the post of Press Officer for the India Office League under V.K. Krishna Menon in London from where he made his debut as a writer with the publication of his first collection of stories The Mark of Vishnu(Saturn Press, London, 1952). According to him, "The years in London and Ottawa gave me the necessary contacts. Several of my stories appeared in English, Canadian and American magazines."(The Canadian Forum, Saturday Night, Harper's. Underlining mine. Singh, 1982 : 185).

Probably this helped his rather over-rated Train to Pakistan to bag the Grove Press Award. Immediately thereafter, he says, he bought himself a Mercedes Benz; then proceeded to America on a Rockefeller Foundation grant. We might make a mention in passing of some other particulars. All the members of his family are so strategically placed as to do significant spadework in promoting his stature and fame. His son, Rahul Singh, a journalist, was at one time editor of the Indian Reader's Digest; resident editor of Indian Express at Chandigarh; and editor of the Observer, Bombay. His son-in-law, Ravi Dayal was the Manager and Publisher of Oxford University Press for several years. Presently he heads an independent publishing house, Ravi Dayal Publishers. His wife, Ms M.Dayal, Khushwant Singh's daughter, is a senior editor with National Book Trust. Khushwant Singh himself has been the longest serving editor of the Illustrated Weekly of India(1969-1979). When Indira Gandhi returned to power, Khushwant being in her good books, was made a member of Parliament(Rajya Sabha) in 1980 as well as the editor of Birlas' Hindustan Times, the largest circulating paper in the capital. In addition, his columns are syndicated in a number of English and regional newspapers and magazines. He is invited frequently on All India Radio and Doordarshan as guest speaker. Most important, when Penguin Overseas started its publication in India, Khushwant Singh was appointed as their Consulting Editor; and from then onwards he has been the dominant Reader on their panel of selectors. A colourful personality like him has drawn many scribes to his fold - notably among them is Ashok Chopra, Khushwant's proverbial Boswell, promoting his books prominently in the national dailies. Even the present OUP editor, Rukun Advani, has ingratiated himself by a long-winded, heavily over-valued review of Khushwant Singh's

Collected Stories(Indian Express, Aug 20, 1989).

Though both his novels Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale are contrived and unabashed potboilers he has been the subject of a monograph under the well-known Twayne's World Authors Series under the general editorship of Sylvia E. Bowman of Indiana University. The late Vasant Shahane, a noted academic, authored the monograph. The following is a sample of his appraisal of Train to Pakistan:

> "Train to Pakistan is surely part of the march of the novel toward realism, but it also goes beyond it in the area of values, the field so subtly and superbly explored by great novelists such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. It embodies the exploration of new concepts of reality. Train to Pakistan, in spite of its predominantly realistic mores, tends towards prophetic fiction. Paradoxically, it is prophetic because it is so innately realistic. The exploration of the human world and its related values in Train to Pakistan is more profound and more moving than perhaps the most erudite and expert commentary on aspects of twentieth-century civilization." (Shahane, 1972 : 56).

That a crude melodrama has been extolled throughout in such hyperboles was tactfully exposed by Nissim Ezekiel in his 'Book-Talk' on All India Radio, Bombay, reproduced in the Indian P.E.N., July 1975:

> "In less than 200 pages he(Shahane) carries out the objective set by the Twayne's World Authors Series as thoroughly as necessary and desirable, sometimes a little too thoroughly to

> be truly desirable ... Neither novel(Train to Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale), in my opinion, bears up against the strain of such an elaborate interpretation,... The author must be allowed to admire his subject but when it results in heavy over-evaluation one cannot but demur." (Ezekiel, 1975 : 21).

An erotologist gone berserk, Khushwant Singh's latest offering to the public, Delhi, a historical account of the metro through the ages is so inartistic in execution and so embarrassingly prurient as to be unreadable. When questioned as to why there is so much sex, often lurid sex throughout the book, Singh replied, "I write as it comes to me. I am a dirty old man, I will remain a dirty old man and I will write as a dirty old man"(The Sunday Hindustan Times Magazine, January 14, 1990). Yet the book has been a blockbuster because of his widespread contacts overseas with the sikh diaspora in the UK, Canada and the USA.

Khushwant Singh keeps company with big business and industry. Two of his well-known pals - the late Charanjit Singh, proprietor of the 5-star hotel Meridien; and Vinay Bharat Ram, the DCM potentate. Hand in glove with these are his regular visits to the Gymkhana for tennis in the morning and scotch in the evening. He also owns a summer retreat in the form of a palatial cottage at Kasauli hill station - 'Maliks' on the Upper Mall road. No wonder Khushwant Singh concludes his essay, 'Compulsions to Write' with:

> "It has been a rewarding life in more senses than one. I made quite a lot of money; I travelled to all parts of the world (at least twice a year round the globe) with travel and

five-star hospitality taken care of by my hosts. ... To this day when a pretty girl comes up to me to ask for an autograph, my skies are spanned with rainbows. What more can one ask of one's life?" (Singh, 1982 : 186).

Khushwant Singh became the role-model for a school of younger writers who followed him. His coeval, Manohar Malgonkar (1913-), lives in his jungle house in Jagalbet, Karnataka, more or less like the lord of a manor with its usual entourage of grooms, watchmen and domestics. His grandfather was the Diwan of Indore; Jagalbet is his ancestral village in Karnataka jungles where he was brought up among guns and shooting. He began his career as a Big Game hunter for princes and foreigners. He had a short stint in the Army which he left after the war. He wanted to enter politics and contested the 1962 parliamentary election from Karwar constituency, but lost by a narrow margin. He lived on tea plantations and tried his hand at manganese mining as well. All his fictional writing is related to his feudal birth(Princes, The Princess), occupations(Distant Drums, Bandicoot Run, Combat of Shadows), and his interest in history(The Man Who Killed Gandhi, Kanhoji Angrey, The Devil's Wind). In his interview in Gentleman magazine(July 1986), he acknowledges that his books sell mostly in the US and the UK and he writes specially for those audiences. His Princes was selected by the Literary Guild in US and sold a quarter million copies there. His ethos as a writer, it seems, has been moulded by market considerations abroad. Shalimar is a typical example. By his own admission, the novel and the film have fetched

him a lot of money. His amoral portrayal of violence, his uppish stances and surprise-ending technique reinforce this viewpoint. His novel on the Partition A Bend in the Ganges is a kinky treatment of the trauma where violence in all its ramifications becomes an end in itself. He invests his proletarian characters not with a sense of virtue or idealism but with wickedness and brutality inherent in them.

If Malgonkar's novels read like a requiem for the feudal and princely classes who declined after independence, the novels of Arun Joshi(1939-) reflect another elitist concern - the hungers of the souls of the well-heeled. Himself educated in the USA and now director of the Sri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, the author's concerns have been rather egocentric. His first novel The Foreigner borrows its theme from Camus' Outsider; the second, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas has echoes of Maugham's The Razor's Edge; and the third, The Apprentice, owes something to Arthur Miller's All My Sons. How one wishes the present set of officers of the IAS/IFS and the executives do actually acquire the traits of Joshi's protagonists - leaving their jobs, their air-conditioned offices, their houses and their cars to ordinary mortals, and seek their salvation by shining shoes or living among tribals. With the roll of years, however, one senses the loss of idealism even in his writings as borne out by the Last Labyrinth and The City and the River.

V.S.Naipaul, in Area of Darkness, has dwelt at length on Malgonkar's Princes, wherein he generalises that the educated Indian is insensitive to the realities of Indian life, and then

continues in the same vein saying that this is the Indian withdrawal and denial; this is part of the confusion of Indian Anglo India. The upbringing of the contemporary Indian writer in English has affected his epistemology where his eclectic microcosm becomes the universal macrocosm. The nature of reality that he portrays is partial, anaemic and marginalised frequently shaped by his jaunts abroad and international vocations and assignments. Of such a mould is a globe-trotting Bengali writer, Romen Basu, who has his 'modest' abode on Amrita Sher-Gill Marg, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi, at a stone's throw from the India International Centre. Not accidentally, the gentleman has been associated with the United Nations for thirty-five years or so and has spent a couple of decades in New York. He is the author of nine novels and three collections of stories. And let us see what are the primary themes of his novels.

In Your Life To Live(1972) he tells the story of a Bengali youth settled in New York falling in love and marrying a Muslim girl hailing from Lucknow. In A Gift of Love(1976) a Bengali from Calcutta goes to London and has an affair with an English girl, Shirley, a one-time call girl turned barmaid. In Candles and Roses (1978), one Samir Sen is shown going to Paris where he falls in love with Monique, a French girl. Samir, incidentally, is a married man whose wife is in Calcutta. The wife Pramila comes to Paris and then Samir is shown running between the two women, unable to decide whom he wants. Portrait on the Roof has Italy as its setting. Here a Bengali Hindu, Dilip Mitra, gets emotionally entangled with Teresa, an Italian catholic, and the two are united in marriage.

The East-West encounter theme has found another zealous proponent in Romen Basu.

Fiction, it is said, liberates the mind of man; it begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and humane conscience. Taking up another author, Shashi Tharoor, who also claims to be United Nations official and shuttles between Geneva and New York, we find how little he fulfils the axiom. A product of St Stephen's College, who first took up a journalistic assignment with Junior Statesman, Calcutta, and later worked as an overseas scribe for the Gentleman magazine published at Bombay, while he was based at Geneva. He must have found time sitting heavy on his hands to be able to churn two extravaganzas - The Great Indian Novel(Penguin 1989) and Show Business(Viking 1991) - in just two years. A mere exercise in flashiness and gimmickry, The Great Indian Novel fails to take off. Its attempt at a political allegory misfires since it degenerates into a mechanical substitution of contemporary names from India's political history with epic ones from the Mahabharata. Show Business is journalese at its worst purloining liberally from gossip glossies. Reading the novel is like watching a demotic Hindi film with all its slapstick and schmaltz.

Another alumnus of St Stephen's is a Paris based author, Vijay Singh. A couple of years ago he had wangled a berth on UNESCO-sponsored Silk Route cruise round the world hitting the headlines from every port of call proclaiming that he was replicating Marco Polo's voyage. His widely reviewed novel Jaya Ganga(Penguin, 1989) is the story of Nishant and Jaya in Paris. The tale begins

with desertion when Jaya leaves him after an intense and surreal encounter in France. She suggests herself to him as Ganga, the spirit of her country. The protagonist, to realise the missing Jaya fully, comes to India and journeys from Gangotri to Calcutta along the Ganga in a confused state of mind. The two narrative streams - mental and physical, unfortunately, flow in opposite directions and leave one foaming at the mouth.

Somehow the Indian publishers seem to have got wind that the UN boasts of a World Bank of Talented Authors! Or is it that they have hit upon a jackpot to siphon away their pulp into the global net-work of UN libraries run by its multifarious agencies? Along with Romen Basu, Shashi Tharoor and Vijay Singh, two other authors, Anees Jung and Dom Moraes, come to mind with identical connections.

The stage has now come to talk of the three musketeers - Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh and Gopal Gandhi; and about the institution they belong to, which has been trumpeted by the media from time to time. Just as Hindu College occupied a place of prominence in the cultural history of Calcutta in the 19th century, St Stephen's, in the 20th century, has maintained its premier status in the capital - and ironically, by the same elitist strategems(Cf. Chapter I). Its impressive list of alumni include presidents of India, Pakistan and Ethiopia; but its typical product has been the civil servant. Characteristically, they have occupied the seats of power and prestige, with the result that over a period of time, they have seized control of Inlaks, Rhodes, Nehru Scholarships and the like. Although there is a cut-off percentage for admission to

St Stephen's, the rules are bent or violated by introducing extraneous factors and by a farcical interview system, the sole purpose of which has been to somehow wheedle into its portals the scions and daughters of the influential bureaucrats, academicians, editors, politicians and industrialists. Thereafter, on completion of graduation, through a cleverly manipulated system, these privileged offsprings are sent to prestigious universities in Britain (Oxford and Cambridge) and the USA. Here again, though there are public notices circulated for minimum eligibility for securing scholarships, it is the interview or a series of them that seal the candidate's fate.

Generally speaking, this blue-blooded progeny opts for social sciences, humanities and liberal arts - economics, sociology, history, journalism, law, linguistics, and literature. There is a wide scope for subjectivity and arbitrariness in selection for scholarship in all these subjects - something which has been openly admitted by many Delhi University teachers.* The scholarship scene in the pure and applied sciences is quite the opposite, however,

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* I happened to attend a meeting of the Oxford and Cambridge Society of India held on 17 Jan 91 at the Teen Murti Auditorium in honour of Dr Williams, the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University. After his lecture, two speakers from the audience made observations that only the elitist class from developing nations like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh made its way to Oxford and Cambridge. Secondly, almost all these students were from the humanities streams, and perhaps, the method of selection was not above board. Dr Williams, in reply, acknowledged that in England, too, there was a powerful oxbridge mafia that controlled admissions to its portals.

because of the JEE(Joint Entrance Examination) admission system into the IITs which permits a hardworking candidate though from a non-elitist background, to compete and qualify. Ever since Science and Engineering subjects have been introduced into the Civil Service Exams, the JEE-IIT students have been the toppers in IFS-IAS list where the Stephanians compete alongside. The common battlefield of the Civil Service Exams, therefore, has proved to be an acid test of comparative merit. The myth that St Stephen's is the nursery of the IFS-IAS, stands exploded.

An IAS-Stephanian, Upamanyu Chatterjee, has come to be widely known by his first novel English August: An Indian Story(Faber and Faber, London, 1988). It seems virtually inconceivable that Red Tape might one day turn a heretic red to express what one scarcely believed it capable of feeling - a healthy disgust for its own service and distaste for the power at its command. It calls to mind the Imperial Police Service's Orwell's Shooting an Elephant. But there the comparison ends. Orwell resigned his service to carry out his convictions(Cf. Chapter III); and Chatterjee proceeds to UK to become the University of Kent's writer-in-residence on a Fellowship jointly offered by the Charles Wallace India Trust and the British Council, enabling the beneficiary to write, travel in Britain, give readings and meet other writers - while still on loan from his parent service, the IAS(British Council Newsletter, Sep 1991). Contrast Orwell's intellectual honesty with the native's tartuffery. In one case, the coloniser conflates his act of writing with his act of living. In the other, the colonised severs his act of writing from his act of living.

Perhaps Faber and Faber has published English August for more than one reason. The book is written in an irreverant tone not only about the IAS but about all sections of society - India baiting is an aspect British publishers look for. Secondly, it is littered with scatology of the public school dormitory - a feature not unrelished by western readership. On his visit to India for the 24th Congress of International Publishers' Association, Peter Meir, President, Penguin International, remarked, "I can't understand why Indians find it more prestigious to be published abroad than in their own country. ... I think that Indian writers should practise nationalism instead of just talking about it." (The Sunday Times of India, February 2, 1992).

A literary yuppie of note is the Stephanian Amitav Ghosh who has managed to obtain a consistently good press both for The Circle of Reason(Hamish Hamilton, London, 1986) as well as The Shadow Lines(Ravi Dayal, 1988). Closely connected with the IFS gentry, he proceeded to Oxford for a doctorate in Social Anthropology after his graduation. He was later appointed as a lecturer in Delhi School of Economics. Presently, he is out of the country on an assignment, not connected with sociology, but with Creative Writing Program, at the University of Texas, USA. It is a moot point how much the Delhi School of Economics in the capital has made use of him as a teacher in Sociology!

The only way to achieve universality, said T.S.Eliot, is through the intense realization of the local. Neither The Circle of Reason nor The Shadow Lines have fixed settings. In the former, we move between Calcutta and Lalpukur and then on to Mahe, Al Ghazira,

Algeria and Sahara. In the latter, the story meanders between Calcutta, Delhi, London, Dhaka, Africa and Sri Lanka; and often the locations are caught in the middle of a crisis. The foreignness and the jet-set living style of Ghosh is manifested through these works which is further corroborated by his latest work, part of which is enacted in Kuwait and Iraq.

The structure of The Circle of Reason is ostensibly split in three - Satwa, Rajas, Tamas. But on a closer scrutiny it appears that the three parts are separate entities and have been artificially welded into a single novel. The author, in a splurge of exhibitionism, crams the pages with smatterings from phrenology, anthropology, microbiology and metaphysics to Jamdani craft, sewing and weaving. The methodology is highly questionable since this undigested material was picked up at random from tomes off library shelves in easy access, he being an academic with loads of free time on his hands. At the same time there is a multiplicity of personae in the novel, very few of whom are realistically actualised. Since Ghosh is rather incompetent in handling, bumping them off at the end of each section is the easy way out - Balaram, Toru Debi, Maya and Rakhal at the end of Satwa; Hajj Fahmy, Prof Samuel, Abu Fahl, Zaghloul, Rakesh, Karthamma and Chunni at the end of Rajas; and Kulfi in Tamas. Also within each section there is an exclusive delineation of characters which are not interlinked: Budhadeb Roy and his clan including his five sons, Shombhu Debnath and Parboti Debi(Section I); Balarama's childhood friend Gopal(Section II); the Vermas and Mishras(Section III). His portrayal of female characters is jejune and strains credulity. Toru Debi's imbecile behaviour,

for example, who simply cannot divine Parboti Debi's motive of visit on the day of her elopement; Kulfi, Karthamma and Chunni are shadowy and insubstantial. Mrs Devonshire's translation of Rene Vallery-Radot's Life of Pasteur, being used as a unifying motif between Sections I and III, is naive in the extreme. Gunter Grass has used a midget in The Tin Drum; and Salman Rushdie, a man with a long snout in his Midnight's Children as central characters. Imitating Grass and Rushdie, Ghosh brings in Alu with large head. Such gimmickry only reduces Alu to caricature. Even otherwise, Alu bears little resemblance to a living character. He is merely a victim of Ghosh's social anthropology research.

The Shadow Lines with all its poignancy ends up as another marginalised tear-jerker with its much-flogged East-West theme. The book opens with the narrator breathing down upon the readers' necks with a discourse of high-profile origin(fiction or real life?):

1. "In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib." (p. 3)
2. "Tridib's father was a diplomat, an officer in the Foreign Service. He and Mayadebi were always away, abroad or in Delhi;... Of Tridib's two brothers, Jatin-kaku, the elder, who was two years older than Tridib, was an economist with the UN. He was always away too, somewhere in Africa or South-East Asia, with his wife and his daughter Ila, who was my age. The third brother, Robi who was much younger than the other two,... lived with his parents wherever they happened to be posted until he was sent away to boarding

school at the age of twelve." (pp.5-6)

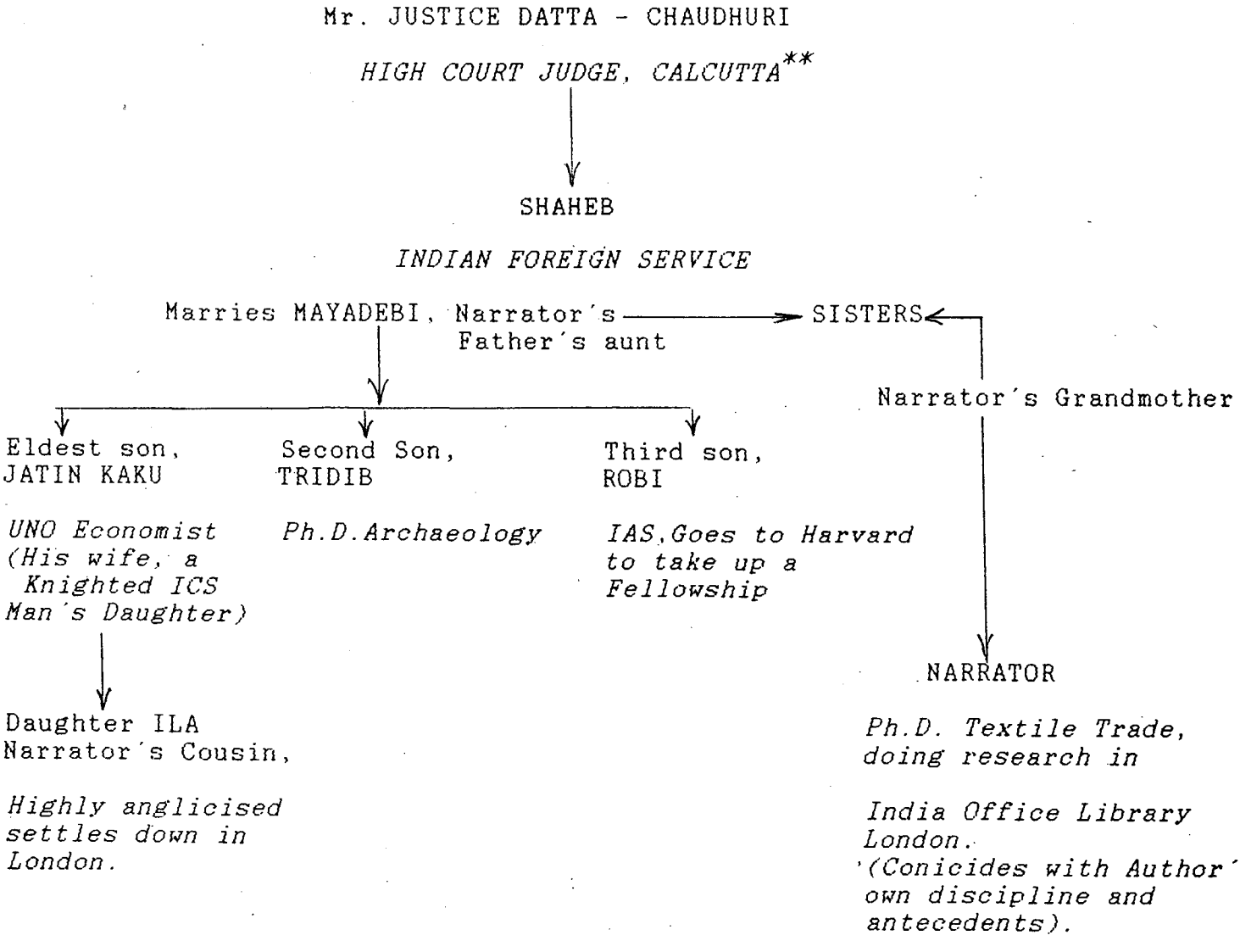
3. "Someone would remark knowingly that he had heard that Tridib's family was rich and powerful, that his father was a diplomat, the son of a wealthy judge, and his brother was a brilliant economist who had a job with the UN and lived abroad." (p.10)
4. "I went to England on a year's research grant, to collect material from the India Office Library, where all the old colonial records were kept, for a Ph.D. thesis on the textile trade between India and England in the nineteenth century." (p,13). (Cf. Circle of Reason, ostentatious advertences to Jamdani craft and handloom weaving. One may recall Ghosh is a lecturer in Social Anthropology.)
5. "Robi was stopping by in London on his way to Harvard. He was on leave from his job in the Indian Administrative Service, so that he could take up a Fellowship in administration and public affairs for six months." (p.23)

The information about the narrator's kith and kin gleaned from the text has been condensed into a diagrammatic representation (see next page) which brings out the exclusive background of the characters. (All references are from The Shadow Lines , Ravi Dayal Publishers, New Delhi, 1988).

Notice how the narrator's propinquity closely resembles the family trees of upper-class Bengali writers of the 19th century dealt with in Chapter I. This is the segment of society that seizes the cultural reins of a nation and rides roughshod over the proletariat as brought out in Chapter IV. This very group then writes

THE NARRATOR'S FAMILY GROUP IN SHADOW LINES

(GOVERNING ELITE AS THE CULTURAL ELITE : THE NOVEL AS PARADIGM)



** Exclusiveness Code shown in Italics

the cultural and literary history of the nation proclaiming to the future generations as if they were the true inheritors and perpetrators of belle lettre and fine arts.

Ghosh's vision seems to be imbued with imperialistic overtones whether talking of the cook Ram Dayal, or the Sinhalese Ayyah Lizzie, or describing the rioting Dhaka crowd. He wields his intimate knowledge of the topography of London as if to shoot down the never-sailed-abroad native reader and thereby establishes a sort of literary hegemony. It is not difficult to presume the colonial eye these novelists are invested with - the same eye that George Orwell described of a white man while viewing our humanscape:

> "Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years and nobody notices when they are gone ... In a tropical landscape one's eye takes in everything except the human beings. It takes in the dried-up soil, the prickly pear, the palm tree and the distant mountain but it always misses the peasant hoeing at his patch." (Orwell, 1950 : 143)

It is astonishing that we have been snowed under an analanche of euphoric reviews by Khushwant Singh(Hindustan Times, Nov 5,1988, 'With Malice Towards One and All'column); and the Oxbridge Girish Karnad(Express Magazine, Dec 18, 1988) on The Shadow Lines which is so marginalised in experience. Ghosh is seized with the Rushdie-itch making a familiar beeline for New York Times and Granta and manufacturing formula fiction with an eye for awards -

W H Smith, Whitbread and the Booker. Commercial considerations play not an inconsiderable part in these writers' choice of ideas, themes, concerns, styles and even sensibility. In the global scenario, internationalised fiction is an attractive consumer durable. Do we expect novelists like Ghosh, then, to give any wholesome direction to Indian Writing in English?

The third musketeer on our list, Gopal Gandhi. A Stephanian, an IAS, and a joint secretary in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, to boot. (He has recently resigned from the IAS to take up a more lucrative and prestigious assignment as Director, Nehru Centre, London). His novel, Refuge (Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1989), one more illustration of internationalised fiction, has an Italian Jesuit priest, a British medical doctor and wife, and an Austrian Buddhist monk. The hard-to-digest plot consists of an Oxford-educated Sri Lankan youth falling in love with an illiterate Tamil coolie girl. The book is interspersed with digressions on Philosophy, music, bird-watching, on the one hand; miasmic and morbid musings, on the other. The westernised boy goes through a crisis of identity and disintegrates in the vitiated atmosphere; while the uneducated girl, a victim of man-made misery, reveals resources of character. At several places in the text there are overtones empathising with the downtrodden. It is as if the writer from the centre (Rashtrapati Bhavan) is deliberately trying to speak the language of the periphery. The picture that emerges is unnatural, forced and unconvincing.

Lesser known, but of the same ilk, are a few other scriveners screaming for attention. Gurcharan Das, a Harvard graduate and presently the Chairman and Managing Director of Procter

and Gamble, the American multinational for chemicals and toiletry, is the author of the play Larins Sahib and a novel A Fine Family (Penguin, 1991). History and biography have been the staple of the affluent IWE writer and Das is no exception. He also figures as a member on the Board of Directors of the Times of India, Portfolio Management Scheme. T.M.Murari, another corporate boss with an American MBA, has authored Enduring Affairs(Viking, India) - a slapstick drama of politicians, gangsters and movie stars with the action divided between Tamil Nadu and the USA.

A Strange and Sublime Address(Heinemann, UK), by Amit Chaudhuri, has won the 1991 Betty Trask Award, whatever that means. The thirty year old author has lived in England since his under-graduate days. He is now working on a D.Phil in English at Oxford. Though a Bombayite, the author makes his alter-ego, Sandeep in the novel, recapitulate nostalgically the sights and sounds of Calcutta. The reviewer, Mandira Sen, raphsodises about the lyricism of Chaudhuri's metroscapes. Satyajit Ray, probably the greatest visual chronicler of the city, who never opted to leave Calcutta and was familiar with it from Chowringhee to Keorala burning ghat, somewhere says that even he knew the metro but partially. Can we then bite the bait?

It appears that light plays no mean part in his writing. Chaudhuri opines, 'The light is different in Europe, the climate emphasises to a stranger that he is an alien. It is conducive to lives led behind closed doors. Such private lives have produced a Kafka or a Camus. The Indian experience of light, of windows and doors thrown open, of streets spilling into houses and vice versa, is onducive to something different.' ... So, not only must India

be imported to us from America and Britain but even the nature of Indian reality must be bought by us as some kind of 'phoreen' gizmos. The novelist writes from Oxford, has all the benefits of wealth, education and western culture, and then drives the last nail into the coffin by proclaiming that he is more Indian than any Indian in India. Little wonder that his next novel, set in Oxford, reflects on India and Indian Classical music. The hype occupies a whole page in the Times of India(Courtesy Anikendranath Sen, Sunday Review Editor, and the Reviewer, Mandira Sen, Times of India, 22 Sep, 1991).

The foregoing chain of these lolly-laden novelists proves that single-minded pursuit of fame has the same effect as the single-minded pursuit of money. It impoverishes the mind, it desiccates the heart, and it shrivels the imagination. In a nation comprising of 70% illiterates and half of them living below poverty line, the triviality and inconsequential nature of their specious writings comes into focus even to an uninitiated reader. What we have amidst us is a race of egocentric, purblind scriveners writing within the ambit of their blinkered vision. For, if a writer has his eyes wide open he cannot but choose to write, and write honestly of most of what he sees. And in an Indian context, we know, what that implies.

Chapter VII

POETRY OR HYPE : THE YUPPYISM IN VERSE

Once upon a time poetry was deemed to be a discipline which taught you to enjoy living in poverty. Kabir, Tulsi, Mira, Rahim, Raskhan and the Sufis come to mind. Then there were poets in this century itself, in Russia, for example, who voiced their protests at being muffled and suffered for it. Essenin took his life two years after the October Revolution and Mayakovsky shot himself eleven years later, writing in his last poem that he had "crushed under foot the throat of my very own song." The Stalinist era unleashed its fury on Russia's three greatest poets - Pasternak, Akhmatova and Mandelstam. The first was denounced as a pig, the second was reviled as "a half-whore, half-man" and the third had his body and spirit broken in a Siberian labour camp. In a third world nation like Nigeria, the poet Okigbo died fighting in the Biafran insurrection. We have also the example of Wole Soyinka who spent two years in prison for speaking against the Nigerian military rulers before becoming the Nobel Laureate. Vaclav Havel, the Czech poet, for several years masterminded the underground resistance against the communist regime before he was chosen President of the new Czech Republic after the Communists were overthrown.

Recounting the above autobiographical details of a few foreign bards is not wide off the mark when you start talking of the present-day Indian poet in English. If Khushwant Singh is the

man who started a sewer of fetid novelists which turned into the Najafgarh drain, Dom Moraes is the man who dug out the cesspool of Indian poetry in English and widened it into an effluent lake. The ministrels overseas were recognised as much for their sacrifice as for their songs. In fact, their songs went with their sufferings, for isn't it that those who write are those who suffer? In our context, recognition comes from one's birth, connections and wealth.

The case of Dom Moraes is the most typical example. Son of the late Frank Moraes, a one time editor of Times of India (from 1950 to 1957) and Indian Express(from 1958 to 1972), Dom(1938-) lived in England for several years and took British citizenship in 1961. Being the son of an editor who ran two national dailies for more than two decades and who was close to the Nehru family, getting into print or being educated at Oxford as an undergraduate was no great matter. For all the favours conferred on him by this land his sense of gratitude becomes quite visible when he says, "I am Indian by birth, but I have lived in England since I was a boy and I hold a British passport. The historical accident of British rule in India worked on my family so that I lived an English life there and spoke no Indian language ... So English was my outlook, I found I could not fit in India. When eventually I came to England, I fitted in at once." (Moraes, 1971 : 183-4).

Through the enormous contacts his father had with the British media he was able to squeeze his poems into many British magazines and journals; and on a personal basis cultivated friendship with George Barker, Stephen Spender and W.H.Auden. Barker recommended his first manuscript of poems to be published

by David Archer of Parton Press who liked to publish young poets. A Beginning somehow got him the Hawthorndon Prize and he never looked back thereafter - hogging the limelight even till today for he now has the weekly Sunday Review column Acquisitions.

A glimpse of his lifestyle may be discerned through an extract from the column: "At one time , when I travelled widely through the world, I lived almost exclusively in hotels. Because of the nature of my employers, first a prosperous magazine out of Hong Kong, and later the United Nations, these were usually five star hotels, ..." (Room with a View, Times of India, Sunday Review, 19 Jan 1992). Further, the article goes on to praise the ambience and the service of the five-star Leela Kempinski near Sahar Airport, Bombay, which is frequented by him and his wife, the actress Leela Naidu. Not only that, his son, Heff, and Nods, the prospective daughter-in-law, often fly from London and rest themselves there. He concludes: "But whatever leftists may say, I like these hotels. They are certainly elitist; but sometimes, I think everyone needs to be elitist, and escapist." (ibid.)

Says Eunice De Souza, "The failure to achieve any sense of identity with the country or even to make any serious attempts in this direction have never, however, stopped Mr Moraes from writing a great deal about this country. He is the son of an illustrious father(this matters in India) and started with high level connections. His works include interviews with Nehru and Mrs Gandhi, the Chogyal of Sikkim whom he refers to by his first name, the Dalai Lama and so on. Unfortunately these connections have given him a fair amount of overconfidence verging on super-ciliousness, and over the years, a tone of increasingly lofty

disdain and petulance. His access to high level contacts has further made him uncritical of himself so that he never stops to wonder whether he is at all adequate to deal with a subject." (De Souza, 1978 : 340).

Truly he has gone berserk while writing his Times of India column presently - just like Khushwant Singh, spewing his utterances on all and sundry with strong predilecions to show off his elevated associations: meetings with the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and Sheikh Suleiman of Saudi Arabia; encounters with Auden, Barker, Larkin and a bohemian Yorkshire verseman Brian Higgins; musings on Oscar Wilde, homosexuality and on sartorial whims of Evelyn Waugh; gossip on Bombay society women; egocentric ramblings on his autobiography, My Son's Father, where he equates himself with Robert Graves, and so on. May be he wants to be entombed in Westminster Abbey as evidenced by the following poem written for Geoffrey Hill, a contemporary British poet:

LIBRARY

(For Geoffrey Hill)

The twigs of my fingers
Shake leafwords down: sound
Of dust falling on silk,
Dust falling on marble
Busts in the library where
We shall finally be embedded:
The hospital for dead poets.

We shall have healed into books
Maybe not read by too many.

Geoffrey, goodbye: four rows of shelves
Separate Hill from Moraes.
We shall have to be borrowed and stamped
And put back in the wrong places
If we are ever to meet.

('Interludes', Later Poems)

Dom Moraes works in the British tradition, as we see. His distaste for all things Indian is proclaimed loud and clear in My Son's Father where he says that the tombs of Greece influenced his poetry more by way of images of kings and burials than the ruins of India; and that the only memory he carries of the Belur temples is not of their architectural beauty, but of the courtyard behind the village full of excrement. His verse is cluttered as much by artifice and narcissism as by Christian symbols and Greek myths. In his Collected Poems(1957-1987) the titles themselves are self-explanatory: 'Cainsmorning', 'Bells for William Wordsworth', 'French Lesson', 'Moz', 'Verses for Peter Levi', 'I M Robert Colquhoun', 'Christmas Sonnets', 'Angel', 'The Laird', 'Two from Israel', 'John Nobody', 'Beldam', 'Fitzpatrick', 'Craxton', 'For Peter', 'Naiad', 'Engrams', 'Munchkin', 'Gabriel', 'Rictus', 'Gladiator', 'Monsters', 'Jason', 'Delilah', 'Sinbad' and 'Merlin'.

Moraes' verse announces a total withdrawal from and denial of the Indian reality. In the words of Chalapati Rau:

> "Writing is close to life, but Indo-Anglians have little to do with life, its lustiness, its blood-thirstiness, its rawness. The Indo-Anglians crawl about like crabs and jellyfish and earthworms of our intellectualism; they are the singers of

self-praise. They are oysters, who may have travelled physically in space, but live in their shells, in metropolitan cities or posh suburban houses, waiting for reviews of their books, which are blurbs, blurbs borrowed from book jackets."
('The Indo-Anglians', The Illustrated Weekly of India, 26 May 1963).

Moraes belongs to the category of the mimic men who wish to be identified with the elite and whose attributes to their own people are in conformity with those of the empire builders and the Western elites, both British and American. To him India is but an important source of income; and the norms of the English literary and social elite, his only source of values. Writers like him find favour in England and America because they do the white man's dirty work without running the risk of being called racial. Also, like many elitist liberals, Moraes is entirely establishment-oriented.

In Three Indian Poets:Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Moraes (OUP, Delhi, 1991), Bruce King calls them "three of the best, best-known and most significant Indian poets who write in English" (King, 1991:1). Just four years ago, in another OUP publication, Modern Indian Poetry in English, the same critic had devoted 18 pages to Ezekiel, 10 pages to Ramanujan along with substantial write-ups on sixteen other poets. Moraes, after a few preliminary remarks, was dismissed in a couple of sentences thus: "... he tends to view the craft of poetry as if it were the construction of an aesthetic object around moments of self pity, hurt, compassion, confusion." (King, 1987 : 109). So much for intellectual honesty!

Serendip (Viking, 1990), his latest volume of poems, comprises of three sections which according to him delve into the

mythical aspects of Sri Lanka, Greece and Sweden. When the publishers asked him to provide an introduction to his new book because it seemed obscure, Moraes charged his imaginary readers with laziness and stupidity asserting that he has not written for an elementary school. Of course not, as these lines testify:

> I was guard of the watchtower,
> A Swedish mile down the fiord.
> The Danes did nothing for years.
> After twenty, they came.
>
> Berserkers with horned helmets,
> Bellaxes, torches flaming.
> The tower, stone, couldn't burn.
> But I could and I did.
>
> ('Barrows', p. 48)

Dom Moraes comes out to be a latter-day Manmohan Ghose whose verse is as sanitized and irrelevant for us as a McDonald hamburger for a jhuggi-jhonpri dweller.

Adil Jussawalla(1940-) is another Bombayite belonging to a bourgeois Parsi family rich enough to send their son for undergraduate education to Oxford. Like Dom Moraes he then sought a job and domicile in England. He failed in these ventures and rather reluctantly returned to India, though not shedding his nostalgia for England. It is manifest in the title of his first book Land's End(Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1962) - a spot in Cornwall in the south of England, jutting into the English Channel. 'Seventeen', the first poem in Land's End, tries to borrow from

Dylan Thomas and Walter de la Mare by exploring the world of childhood:

Time was short
Short time
When a boy
Lived each moment
anew

Now detached, the
Water is spilled
Killed
On rocks
One by one
The lights are snuffed.

The fragmented syntax and absence of any striking image lends it only jerkiness. It is another instance of prose chopped up.

His second book Missing person(1976) was published by Clearing House, Bombay, of which he was himself one of the editors. This book again records feelings of alienation and cultural chaos, and therefore, does not break any new ground. His dilemma of making his final choice for settling down still bugs him. In his article, 'Patterns of Domicile', published in Debonair magazine(February 1988), he says, "Once you cross the black waters, you come back with a pendulum in your head. It never stops swinging between two points of reference - 'here' and 'there'."

No new poetry has emerged out of him in recent years. Besides his upper class Parsi origins, his westernised mode of

living is accentuated by his having a French wife, and friendship with socialites prominent in the publishing and business circles. He is on the editorial staff of a salacious Bombay Monthly, Debonair, the Indian Playboy, which has nude pull-outs as one of its regular features. Obviously, Jussawalla thinks it profitable to swap poetry with prurience.

Pritish Nandy(1947-), who has relinquished the editorship of the Illustrated Weekly of India and has now become the Editor-in-Chief of the Observer Group of publications, Bombay, hails from a big business family based in Calcutta. Notorious for Bollywood connections and life style, his infamous brushes with politicians are only too well known. Before taking on to the Illustrated Weekly he had set up his own Dialogue Publications. Nandy began his meteoric poetic career even before he was twenty. He carved out his path to fame by getting published in obscure American magazines specially the River Run Press of New York. Professionally an advertiser(like Kersi Katrak and Siddharth Kak), he promoted most the sales of one product - his own verse. His Lonesong Street(Poets Press, 1975), a collection of pop song lyrics, is reported to have sold 20,000 copies and has been recorded and made into a film. His poems have become increasingly shorter as if he has nothing more to say, so much so that around 1981 he announced he had stopped writing poetry. Earlier Arnold Heinemann brought out a whole monograph on Nandy

the poet, authored by Subhoranjan Dasgupta.* Hype as a surrogate for poetry never witnessed a bigger boom.

Another poet riding the bandwagon of hype is Dilip Chitre (1938-), son of an editor and a publisher. Claiming to be bilingual, Chitre began writing first in Marathi, then in English. He soon shifted to advertising and painting. His poems first appeared in a Baroda art magazine published by his father, Vrishchik. He also got involved with film-making and turned mobile, undertaking a lot of foreign travel to Ethiopia, Europe and America. He made his presence felt in Bombay by associating himself with Gieve Patel, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar and other Bombay poets. Later he moved to Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, and received establishment patronage founding Bahuvachan magazine along with Jayanta Mahapatra. He was in some way or the other connected with the publications of Pushpanjali(a five-star magazine), Damn You(Mehrotra), Dionysius (Kolatkar), Blunt(Parthasarathy), Poetry India(Ezekiel), and with the Quest magazine. Advertising and art facilitated wide circulation

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* Subhoranjan Dasgupta, an unknown versifier was suddenly brought into limelight by Nandy's anthology Indian Poetry in English Today(Sterling Publishers, 1973), in which he is flaunted as one of the twenty rising names on the poetic horizon. The mystery solved itself later when the same obscure gentleman obliged Nandy(who was only twenty-nine years old then) by writing a monograph on him in 1976.

of his poems which are contained in two volumes - Ambulance Ride (1967, privately published) and Travelling in a Cage (Clearing House, 1980). Using avant garde and experimental techniques, Chitre injected doses of surrealism into his verse:

> The garden, mutely burning
> In various colours, passes
> A flame to the eye -
> Souls are lighted
> On the rose's matchstick.

('Private Poem in a Public Garden')

That Chitre has still not rid himself of the rose motif reveals the stagnation of his imagination. Even in Marathi, his native language, a rose as a flower is scarcely an eloquent poetic symbol among the masses.

Two other poets belonging to the worlds of high profile advertising and journalism are Kersi Katrak and Manohar Shetty. Raised in families devoted to flourishing trade and commerce, their verse is a mirror of their vocations - and for that reason quite trite and shallow. Katrak is married to an Indian brought up in Europe and both of them are highly active in the Bombay's cultural scene - especially theatre and the arts. Quite a few of his poems in his Diversions By The Wayside (Writers Workshop, 1969) border on the banal and the obscene:

> Who would have thought it? A small
> Mishap at lunch. Then this.

Was the water boiled dammit? The salad
Rinsed in permanganate?
Or was the beef infected? Mother after all
Was right. One should eat
At home.

('Dysentery')

Or:

Then we were young and plastered:
But you were twice as high:
And I was a happy bastard
When you opened up my flies.
I was young and had still not mastered
The fact that thighs are thighs.

('A Ballad of Mild Reproach')

Manohar Shetty edited Keynote magazine in Bombay, and later Goa Today at Panaji, Goa. An upstart from the ritzy class, but without much talent, he hosted Bruce King while he was at Bombay and Goa so royally that King devoted seven pages to his slender volume of poems A Guarded Space (New Ground, 1981), pronouncing him as one of the significant new poets. Among the six to whom King's Modern Indian Poetry in English is dedicated, Shetty is one. Shetty's failure to corelate physical detail with specific locale and lack of Indian experience and sensibility mark out his verse as subjectivist flotsam that should not have been published at all

in the first place. The poems speak for themselves:

Today I woke and the sunlight
Wore the same sheen.
Strange that it does not change
To the slackening of my heart-beats.
Strange that I cannot incinerate
Two years that bloomed
And splayed like waves.

('Her Grief')

Or:

Our parting was ordained:
The slur of my moon-shadow
Stained your pure world:
Some wide-eyed clairvoyant foretold
The dark charm of the birthmark
On the left half of your left forearm;

('Invocations')

The credentials of Vikram Seth make impressive reading. Born in Calcutta in 1952 and raised in Patna and Delhi, Seth was sent to Doon School, the Apu Ghar of our plutocracy's kids, and to Tonbridge School, UK, from where he gravitated to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His father had a roaring business in export of

leather goods at Calcutta. The mother, a prominent lawyer-turned judge, is now the Chief Justice of the Himachal High Court at Simla. At Oxford, Vikram Seth opted for PPE(Politics, Philosophy, Economics). In 1975 he obtained admission to Stanford University, USA, for his MA in Economics and has stayed on there ever since, but for a 2 year stay in China at Nanjing University. Book after book the blurbs unfailingly advert to his ongoing Ph.D.(on the economic demography in China) which commenced somewhere around 1977/1978 and is still incomplete.

To date he has published Mappings(Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1981), From Heaven Lake(Chatto and Windus, 1983), The Humble Administrator's Garden(Carcanet Press, UK, 1985), The Golden Gate(Random House, USA, 1986), All You Who Sleep Tonight(Viking India, 1990) and Beastly Tales From Here And There(Viking India,1991).

Four of the six books listed have won some award or the other - From Heaven Lake got him the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award; The Humble Administrator's Garden, the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, Asia section; The Golden Gate, the Sahitya Akademi Award; and All You Who Sleep Tonight was made the Poetry Book Society Choice. With a halo of such acclaim and accolades around an author, a critic who sets out to launch a frontal assault on Seth's work in an Indian context, must run the risk of being scornfully dismissed as a latter-day Don Quixote. But it is worth a try.

Mappings, his first volume of verse has 46 pieces in all - a melange of original poems with translations from Urdu, Hindi, German and the Chinese. Although published in 1981, when he was twenty-eight, there is an air of adolescence that blows through

the body of the work. Calf-love, nostalgia, melancholy are recurrent themes:

> O my generous and exuberant love
> As the slow moon coldly slopes down the sky
> The pines hum to themselves and you to yourself
> And you pass your hands across my face.
> ('Sonnet', p.20)
>
> Dear Madeleine, I dip my Pepperidge Farm
> Cookie into my tea and think of you
> And how you laughed and held me by the arm
> ('To a Fellow-Traveller', p.22)
>
> Down Highway 101 the van
> Hurtles with all the speed it can
> And all the passengers but one
> Have jolted off to sleep. The sun
> ('Home Thoughts from the Bay', p.27)

Not only in thought, but also there is little in terms of phrasing or diction that is new. Only nine out of the four dozen verses have any Indian reference. Probably the twenty-five long years Seth has spent in the West have taken their toll.

The Humble Administrator's Garden shows a similar deficiency. There are three sections in the book - each represented by a tree suggesting the country the poet has lived in: Wutong(China), Neem(India) and Live-oak(California, America). The first about China is made up of fifteen poems occupying 20 pages; the third about America is made up of twelve poems occupying 16 pages; but the second on India is the shortest with six poems

taking up 10 odd pages. An Indian reader naturally has a grouse. To add insult to injury, the Neem section is also the weakest. The verse is uninspired and the observations, commonplace:

> The father sits in bed reading the Indian Express,
> Inveighing against politicians and corruption.
> "India could do so much ..." he says.
> "Even in the time of the British ..." he says.
> "Can you believe it - on every bag of cement -
> And still he continues to be a minister!
> The rot has gone too deep. Let's go for a walk."
> He and the elder son drive to Lodi Gardens.
>
> ('The Comfortable Classes at Work and Play', p.34)

Incidentally, Seth also gives a thumb-nail sketch of his mother's(Justice Leila Seth) official residence on Rajaji Marg in Delhi when she was a judge of the Supreme Court(till 1990). When we take cognisance of the fact that Seth got the Sahitya Akademi award while she was still handing out judgments at the national level a few blocks away, the 'puruskar' may be seen in its true perspective. Being the son of an illustrious mother, this matters in India(Cf. Eunice De Souza's comments with regard to Dom Moraes; and the spectacular rise of Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi). Seth, during his ten long years at Stanford had carefully cultivated the friendships of leading critics, literary agents and the like. So when Golden Gate, a novel in verse set in San Francisco and centring round the lives of Californian yuppies, hit the stands, the blurbs dazzled the readers. In England, the Oxford connection worked and D.J.Enright waxed eloquent. If there was nothing Indian about it,

the fact went unnoticed in our colonised media. The supine academics devoured the stuff and the members of the National Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi crowned the achievement with the award.

Writes Daruwalla:

- you need something foreign about you
else verse cannot sprout from our cowdung soil.

('To Fellow Indian poets', Apparition in April)

The lines are revealing when applied to Seth. What was presaged by Mappings and The Humble Administrator's Garden was proved beyond doubt in the case of The Golden Gate. The promotional fanfare of this book was on an unprecedented scale - the Sunday newspapers, the tabloids and even our Doordarshan let loose a blaze of publicity. Oxford University Press, Indian branch, first distributed it on behalf of Faber and Faber; then bought the copy-rights and published an Indian edition of its own. One opened any magazine and there was Seth's broad grin on the page announcing his literary triumph. The poet may be successful at approximating the American idiom:

These chickenhearted chickenshits
Jerk off their weak and venomous wits (1.14, p.10)

Or:

"We need first off," says Janet dryly,
"A venue to begin from." "What?"
"Your office, John?" she ventures slyly -
"Any nice women?" "Not too hot."
"Any nice guys?" "Oh, come on, Janet." (1.28, p.17)

Yet, as Saleem Peeradina aptly put it:

"In fact, the Bay jargon, West Coast graffiti and Californian fads are often so numerous and obvious that the novel is in danger of sounding dated even while it is being read." (Express Magazine, Aug 10, 1986, 'A Californian Ballad')

And Bruce King has something more private to reveal about our young celebrity in the context of Golden Gate:

"While the feeling of marginality is furthered by his declared bisexuality, it is also the typical perspective of the alien in a foreign society in which for many years you are the observer of natives and their strange, often humorous customs." (King, 1987 : 230).

In All You Who Sleep Tonight the private voice of Vikram Seth is heard all over again. We recognise the lonely man facilely expressing his distress but it moves us not. We recognise in it, too, the peculiar affliction of the privileged living in far away America in opulent surroundings. Is there a need to commiserate with five well-placed, well-fed upper class Indians because they all must die one day - Mr Seth, his brother, sister and parents - as conveyed in the following 8-line poem:

How Rarely These Few Years

How rarely these few years, as work keeps us aloof,
Or fares, or one thing or another,
Have we had days to spend under our parents' roof:
Myself, my sister, and my brother.

All five of us will die; to reckon from the past
This flesh and blood is unforgiving.
What's hard is that just one of us will be the last
To bear it all and go on living.

And, believe it or not, this work was declared the Poetry Book Society Choice for 1990. It will be fruitful here to dwell on the politics of poetry awards in Britain. But before that some revelations on British media tycoon, Robert Maxwell, who died recently in mysterious circumstances. It could well provide a few missing links. Proprietor of the Mirror group of newspapers and the Maxwell Communication Corporation, Mr Maxwell had used hundreds of millions of pounds of pensioners' money to shore up the finances of his private companies. The Maxwell episode sparked off a serious debate on the dismal part played by the government regulatory and investigative authorities and the banks in corporate governances.

Mr Peter Jenkins of The Independent points out that the very same banks who were so liberal towards Mr Maxwell helped close down some 20,000 honest small businesses in the past year. He extends the debate to cover the value system of a society where the elite willingly serves the crooks(In our scenario the Harshad Mehta's case comes to mind where senior officials of RBI, SBI and NHB have colluded with the unscrupulous broker in defrauding the nation). Peter Jenkins, the news analyst, is wonder-struck by the fact that so many Harrovians and Etonians and superior-minded Wykhamists suffered the vulgarities of Maxwell in the noble cause of his turning a dubious million or two in which they could hope

for a share.

But back to the politics of poetry awards which is interlinked. This is what Martin Booth says in his book British Poetry - 1964-84:

> "Unlike any other business, poetry can hype itself with ease. It has built into itself such an old-boy network now that anyone in the know with those in power can be promoted beyond their value. The Poetry Book Society, the literary awards schemes, the National Poetry Centre - all these are controlled not by those writing good verse or publishing it, but by those who have succeeded in getting to the positions of power not through merit but through connections. When you own the phone company, as the saying goes, you listen to the talk and when you own the wires, you can add your own lines." (Booth, 1985:57. Underlining mine).

Elsewhere while castigating the poems of Charles Boyle, an English poet(educated at Oxford and published by Carcanet; like Boyle, Seth has also studied at Oxford and his Humble Administrator's Garden has been published by Carcanet Press), Booth writes:

> "There is little hope for modern British verse if this is considered acceptable for print, and even more astonishingly, Boyle received a Cholmondeley Award in 1981. One wonders what the arbiters were seriously thinking of at the time: possibly, there came into play there some of the old-boy network of editor and judge and publisher* that so undertows our literary scene."
>
> (p.169, underlining mine).

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* Carcanet Press was founded at Oxford in 1968 by Michael Schmidt, its publisher, himself an Oxbridge man.

Continuing further, Booth conjectures:

"Why is it that so many of these young poets, now being hailed high on the mountains of Parnassus, as they'd like to think, write such poor verse? The answer may lie in the fact that, according to the blurbs on the back covers of their books, most of them are British University-educated in recent years and not a few of them are Oxford and Cambridge products."(p.172).

Little wonder Seth's books net the Commonwealth Poetry Awards and the Poetry Book Society Choice!

Seth continues his word-game of fame hunting in Beastly Tales From Here And There, ten stories of animals across the globe - two each from China, Greece, Ukraine, the Land of Gup, and also, just two from Bharat(whose native he is or is he?). The book was released in January this year to coincide with the tenth World Book Fair, just as All You Who Sleep Tonight was made to coincide with the ninth WBF in 1990. It only shows Best-sellers are not born but made. Not only the publisher, Viking India, but even Sunday Times, and OUP editor, Rukun Advani, volunteered in the sale-promotion drive. The Times of India, Sunday Review, filled an entire page with plaudits and jingles. Advani's hysteria is recaptured in the following sentence: "Mozart's short life may have found reincarnation in the short form of this contemporary prodigy." (Times of India, 26 Jan, 1992).

In an earlier review of Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel, Advani wrote:

"It is clear now that during the sixties and seventies the Doon School and St Stephen's College were the unsuspected breeding

grounds for the finest writers of literary English that have ever appeared in India. Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy and Upamanyu Chatterjee, separated from each other by a year or two, ate at different times from the same table and might, for all one knows, have lived in the same room. The linguistic skill of these eighties writers, who have emerged out of the Desani-Rushdie slipstream, at least marginally exceeds those of Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri; their superiority to Anita Desai, Ruth Jhabavala, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan is so considerable that it will be disputed only by people who make a living out of literary criticism." (Express Magazine, 26 Nov, 1989).

When scribes resort to making sweeping and irresponsible statements to promote 'the old-boy network'(Advani is an Oxbridge and a Stephanian) it not only casts doubts on the integrity of the entire tribe of book-reviewers but also on the yuppie-nature of the management of national dailies which allow such write-ups to be published at all. Significantly, the media world itself has time and again been controlled by Doon School and St Stephen's fraternity - Khushwant Singh, onetime editor of the Illustrated Weekly and the Hindustan Times; B.G.Verghese, former editor, Hindustan Times and Indian Express; Arun Shourie and Suman Dubey, ex-editors, Indian Express; and Aroon Purie, editor, India Today.

Towards summing up, we have seen that it was Derozio, a commoner, who launched the IWE ship and set it on the right course with Poems and The Fakeer of Jungheera. But with his expulsion

from Hindu College and early death, the westernised crew of Bengali haute bourgeoisie seized control of the ship. For a hundred years, thereafter, with the Hindu College as the nursery, the hybridised scribblings of these brown sahibs in the coloniser's tongue came to be handed down to us as the nineteenth century body of IWE.

Then in the second decade of the twentieth century, the crew changed hands. A group of writers with non-genteel upbringing and imbued with a strong sense of national consciousness (The Makers of IWE), hammered and forged the English language to suit our native needs. This was the golden period of IWE, endorsed and acclaimed by the community of teachers and students and the general reader at large. But the renaissance was short-lived.

A couple of decades after independence, the sybarites took over. The movement was spearheaded by a bevy of women novelists. Along with their palatial houses, cars, retinue of servants, pedigreed canines, to become a writer in English and to win acclaim at home and abroad assumed the shape of an awesome status symbol. Simultaneously, a crop of young affluent males attempted to exhibit their mettle in print. The meretricious lifestyles of these literary dandies informed their vision and world-view. The crew had changed hands once more.

The IWE scene has now turned full circle - with St Stephen's College, Delhi, playing the same role which the Hindu College, Calcutta, played during the nineteenth century.

Writing is a social activity and literature involves assumptions, beliefs and sympathies with which a large measure of concurrence is indispensable for the reading of literature as literature and not another thing. Is it right, therefore, that a group of people, following value-systems not in the mainstream of Indian ethos, should usurp the reins of leadership in the field of IWE ?

EPILOGUE

A writer's epistemology must conform to the nature of reality around him. Any Indian writer who keeps his eyes wide open cannot but choose to write of most of what he sees. If he but records what he observes he will not fail to notice that the dominant key in which his literary creations may be underscored is 'anger'. The appropriate mode of expression for our times, it seems, is the 'raudra rasa' in all forms of creativity. To illustrate this from regional literatures, consider the poetry of Sri Sri(Telegu) and the Dalits(Marathi); the plays of Vijay Tendulkar; the films of Ritwik Ghatak and Govind Nihalani. The man who suffers must be the man who writes. When the man who suffers is not the one who writes then it is the writing that suffers. In the West it is a common phenomenon for the artist and the writer to emerge from the fringes of society. So also in the regional writings in our country.

Poverty, anonymity, lack of recognition, risk to one's life, financial insecurity, persecution by the law, personal debilities, onerous family commitments, social activism, intense creative activity, early death - such are the soils from which have sprouted the seeds of immortal works of imagination.

Wealthy parentage, wide publicity, instant recognition, congenial environment, life-long security, luxurious lifestyle, insensitivity, egocentrism, ephemeral and marginalised creative activity, overseas contacts - such are the grounds that breed the weeds of contemporary Indian writing in English.

The plain fact is that an affluent person who takes to writing is ill-equipped for the task. Not only does he lack originality and the creative compulsion, he easily goes out to borrow and imitate. People from the less privileged background, just as they learn to improvise for their sustenance, so also they do if they take to literature.

Between the correct setting of the question and its solution, the former alone is mandatory for a genuine researcher in Humanities. For in the pursuit of Sciences our primary task may be to find the right answers; but in the pursuit of Humanities our primary task is to field the right questions.

Why is it that even with the widespread diffusion of English language in the country only the affluent writer is overtly visible? Is it that the writer from the humbler background is being deliberately driven into the limbo? What are the sinister forces at work? The answer perhaps is that the present-day IWE writer is the neo-coloniser who has seized the organs of publishing, the organs of publicity, the organs of state patronage and the organs of higher education within the country. The Book Review magazine, ICCR's Indian Horizon, IIC's Quarterly and institutions like Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, illustrate how the governing elite has become the cultural elite.

'Shahjahan built Tajmahal' - this stereotyped sentence often found in our Indian history text-books carries connotations far beyond its literal meaning. How does a feckless, faineant

king take the credit for building such a monument? The patron appropriates the skills of a thousand artisans and the supine historian lets the distortion pass. But the aberrations in literary history are wrought in a different way. The collected poems of Manmohan Ghose and Aurobindo Ghose are republished by Sahitya Akademi and Aurobindo Ashram respectively at state expense, but the novels of Venkataramani still remain out of print.

Indian writing in English is an endogamic activity - a scene monopolised by the insiders. The six skeins which have to be disentangled are: the author, the publishing houses, the print media, advertising and marketing agencies, reviewers and editors of literary journals, and the university departments of English. Occasionally, even some metro-students are insiders. To bring structural changes in this equation all these six components require to change. IWE can only be revitalised by exogamy or blood-transfusion from outside. As it stands - this incestuous in-house breeding may lead to its extinction.

Internationalism is the buzz word these days and the Indian-English literary scene has shifted its venue from mofussil towns of India to megapolises of the USA, resulting in contemporary vacuum fiction and vacuum verse. There seem to be gargantuan forces at large that have annexed literature to their own ends. An Anita Desai or a Nayantara Sahgal may have won international acclaim but the IWE has yet to wait for a Mahasveta Devi to be born on the Indo-English scene. An Amitav Ghosh or a Vikram Seth in their bid to create slots in literary history, undertaking

non-stop flights over the Atlantic and the Pacific, and claiming kinship with Anglo-American writers, editors and publishers, are no different. Would it be asking for the moon to scout for a home-spun Narayan ?

Obviously, the jet-set gentry are not the right role-models as literary personalities either for the students or for the society at large. Paradoxically, there appears to exist a parallel between a segment of English teachers and the contemporary IWE writers. Both could be elitists, come from public schools, possess Oxbridge degrees, hail from metros, and both being globalised may well have symbiotic existence. And their symbiosis naturally extends to the visceral expatriate writers who in their illicit liaison and stay in the West, keep begetting their bastard nurselings there. Our teachers wait back home like dutiful ayahs to dandle these offsprings of miscegenation, fondling and passing them off as 'wunderkinds' of literary creations to the gaping students.

There is another group, although from vernacular background, in whose case amelioration in their personal circumstances over the years has altered their literary stance and world-view. If the current media-propped writers have to be re-examined in the right perspective, are such category of pedagogues willing to correct the imbalances? Aligned with the plutocracy, for them the aberrations in IWE are the norm.

Yet another group, despite being on the rolls of departments of English, is hostile or indifferent to IWE, in general.

Having secured their livelihoods within the English faculties, they now make it a point to sabotage its diffusion by damning it as anti-Indian and by dubbing it as a library language. They refuse to acknowledge the presence of any creative afflatus in fellow-Indians, perhaps, because of their own limitations in wielding the English language creatively. They are the ones who most subvert the cause of Indian writing in English. Either because of their political leanings or under the plea of specialisation they choose to ignore this genre of writing.

That IWE is a 'specialisation' which requires to be 'taught' is perhaps a fallacy. Teachers in the English departments of any university could easily imbibe it as self-study. English language defines their profession; and contemporary literature being made or unmade in English language around them must of necessity be a matter of concern for them. A specialisation of the kind in AIIMS is uncalled for and unhealthy, and probably, a symptom of unaccountability.

The aim of the exercise has been to point out that only the author belonging to the eclectic oligarchy stands a chance to hit the headlines. Necessary precautions need to be taken by the academic community that a writer does not make an entry into the pages of literary history merely because of his birth and influence. The genuine writer has all the odds against him. He will rot in anonymity during his lifetime. Such a writer may resurface later in other countries due to disinterested research; but here, even that chance is remote due to the academic sloth prevailing in our campuses.

Despite the distortions in the current IWE scene - creative, critical and pedagogical - there are a handful of works emerging on the horizon which sound authentic. Unfortunately, the scope of this dissertation does not allow space for their discussion. It is, therefore, worthwhile to keep the IWE alive in the campuses and permit an ongoing debate all the time.

Probably, it is the native scholar in English who is best equipped to write the finest poems, the finest stories and novels, and the finest prose in English. And, generally speaking, such native writers hail from plebeian backgrounds. There may be scholars of the ilk of Nirad Chaudhuri scattered in all parts of the country since there has been such an uncontrolled diffusion of English language in the post-independent scenario. But the response towards them, of the westernised elite both in the academic and official circles, fortified in their insularity and egotism, is largely in the form of sneer and superciliousness.

The sterility and barrenness which have crept into the IWE in the last two decades notwithstanding, the achievement of this genre of writing from 1920 to 1970, I feel, will still sustain it and allow it to make a niche for itself in world literatures in English.

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