

Samvatsar Lectures 1988

THE IDEA
OF
INDIAN LITERATURE

Umashankar Joshi

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Sahitya Akademi



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Foreword to the Series

THE Executive Board of the Sahitya Akademi passed a resolution on 24 February 1985 accepting the recommendations of the Committee set up for the establishment of a series of lectures in literary criticism called the Samvatsar Lectures. A procedure was prescribed by the Board for the selection of the annual Samvatsar lecturers. The Samvatsar lecturer is expected to deliver two or three lectures on a theme chosen by him. It has also been laid down that these Samvatsar lectures would be published after they are delivered. The crucial clauses in the resolution relating to the Samvatsar Lectures read as follows :-

These lectures should reflect a deep concern for values. They should open up new vistas of thinking regarding a literary movement, a current literary trend, some original thinking about a great writer or a great classic or a new path in literary criticism or literary creation, etc. The presentation should be from a larger perspective while the subject matter could be drawn from the regional or comparative sources within the speaker's experience.

I have great pleasure in writing this brief foreward.

New Delhi
1987

Vinayak Krishna Gokak
President
Sahitya Akademi

The Idea of Indian Literature - I

How did we come to think of 'Indian literature' as such? What has led to the idea of 'Indian literature' becoming more and more relevant during this century? What could be the factors that would make 'Indian literature' identifiable? Is it possible to conjure up a vision of Indian literature? These are some of the questions that suggest themselves as one tries to come to grips with the idea of Indian literature.

Sometimes it is outsiders, foreigners, who resort to geographical terms to help distinguish things. It was the German poet-scholar August Wilhelm von Schlegel who referred to 'Indian literature' as early as 1823, though what he meant was mainly works in Sanskrit, which had just reached the West.

The investigation of Sanskrit works by the western scholars led to the epoch-making discovery of the affinity of languages, the discovery about Sanskrit as well as other Indo-Aryan languages and most of the languages of Europe belonging to the same family which was named 'Indo-European'. They concentrated mainly on the study of the literature in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit and called the history of that ancient literature 'History of Indian Literature', even though they were very much aware of the fact that they had not considered the literature of the languages of non-Aryan origin and even that of the modern Indo-Aryan languages. Albrecht Weber the author of *History of Indian Literature* in German, said in 1852, that he retained the name 'Indian Literature' "for the sake of brevity". Another German savant, Maurice Winternitz, called his monumental work, published in 1907, the *History of Indian Literature* though he clearly stated that he would limit himself "mainly to Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit literature". He hastened to add almost by way of a promise, "at the most it will only be possible to touch on modern Indian literature in an Appendix." He did give a brief survey by way of an Appendix to the second part of the third and final volume under the title 'A View of the Modern Indian Literature'.

Evidently this view of Indian literature was limited because it left out the ancient Tamil classics. However, it encompassed the literary activity conducted during three milleniums in the length and breadth of a subcontinent in a few cognate languages. The Western scholars felt excited, as it

were, over discovering the oldest monuments of Indo-European literature and the new opportunity of studying Greek and Latin literatures in a proper perspective. The poet Goethe was deeply impressed by the artistic quality of Kalidasa's play, *Shakuntalam* and he could not rest till he saw it staged. The Western scholars found that Indian fairy tales and fables had travelled to Europe long back and were the source of *Aesop's Fables*. They saw that in grammar the Indians excelled all other nations of antiquity and were not slow in recognising the worth of treatises as varied as those on the performing arts (*Natyashastra*), erotics (*Kamasutra*), and political economy and administration (*Arthashastra*). What August Wilhelm von Schlegel said in 1823 was very pertinent: "Will the English perhaps claim a monopoly of Indian literature? It would be too late Cinnamon and cloves they may keep; but these mental treasures are the common property of the educated world."

The English far from claiming a monopoly of Indian literature seemed to be just interested in cinnamon and cloves. Otherwise, how could a writer of the stature of Macaulay make himself ridiculous by writing in his historical Minute of 1835, "I have never found one among them (orientalists) who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia?" He recorded his haughty decision, "I would at once stop the printing of Arabic and Sanskrit books."

Ironically enough, there were a large number of Western scholars who poured their soul into critically editing works of ancient India and even if orientalists in India had not the courage — or even adequate knowledge to deny Macaulay's hysterical statement, the academic labours of the indefatigable Western researchers gave a lie to it. What was more, Indians themselves, especially the newly educated amongst them who were also gradually becoming conversant with Western classics felt a little reassured that their land though currently politically prostrate had once produced literary classics of comparable worth.

These classics were edited and annotated with the help of the tools of the new research methodology and translated into various languages by Indians. Apart from influencing the writing of poetry and drama they contributed immensely to the general enrichment of the languages.

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed hectic activity in literary writing under the influence of Western, ancient India and Persian

literary treasures — and it included much translation work also. However, the writers in every Indian language worked more or less in isolation, hardly caring to compare notes and to benefit from the experiences of one another. Much less did they visualize that their efforts in vitalizing the existing languages were leading to the building of a literature that was bound together because of a shared historical situation as well as common urges and aspirations. More than a hundred years of foreign occupation were to elapse before such a consciousness emerged.

It was given to a great poet, Subramania Bharati, the indomitable voice of Indian resurgence to sing of the unity of India as expressed through the modern Indian languages, in 1909:

Seppu mozhi padhinettu udayal,
Enil chintanai onrudayal.

(She [India] has eighteen languages to speak, even then the *chintana* [thinking] is one.)

Bharati in his short life had visited various centres of nationalist and cultural importance in the country. Through a forceful image he projected the idea of Indian literature as a rich orchestration of the various linguistic strands into a harmonious literary pattern. It was indeed a voice of national assertion on the part of a colonized people.

Constructive steps were taken to realise and reinforce this sense of unity. In 1919 under the leadership of Sir Asutosh Mukerjee the first ever Department of Modern Indian Languages was established at Calcutta University. The same year, while presiding over the Howrah Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan, Sir Asutosh urged upon the Bengalis to "pay attention to the map of India," to what was being written in other Indian languages and initiate a process of mutual enrichment. "Without such give and take, our literature cannot hope to develop and attain fullness." In fact, he had a larger vision. He looked beyond to the dynamic process of the mutual enrichment of the Indian people's life and their national literature. Referring to the illiterate masses, he added, "if this vast population can be united through the medium of literature, then only will a truly national literature develop in India."

By 1939, there was a specific urge felt to add a new dimension to the idea of Indian literature as national literature, that of a clearer accent on the

concern for the exploited and suppressed masses. I wonder how many litterateurs know about the publication of *New Indian Literature*, the quarterly journal of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association in 1939, from Lucknow, with Prof. Abdul Aleem as the editor and an editorial board of representative writers in Indian languages, the present speaker being one of them. This was perhaps the first periodical to focus attention on Indian literature through its very name. Another important thing that happened during the latter half of the thirties was that writers of India met for the first time in a big way — in a significant way at a conference. The first All-India Progressive Writers' Conference was held in Lucknow in 1936 with Premchand as its president and the second at Calcutta, in 1939, which began with an address by Rabindranath Tagore.

The mid-forties and the first two decades of the post-Independence period witnessed the organizing of writers' conferences by the All-India P.E.N. Centre and seminars especially by the Sahitya Akademi on various aspects of literature written in the various Indian languages. The tendency to refer to Indian 'literatures' persisted for quite a few years. The All India Radio planned broadcasts in 1954 on the ancient and medieval as well as modern literature of each of the thirteen modern Indian languages. The book in which they were collected bore the title *Literature, in Modern Indian Languages*. The first talk by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee surveying the whole field is entitled 'Indian Literature'. The same scholar, however, chose to call his book on the subject, as late as 1963, *Languages and Literatures of India*. It can be said that it was after the establishment of the Sahitya Akademi in New Delhi in 1954, more especially after the publication of its journal, *Indian Literature* in 1957, the idea of 'Indian literature' standing for the literary work in all the Indian languages came gradually to take roots. It was clinched in the brilliant aphorism of Dr. Radhakrishnan "Indian literature, though written in many languages, is one."

Not that there was no disagreement voiced regarding the idea of Indian literature. Attention was drawn to the fact that a literature was written in a language. There is the Tamil language, there is the Hindi language, there is the Kashmiri language. So we have Tamil literature, Hindi literature, Kashmiri literature. But if there is no particular language like 'Indian', how can there be 'Indian literature'?

Even though India does not have only one language but quite a number of languages, the work produced in any one of them, as that

produced during the medieval Bhakti period or during the colonial period after India's coming under the influence of the West, can bear the stamp of the whole of India and be, in that sense, an authentic work of 'Indian' literature. The modern Indian languages and ancient Tamil are far too developed vehicles of literary creativity to permit any single Indian language to be the sole vehicle of Indian literature to the neglect of other languages. All Indian languages are national languages. So, in a multilingual country like ours, one has to get reconciled to the idea of looking for Indian literature in a number of languages instead of in one. The Indian Muse is 'Sarvabhasha-Sarasvati', to borrow the term used by a Karnataka Sanskrit poet. The literary works though written in various languages have something very vital in common which accounts for their legitimately belonging to Indian literature. In short, the idea of Indian literature inheres in the peculiar multilingual situation that obtains in India.

The Indian scenario is comparable to the European one, with this important difference that the inter-relationship, the common ground in the case of the Indian languages and the literature produced in them is much too intimate, cohesive and vital to be underplayed, much less lost sight of.

Dr. Niharranjan Ray, while doubting the contention that Indian literature was one though written in different languages, dwells on the particularity of language and rather takes an extreme position. He says: "... the contention cannot be sustained in its fullest sense. Literature is absolutely language-based, and language being a cultural phenomenon it is all but wholly conditioned by its locale and the socio-historical forces that are in operation through the ages in that particular locale. If that be so, one may reasonably argue that the literature of a given language will have its own specific character of form and style, images and symbols, nuances and associations, etc. Even themes and contents are more likely than not to have their specific nature and character."

It is not difficult to agree with the plea that the literature of a given language will have its own specific character of form and style. It has to have this specific character if it is to be a literary product. The question is whether a literature in a language, which is literature because of its specific character of form and style, exhibits over and above such specificity some properties that characterize it as a sharer of the same properties with literature in other languages.

Niharranjan's argument, though couched in historical terminology, is in fact of an aesthetic nature. If he was worried about "language, being

a cultural phenomenon, ... all but wholly conditioned by its locale and the socio-historical forces," he should have paused to examine the implications of his own formulation of the nature of language. Evidently, when he refers to the conditioning of language by socio-historical forces, he agrees that there are other components of the total cultural phenomenon of a locale over and above language, such as economic and political patterns, social institutions, set of values, ideals, beliefs, etc. and artistic predilections. These latter though not the language, could be shared to a large extent by the speakers of other languages. In fact, Sujit Mukherjee, who, like a few others, has been assiduously pursuing the twin aim of defining what Indian literature means and clearing the ground so that Indian literary scholarship can move towards a literary history of India, did emphasise this aspect when he argued back that "locale and socio-historical forces have been and are being shared by more than one Indian language, hence their literatures tend to give expression to the same consequences." He further pointed out, "As for images and symbols, surely these do not spring from the language itself but from the life lived by speakers of the language."

But as mentioned above, the argument was mainly aesthetic, one may call it puristic. When Niharajan Ray says that the contention that Indian literature is one though written in different languages cannot be sustained in the fullest sense, he perhaps concedes that it could be sustained in some sense or the other but insists that it could not be quite "in the fullest sense." And he would be right in saying so, because the languages are different. However, the contention is, obviously, not that the literature written in the different languages is one and the same. That would be an absurd proposition, but that it is one in the sense that it is similar, that it shows similarity in such an appreciable measure that it shares a composite identity — shows a sort of a sense of oneness — with the literature produced in one or the other Indian language. This is not to say that the identity of the literature in any of the Indian languages is blurred, much less demolished. If anything, it would be enriched. The lesson to be drawn is, not to underplay the basic identity of an Indian literature (Assamese, Telugu, Marathi, etc.) while considering it in the fuller context of 'Indian literature'.

The puristic approach can be pushed a little further. If a composition in a language reaches the level of poetry, it at once becomes, because of

its universality, a legitimate part of world literature. It can be appropriated by anybody living in any country or age, if he cares to learn the language in which it is written. What legitimacy is there behind viewing it as a poem belonging to some national, say, Indian literature? Why posit this middle term at all in the study of literature? True, a poem, if it is a poem, belongs to world poetry. The emotive experience is metamorphosed into a poetic experience, the Indian literary theoreticians would say, because of *sadharanikarana* — universalisation. But they would hasten to point out that the *vibhavas* (determinants), *alambana vibhavas* (the supports of the emotion, i.e. the characters, the hero and the heroine) and the *uddipana vibhavas* (the factors inciting the emotion, i.e. the environment) differ from one literary work to another. The particularity of a poetic artefact may have to do not only with the language in which it is written but also with the total national milieu. Aristotle observed that while philosophy dealt with what was universal and history with the particular, it was poetry which dealt with both the universal and the particular. The universality of a poem is because of common emotional experience of humankind, the particularity is due to not only the language of the poem but also the total national milieu. The study of the literature of a language in the context of national, say Indian, literature enhances the value of such study in terms of its being a particular specimen of world literature.

Recently, during the past two decades, the idea of Indian literature has all of a sudden gained a relevance which seems almost unquestionable. At a time when at the post-graduate-level the two subsidiary papers in a language other than the one in which a language student wants to major are being dispensed with and all the eight papers are devoted to one language, the teaching community has made the discovery that in India it is unfruitful, if not almost impossible, to study a literary text or author or movement in complete isolation. The need for comparative study is being regarded as indispensable for the fullest understanding and appreciation of the literature in an Indian language. A new discipline — that of comparative Indian literature — is in the process of evolving. The idea of Indian literature and the idea of comparative Indian literature seem to be so inextricably interwoven that even if there were no discipline called Comparative Literature, we, culturally situated as we are in India today, would have had to invent one. It would seem, at long last the idea of Indian literature has found its *raison d'être*.

So, if one talks about Indian literature, it is not merely because one is often chided that while being fairly conversant with the literature of far-off lands, that of France, Russia or America, one has not even a nodding acquaintance with that of even a neighbouring Indian language and one now wants to make amends for that lacuna. Nor is it merely a manifestation of a nationalist urge, which is likely to degenerate into political, cultural or literary/linguistic chauvinism. Even though, it does happen to be a result of both these urges it is much more. It is an indispensable aid. One only wants and tries to study a text or an author in one's own language and discovers that one cannot do it fully without looking around, without studying those in a sisterly language. Literary narcissism does not pay. One has to look at neighbours' faces in order to be able to fathom one's own more deeply.

One cannot repeat the caution enough that the comparatist will do well to bear always in mind while underscoring what is common between two literatures, authors or works, that for a literary work, uniqueness is of the essence. A literary work is a word-construct, an individuation of something universal, which is unique in itself and lives by being different from any other work made of words. Comparative literature provides a framework, a perspective in which the otherness, the separateness, the dissimilarity of each artistic work can best be apprehended. Paradoxically enough, a sense of commonality enables one to view better the separateness of the individual work of art.

While launching on the comparative study of literature in one language and that in another the interest in what is common to both will necessarily lead to concentrating attention on problems of social and cultural history. However much a student of literature might like to deal with only the literary value of a work, he cannot wish away history. However, in a literary study it would be advisable to project the works, once one has done with registering their contribution as archival 'documents' having significance for one or more fields of study, as 'monuments' emerging from that particular period.

The Roots

It might be rewarding to view, in the light of the above discussion, the whole body of Indian literature, produced in our various languages during

the past four thousand years or so. One need not attempt even a rude outline of its history but attend to something which is more important at the moment — to note some aspects of the composite identity of Indian literature and familiarise oneself a little more intimately with some of the tendencies and features that are shared by several Indian languages. Such an effort might result in not only making the idea of Indian literature itself a little more clear but also contributing its mite to the ambitious project of writing a history of Indian literature, if such a history is not to be just a compendium of full monographs, or periodwise series of chapters, one following the other, on the literature of each of the various languages. Attempts at understanding some of the integrating factors, and shared features should precede the writing of such a history, however deficient they remain in thoroughness.

The first phase of Indian literature occupies a long period, from about 2000 B.C. to A.D. 1000 and begins after the advent of the Aryans.

The second phase occupies the period from around A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1800. It was around A.D. 1000 that the modern Indian languages emerged as developed vehicles of literature, except for Tamil whose literature can be traced to the first century B.C., if not to an earlier period. Early during the second phase Muslim rule was established in India.

The third phase begins from around A.D. 1800 after India came under the overwhelming influence of the Western civilization due to the consolidation of British power and the introduction of the British educational system in India.

The court language during the first phase was mainly Sanskrit in the North and Tamil in the South. During the second phase even though the Muslim rulers used languages of Western Asia such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian, etc. it was Persian that enjoyed the status of the court language till English took over. Like the Aryans earlier the Muslims had come to stay here and did not remain foreigners like the English. During the six centuries of Muslim rule a new language, Urdu, with indigenous syntax and Persian and Arabic vocabulary and cultural flavour was developed which meant a definite enrichment of the national culture. The Britishers never meant to belong to India. The continued use of English even after they have left presents a unique cultural phenomenon and one wonders how the identity of national culture will get reconciled to its constant presence.

The ancient Aryans who had settled in the land of the Seven Rivers (Sapta Sindhu), Indus and others, spoke the language of which the Vedas are the earliest record and which along with that of the Parsi Avesta had descended from the earlier Indo-Iranian language. This Vedic dialect that developed in North-West India was the common source of Sanskrit as well as Pali and other Prakrit dialects. Sanskrit was, as the name suggests, a 'cultivated' language meticulously following rules of grammar, framed by Panini and was used by the cultured class. Prakrits were the 'natural' dialects, and were used by the unsophisticated masses. By 500 B.C. the Buddha and Mahavir, both tall teachers with abounding compassion, addressed the people in their own languages, in Pali and Prakrit respectively. They were totally opposed to the Vedic order, especially the institution of sacrifice. But the languages they used—even when they were those of the masses, had their origin in the language of the Vedas, even as Sanskrit had. It seems, within a few centuries the Vedic dialect that grew in North-West India had replaced the tongues of far-off Behar and dialects structured on the basis of the Vedic one were already in vogue there by 500 B.C. The presence of Sanskrit must have helped the process. The aggressive role of a powerful language can be visualized with the help of our recent experience of English, which even in more advanced socio-cultural circumstances has near-replaced Indian languages for about two centuries in some important areas of social articulation. The encounter with the Aryans must have been a highly disturbing, often a gory one, like most encounters. However, the immigrants were no less overwhelmed by the cultural resourcefulness of the indigenous people. They were soon to put Sanskrit, the great linguistic tool they had developed, to the service of imbibing and assimilating what the native population had to offer, till at last even the composite religion that emerged showed that about half the number of the tenets of its faith were of non-Aryan origin.

It all began during the period of the compilation of the Vedas, which were referred to as *trayi* — being three in number. Later the number rose to four, with the addition of the Atharva Veda which attempts to incorporate much that the indigenous traditions with different social backgrounds made available.

Soon Sanskrit was to be a storehouse of ancient myths and legends. The *Mahabharata*, the great epic, an encyclopaedic work, describes itself as the *Pancham Veda* (the fifth Veda). Similarly the *Natyashastra*

describes how Brahma was approached and requested: "The Vedas are not recited before the Sudra classes. So create a fresh fifth Veda which belongs to all the classes." This is how, one may say, the second and the third voices of poetry were celebrated.

Folklore was tapped in a big way. The *Panchatantra* is a masterly attempt at dovetailing popular fables about beasts, birds and human and non-human beings into a pattern that would turn even children who are weak in mind into experts on public affairs. *Panchatantra* is politics without tears.

The *Jatak Kathas*, the tales of the Buddha's past incarnations, in Pali, incorporated much folklore material. Gunadhya produced a masterpiece, *Brihatkatha*, in the Paishachi Prakrit. It was the most ambitious attempt at collecting the narratives that were current in the oral tradition. Gunadhya's work was burnt in fire. Only excerpts by way of quotation in works of aesthetics like Bhoja survive. But for Sanskrit its tales would have been lost except for whatever inevitably would have remained in the oral tradition. Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagar* and Kshemendra's *Brihatkathamanjari* in Sanskrit and Sanghadasa Gani's *Vasudevahindi* in Prakrit have substantially salvaged the *Brihatkatha* narratives from oblivion.

It will be seen that to look upon Sanskrit as a language of religion is not adequate. It is the language of a whole, fairly widespread, culture that emerged as a result of the interaction between the life of the immigrant Aryans and that of the indigenous people. On the one hand it shared that status of being the language of religion with Pali and Prakrit, on the other it developed into a key to the rich treasures of the imaginative literature of various sections of the people. It must have remained a spoken language for the upper class for quite a few centuries till after the fifth century B.C. It must have been easily understood by a large number of people to warrant the writing and recitation of the two popular Epics. The text of the *Mahabharata*, while it was being finalised and passed on from generation to generation, kept the writing talent busy as the variants in half-lines and phrases, in every fibre of the texture, registered in the various recensions from different parts of the country show. By the first century B.C. the language shows signs of the welling up of literary creativity as borne out by the epics and plays of Ashvaghosh, Bhasa's plays, the realistic play of Shudraka, *Mrichhakatika* (The Clay Cart), the exquisite *Chaturbani*

(Four one-act monologues), etc. Sanskrit's finest hour was to come with Kalidasa's half a dozen works of untold grace, products of a comprehensive soul during the fourth century. Bana, Bhavabhuti and others follow, but the literary epic goes on becoming more and more contrived and laboured till at last the creativity of the language almost peters out by the end of the first millennium though it continues to function as a standby to all Indian languages.

The literature of the first phase from 2000 B.C. to A.D. 1000 can be seen as falling into two broad categories:

- A. Religious literature in the Vedic and Sanskrit language, in Pali and in Prakrit
- B. Imaginative literature
 1. Narrative literature: The two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the Puranas; Fables—the *Panchatantra*; the *Jataka Katha Samgraha*; *Brihatkatha* (its surviving versions); Jain narratives; folk narratives, etc.
 2. Classical Sanskrit epics, plays, Subhashitas, etc.
 3. Tamil literature, the poetry of the Sangam period, *Kural*, epics, devotional songs, etc.
 4. The Prakrit narrative *gathas*, etc., Apabhramsa narratives, *dohas*, etc.

As far as the religious literature is concerned, I would suggest at the outset that it is high time that some attempts to study the Veda as poetry were made. Apart from the insights into man's being, which also can lend not a little to the poetic value, the Vedic literature abounds in what Wallace Stevens calls analogies. After saying that "The thing stated and the restatement constitute an analogy", he goes on to point out that the venerable basic "books of the human spirit are vast collections of such analogies and it is the analogies that have helped to make these books what they are. The pictorializations of poetry include much more than figures of speech."

To pick up one such analogy, that of two birds from the *Mundaka Upanishad*:

dva suparna sayuja sakhaya
samanam vriksham parishasvajate,
tayoranyah pippalam svadvati
ananasnannanyo abhichakasiti.

(Two birds, companions, ever united
 Cling to the self-same tree.
 Of these two, one eats the sweet fruit
 The other looks on without eating)

The second statement shows that there are actually no two birds and illumines in a flash the predicament of the human soul. This analogy seems to articulate something that is there deep down in the human psyche. I remember to have seen the photograph of a seal from Central Europe bearing this motif.

To take an analogy from the Buddhistic 'Dhammapada':

na puphpha-gandho padivatam eti
 na chaguru-chandan-mallika va.
 satam hi gandho padivatam eti....

(The fragrance of flowers does not blow against the wind,
 Nor that of the aguru gum or sandal wood or jasmine blossoms.
 The fragrance of (the presence of) the good blows against the wind)

The second statement makes the struggle of the flower fragrance to blow in the face of a sharp wind vivid and poetises what would have remained a cold didactic dictum by revealing through a contrast how what was an impossibility on the physical plane was a reality on the moral, metaphysical one.

I need not dwell on the charm of the various odes and hymns like the one addressed to the Dawn, the eternal maiden, in the *Rigveda* or the one addressed to the Earth in the *Atharvaveda*, celebrating man as the inheritor of the Earth, — *mata bhumiḥ putro aham pṛthivyaḥ*.

There is a most exhilarating dialogue between the poet-seer Vishva-mitra and the rivers Vipat (Beas) and Satadru (Sutlej). He solicits: "O sisters, listen to a poet. I have come from afar with carts and chariots. Allow yourself to be easily fordable. May your current remain below the axes of the wheels." The river responds: "O poet, we have listened to your words. You have come from afar with carts and chariots. I bend like a mother giving milk to her child "

One recalls the words of another, more recent, poet, Iqbal :

Ay abe-rude Ganga, vo din hai yad tujhko,
 Utara tere kinare jab carvan hamara ?

(O land watered by the Ganga, do you remember the day, when our caravan arrived on your bank ?)

One could imagine even Henry Derozio, the son of a Portuguese father, the fiery poet-reformer of the early nineteenth century, a great lover of his native land, India, utter something like this: "When our ships arrived, the harbour wore a smile, a smile that was there even before the birth of man."

May be poetry is a sure cure of bitterness stored up by history.

It is well known that the Vedas include some secular material also. The moving lament of a gambler is an instance in point. "Others embrace the wife of him whose goods and chattels the eager dice have striven hard to capture."

Still more touching is the description of the plight of Yami of the old myth of the origin of the human race from a first pair of twins (Yama and Yami). Yami tried to tempt her brother Yama for incestuous love but failed. A later account shows how after Yama's death Yami could not be persuaded to forget him. She would say: "Only to-day he has died." So the gods created night; there arose a morrow; thereupon she forgot him. In a folk-song of the Ao Nagas' language which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group, the same myth finds even a more poignant expression :

Since society would not suffer them to be together,
The spiralling smoke from the two pyres unites in the sky.

The need to relate every piece of older literature to folk-lore as far as possible can hardly be overemphasised.

As far as the vast body of creative literature is concerned the narrative works of creative imagination form the bulk of it. Five narrative master-pieces of ancient India crossed the borders of this subcontinent and became popular in foreign lands, where they eventually got more or less adopted and adapted. The *Panchatantra* and versions of Gunadhya's *Brihatkatha* are said to have no small influence on the writing of *Aesop's Fables* and the *Arabian Nights* respectively. Both works are secular and have been more influential in countries west of India. They penetrated distant and altogether different cultures by their narrative quality and moral significance. The other three works are the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the Buddhist *Jatak-kathas*. These three works are grounded in religion but they would collapse in the absence of the narrative quality. They became popular mainly in the countries of East and South-East Asia. The *Ramayana* reached Mongolia and parts of Siberia in the

North and North-West. All the five works are rich in motifs which have a universal appeal. It is a unique thing in the history of world literature that the products of the mental activity of a people should have so deeply interested peoples of far-off lands in ancient times. Even portions of the manuscripts of Asvaghosa's plays were dug out from the sands of Central Asia.

Two points need to be immediately made: one, these five narrative works were the fruit of the total culture of the people, not merely that of the post-Aryan culture but also that of what had survived from the culture of the pre-Aryan people including the tribal communities. Some of it must have found it somewhat difficult at first make a mark even at home. Gunadhya who had written *Brihatkatha* in Paisachi Prakrit, may be a dialect closer to a tribal one, seems to have had a hard time with his magnum opus. Legend has it that he read it before forest animals far away from human society and went on consigning to fire each palm leaf as he finished reading it. The king observing that less meat was being served at meals inquired the reason and on coming to know that it was because of the deer becoming leaner as they were busy attending the story-recitals, rushed to the spot and tried to salvage whatever remained of the book. These five narrative masterpieces not only testify to the continuation of the pre-Aryan literary and cultural heritage but also belong to the body of literature which is the main source of the civilizational continuum in Indian life and letters throughout the period that follows.

Over and above these five works there are numerous Buddhist, Jain and Dravidian narratives, which would keep comparatists busy studying in what manner they differ from one another and even from oral folk narratives. Take, for example, the "chira-haran", a motif that is popularised by the '*Bhagavata*' account of adolescent Krishna stealing the clothes of the bathing Gopis. It could be an actual incident turned legend or myth. The secular Gunadhya version, in which the bathing beauties are damsels, survives in a North Gujarat tribal folk tale. It will be always rewarding to correlate an ancient narrative, whenever possible, with the native folk tradition and even with a foreign, e.g. Indo-European, one as in the case of the serpent sacrifice myth.

It was the classical Sanskrit literature—poems and plays—which along with Vedic literature drew the highest praise from Western scholars. Though these works have been fairly well-studied and appreciated in

modern times, the plays need to be studied a little more closely as works of dramatic art. There are only a few epochs of dramatic writing in world literature. The distinct value of the epoch of Sanskrit drama remains to be assessed fully in the wider context.

Many works in Sanskrit, mentioned in other texts, have been lost. But the loss Tamil literature has suffered is immeasurable. *Tholkappiam*, the first important work that has survived is more than two thousand years old. It is a treatise on grammar. In fact it is much more. The first section is devoted to letters, the second to words, and the third to *porul*, i.e. the subject matter of poetry, which is divided into *aham* (inner, subjective) and *puram* (outer, objective). *Aham* deals with love and its psycho-social aspects, *puram* with war and state, cattle-raiding, invasions, siege, victory, etc. Such a work presupposes the existence of a highly developed literature that has perished beyond recall. The epoch of the Sangam classics that follows is named after the academy (Sangham) supported by the Pandya kings at Madurai. The love poems follow certain conventions. Every love poem has to refer to one of the five regions ascribed to five aspects of love and each region has its own god, flower, bird and animal. Centuries of poetic composition must have preceded such a sophisticated stage of poetic articulation. All that remains of Sangam literature is contained in eight schematic anthologies and ten longer poems, in all about forty thousand lines of poetry, composed by 473 poets, and is marked by poetic excellence and bespeaks highly of the sensibility of the users of the language. The lady does not believe the maid when she announced the return of the husband from war for the bells of his chariot are not heard. The maid explains :

The bells are silent, their tongues tied;
Lest their clang disturbs the bee on the bough
Where it, in its flower-ridden bower, is
In amorous dalliance with its love-mate dear.

This concern for the same emotion as one's own even in the smallest of the creation is something which is associated with the Indian ethos. And yet, how many specimens of the depiction of such tenderness could one cite from other Indian languages ?

Two centuries before and the first three or four centuries of the Christian era witness the enriching of Tamil literature as they do that of

Sanskrit and Prakrit literature. The most noted work produced during this period is the *Kural* by Thiruvalluvar, a householder, of Jain persuasion, referred to by followers of all religions as a saint. It derives its name from *kural* (Tamil word for 'small'), i.e. a small Tamil metre. The overall theme is the art of living. The work consisting of 133 chapters of ten *kurals* each, is in three parts dealing with *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (worldly objects) and *kama* (desire) respectively. It is translated in many Indian languages including Sanskrit and in English, French, German and Latin. Every culture has a rich treasure of aphoristic sayings. The Greeks cultivated the 'epigram'. The Japanese *haiku* is rather more picturesque than didactic. Sanskrit is exceedingly rich in *subhashitas* (goodly utterances). The three parts of *Kural* remained one of Bhartrihari's three sequences, of hundred verses each, dealing with *niti* (socio-political behaviour), *sringar* (erotic love) and *vairagya* (renunciation) in a variety of metres. One of Bhartrihari's verses (1.61) is also found in *Shakuntalam* (V.2) with a slight variation. It may be a case of borrowing or a common source for both writers. Collections of aphorisms even when they include original work of the compiler are bound to benefit from the current literature. If the more ancient Tamil literature were extant it would have been possible to trace some of the *kurals* to it. Winternitz says on the basis of his study of Sanskrit literature, "In one department of literature, that of the aphorism (gnomic poetry), the Indians have attained a mastery which has never been gained by any other nation." The *Kural* shows that the art of turning out aphorisms must have developed highly amongst the ancient Tamil speaking people to warrant the appearance of such a work.

The *Kural* is indeed the first ambitious attempt at stringing together as many as 1330 epigrammatic stanzas all in the same metre, in any Indian language. The stamp of the masterly genius is evident not only in the beauty of utterance but in pressing the whole material into the service of a neatly-designed work, a manual of human conduct, which contained the distilled wisdom of the Tamil culture. No wonder that it came to be regarded as the Tamil Veda, or the Fifth Veda. As the popular narrative and dramatic traditions were raised each to the status of the Fifth Veda, the oral tradition of the couplets of popular wisdom also came to be accorded a similar high status. The originality of Thiruvalluvar sparkles through an

unexpected turn of idea, wry humour, or bold sarcasm that assigns strange bedfellows to even God:

It is asked what is as grievous as poverty, the answer can only be
'poverty'. (II. 661)

No pain is caused when fools chance to separate from us. So, in a way,
friendship with fools is a matter of delight. (II. 469)

Ah, God and ignoble persons form a class in achieving successfully
whatever they desire, with none to question them. (II. 459)

The early Tamil epics, especially Ilango Adigal's *Silappadikaram* (The Saga of the Anklet), touch a new height in poetic composition. The central figure in *Silappadikaram* is the heroine who, finding that her husband, who had gone to sell one of her anklets for buying food was wrongly apprehended as the stealer of the queen's anklet and sentenced to death, ran through the streets of Madurai carrying the remaining anklet in her hand as evidence of her husband's innocence.

"Are there women here?" She cried, "Are there women who could bear such wrong done to their husbands?" She goes on, "Are there good men here . . . ? Is there a god here?" The king finding himself cheated by the goldsmith falls dead. The heroine's curse raises a fire which destroys the city. A single woman who had lost her husband conquered the evil king with her anklet. She was deified and became the symbol of the cult of *Pattini*, the chaste wife. Prof. Nilakantha Shastri, the noted historian, says, "That poem is best looked upon as the handling of an old popular saga which like the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, threw into oblivion earlier versions of the story of Kovalan and his wife Kannaki, the model of chastity."

The epic is in three books, each one named after each of the capitals of the three great Tamil kingdoms. It gives descriptions of the terrain in graphic details and deals with the history and culture of the people and has become a people's epic. Another great Tamil epic written by Chathanar, a contemporary of Ilango, is *Manimekalai* which is a sequel to *Silappadikaram*.

When mystic poetry came to be written in the wake of the Sangam love poetry, the Tamil language availed of all the earlier equipment while bursting into poetry of divine love. This poetry being, for all we know, the mainspring of the phenomenal Bhakti movement, forms an important part of the study of the second, i.e. medieval phase of Indian literature.

The Prakrit *gathas*, i.e. couplets in the *gatha* (*arya*) metre form a very significant part of Indian literature. They invite a comparative study with not only the Sanskrit *subhashita* as well as the Tamil *kural* but also with the *muktakas* (stanza-poems) like those in the *Amaru-shataka* as well as the *Aham* (love) poems of the Tamil Sangam period. An interesting fact about the *gathas* is that while the anthologies of Sanskrit aphorisms belong mainly to a period after the twelfth century A.D., the most important anthology of Prakrit *gathas*, *Gathakosha* or *Saptashati* is compiled by Hala, i.e. Satavahan, an Andhra king, during the first or second century after Christ.

It contains over and above his own couplets those of more than a hundred poets. One of the recensions notes that he collected about seven crore *gathas* to select only seven hundred out of them. Prakrit was widely used as a court language as well as a language of poetic composition by his time and many couplets from far-off regions must have found a place in his anthology. As he was ruling in Pratishthan, it should not be surprising if some *gathas* on love remind the reader of the moods of love depicted in the Sangam poetry. Another interesting feature of the *gathas* is, they are, as the very name declares, in one metre, which is again one that can be set to music. The vast number of Sanskrit epigrammatic stanzas are in a variety of metres, the chief among them being *anushtup*. They need not be sung. the *gatha* does not have to like most of the Sanskrit metres, stick to the number of syllables but is flexible and maintains a certain number of morae. It would be worthwhile studying what made the *gatha* popular. Certainly it was in vogue in the time of Kalidasa, who uses it freely in *Shakuntalam* for moments of music. All *gathas* scattered in a number of books and those in Apabhramsha also, which followed Prakrit as a widely spread language, deserve a closer look.

Some of the *gathas* are superb specimens of realistic and imagist poetry. A Prakrit couplet delicately captures a moment of parental bliss:

“Just look at this !” So saying the wife, with her face all smiles, hands over to her husband a plum bearing the marks of being pierced by the tips of two newly sprouted teeth of their child.

An Apabhramsha couplet (though not in a *doha*) uses an image in which water itself represents lack of water:

The Tungabhadra river appeared as if the Sahya mountain, not being able to withstand the forest fire, the lashing winds and the unbearable

rays of the sun and getting inordinately thirsty, had protruded its tongue towards the sea.

Thus we saw how fairly early in the day there grew, apart from religious writings, a huge corpus of imaginative literature and how a vast variety of orally transmuted mythological and folklore material got permanently embodied in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit, ensuring a living continuity with the pre-Aryan past. The process of interaction and cross-fertilization of various cultural trends throws light on one important aspect of Indian literature, that of comprehensiveness and a continuing struggle for a synthesis. It was the fruits of this process — the great imaginative writings — that crossed the borders of India and were shared by peoples of far-off lands, making, so to say, the idea of Indian literature relevant from the point of view of the foreign appropriators even in those early days. The lack of any significant translations, especially from China, may be due to the preoccupation of Indian as well as Chinese missionaries with Buddhism. The lacunae is, however, too outstanding to be missed.

We saw how around the beginning of the Christian era there was a blossoming of the creative spirit, Sanskrit as a court language in the North producing literary epics and plays of great literary excellence and Tamil as that of the great Southern kingdoms producing the unique poetry of the Sangam classics and a rare popular epic like the Saga of the Anklet, all which will keep the comparatists busy for quite a long time. We also saw how the Indian genius for gnomic poetry found an expression in the Tamil classic *Kural*, in the vast number of Sanskrit *subhashitas* and the Prakrit *gatha*-couplets and Apabhramsa *doha*-couplets some of which are poetic vignettes rich with a vibrant lyricity.

The Idea of Indian Literature - II

A Continuing Journey

The second or the medieval phase of Indian literature, which begins with the emergence of the modern Indian languages, underscores the relevance of the idea of Indian Literature. A living continuity with the past is maintained, as the narratives of the two epics and the *Brihatkatha* get retold in almost all the Indian languages and work as a great integrating factor. A new integrating factor emerges with the rise of the Bhakti movement. The result is, it is not possible to study the literature of any modern Indian language in isolation. It has to be studied in the total context of Indian literature. This medieval phase lends an edge to the need for the new discipline of Comparative Indian literature.

To take just one example — the case of four women saint-poets. How much is common between Andal of Tamil Nadu (before 8th century) and Meerabai of Rajasthan (16th century), both of whom accepted Lord Krishna as their spouse and are said to have merged into Lord Ranganath and Hari of Dwaraka respectively ! As these two were Vaishnava voices, Akka Mahadevi of Karnataka (12th century) and Lal Ded of Kashmir (14th century) sang of Shiva. It happens that both moved around undressed and the utterances of the former, like those of her elder contemporaries, are called *vachanas* and those of the latter *vaakh* (*vakyas*). It is difficult to think of a more integrated cultural milieu in a subcontinent of India's size.

Medieval literature can be seen as falling into the following categories :

1. Bhakti literature :

Shorter verse — *Dohas, padas* including *barmasas*, etc.; poetry of Prophetic satire; poetry of the synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, poetry of sufism.

Narrative verse — Rendering of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata* (especially Book X); Akhyanas from the *Mahabharata* and the Puranas; Akhyanas about saintly persons.

2. Jain Rasas and Prabandhas, other narratives based on the *Brihatkatha* tradition and folktales, etc.

3. Historical rasas, prabandhas, ballads, etc.
4. Mahakavyas, champukavyas, writings of the *riti-kala*, etc.
5. Folk plays.
6. Prose.

The modern Indian languages begin their career sometime during the first two centuries after the first millenium. The exact date of the first work in the language would vary from language to language. The Kannada language appears to have been in use since A.D. 450 as testified by an inscription of that date.

The Indo-Aryan group descended from Apabhramsha which had succeeded Prakrit as a widely used literary language in the North. Later by virtue of its registering local variations it broke up into a variety of Apabhramshas. For example, 'Apabhramshana tushyanti svena nanyena Gurjarah' — the Gujaratis feel pleased only with their own brand of Apabhramsha. From these various Apabhramshas the modern Indo-Aryan languages emerged.

By far the greatest poets in almost all these languages as well as the Dravidian languages are the saintly Bhakti poets. In fact the Bhakti movement began with the devotional songs in the Tamil language. Bhakti (devotion) is said to be *dravidejata* (born in the Dravid land). After the Sangam period, there appeared in Tamil Nadu God-intoxicated poets, the sixty-three Nayanmars, followers of Shiva and the twelve Alvars, devotees of Vishnu, during the period roughly between the third and the eleventh century. Some of them were lowly born, barbers, washermen, hunters. Andal was a woman. The thousand songs of the peasant Nammalvar, who was like a soul to the Alvar body, are called *Dravid Veda*. His is a full-throated voice of human confidence : "I knocked at the gates of heaven; wonder seized the council of the gods. And they stood musing, that a lily of the dale should long for the freedom of the stars. But I told them, it is the privilege of the earth-born to aspire unto the kingdom of heaven."

The word 'Shiva' is said to be of Dravid origin. The Gupta emperors were devotees of Shiva, later they became those of Vishnu. The Vedic Gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni, were slowly being replaced by Shiva and Vishnu. The simple folk turned away from the Vedic order and the strictures of the scriptures; instead of sacrifice they preferred 'puja', the offering of *patram, pushpam, phalam, toyam* (just a leaf, a flower, a fruit water). There used to be a large number of images of the Buddha

installed in India as well as beyond the borders of India (in fact, the Islamic word 'but' for 'image' derives from 'Buddha'). But after the waning of Buddhism it was Vishnu who was the most sculpted deity. The writing of the *Bhagavata* in the South around the eighth century was a great aid to the propagation of Krishna-worship. In all probability it was the summation of all the Bhakti trends in South India, one more example of Sanskrit acting as a reservoir of accumulated cultural gains.

By the fourteenth century the Bhakti wave that had modestly started in the South rose as a tidal one and spread and swept northwards engulfing almost every nook and corner of the land. Sir George Grierson feels overwhelmed with this phenomenon and considers it even more extensive than the Buddhist one because its impact is felt even to this day. It was not a matter of knowledge but of emotion, passion. The promulgators of this movement were not great pundits of Varanasi but ordinary men and women. Like a flash of lightning this new thing appeared overriding all older religious beliefs and nobody could definitely say from where it emanated. Grierson tried to argue in his paper 'Modern Hinduism and its Debt to the Nestorians' that the Christians who had settled in Tamil Nadu in the second or third century must have exerted an influence on Ramanuja (11th century). Bhakti, however, can be said to be as old as the human heart. The Vedas and Upanishads are full of it. The thrust of the *Gita* also seems to be in favour of absolute self-surrender and devotion to a personal God.

Islam, a simple and vigorous faith, knocked at the gates of India just when Brahminism had scored the final academic victory over Buddhism and got itself almost battered during the long-drawn out struggle. Islam was not ceremony-ridden and stood for social equality. This agreed with the trend of the Bhakti movement, which must have been helped not a little by it.

With the Bhakti phenomenon it was the Dravid people's turn to contribute to the common binding of the Indian people, and also provide for an inner reconciliation with Islam resulting in a kind of synthesis. It was the same Indian spirit that expressed itself through the writings of the earlier Apyar and Nammalvar, and medieval Basaveshvar, Ezhuthachan and Ninnayya in the South, Sarala Das, Chandidas and Krittibasa, Shankardev and Madhavdev in the East, Kabir, Nanakdev, Lal Ded, Surdas and Tulasidas in the North, and Narasimrah Mehta and Meera, Jnaneshvar, Namdev and Tukaram in the West.

Some writers are claimed by two or three or even four languages because of their mobility or the special nature of their language. Vidyapati is claimed by Maithili, Hindi, Bengali, if not by Nepali also, and Meerabai by Rajasthani, Vraj and Gujarati.

A few observations on the variety of Bhakti writings from the point of view of comparative study not necessarily chronologywise, will not be out of place.

The first form to flourish was the *doha*, which came handy to the exponents of the early Nath sect. The *anushtup*, *kural* or *gatha* and *doha* metres served as vehicles of gnomic poetry in Sanskrit, Tamil, Prakrit and Apabhramsha respectively in the ancient period. It was now the *doha* that became the current coin in the modern Indo-Aryan languages, in Hindi (Vraj, Avadhi and other dialects), Panjabi, Rajasthani, Gujarati. The medieval *dohas* contain much of the metaphysical wisdom of the Bhakti singers, Kabir, Dadu, Nanakdev, Tulasidas and others. However, there is a large number of secular *dohas* also. Two cowherds standing, leaning on big cudgels, and regaling listeners by addressing *dohas* to each other is a common sight even now at Saurashtra fairs in Gujarat. The *doha* is accorded a big status, 'Duho dasamo veda' — the *doha* is the tenth Veda. Dholamaru *dohas* on love are some of the very best. I read somewhere that the *doha* finds a place in a recent collection of Allen Ginsberg's poems.

The *pada*, or a short song, is the main medium of Bhakti poetry, because it can be sung. The languages vie with one another, so to say, in the lyrical effusions of devotional songs.

It is in the *padas* that the prophet-poets poured their soul and they form the peak creations of the literary efflorescence of the modern Indian languages in the medieval period. It would be interesting to trace when and how the *pada* achieved a literary status. The Sanskrit works on aesthetics, including the *Sahityadarpana* written as late as the fourteenth century, mention only the *muktaka* (or cluster of two to five *muktakas*), *khandakavya*, *kavya* and *mahakavya* as types of poetry. There are, except for the *stotras* (hymns), hardly any specimens of the small-size poem longer than a *muktaka* — a stanza and shorter than a *khandakavya* (like the *Meghaduta*) recognized as a form of poetic composition. Even in the drama there are no short songs. All we have is the *gatha* couplet that is meant to provide music as in the *Shakuntalam*. It should be noted that the

popular *stotra* poems (hymns) in Sanskrit were short and had a musical quality. *Bhajagovindam* ascribed to Sankara is a pure *pada*. The *Sahityadarpana* mentions *Kadavakam* as the chapter ('Sarga') in an Apabhramsha epic in "metres appropriate to" the language and it could on occasion be condensed to a lyrical song, *pada*. Thousands of *kadavakas* were composed and quite a few of them might have approximated the *pada*. The folk-songs were of course there. Tamil has, on the other hand, recognised and developed the short poem. The Sangam anthologies have in all 2381 poems varying in length from three to over 800 lines. The devotional songs of the Nayanmars and Alvars were already highly popular in the south. The musical *ashtapadis* in Jayadeva's Sanskrit work, *Gitagovinda* (10th century) pre-suppose an Indo-Aryan folk-tradition of musical compositions. The emergence of the Bengali language with *Charyapadas* in the same century is an instance in point. The short lyrical song, *pada* became favourite with the Bhakti singers of the modern Indian languages. Even when the composition was in prose, as in the case of Kannada *vir-shaiva vachanas*, it was a short, concentrated, lyrical utterance with not a little incantatory power sometimes.

Forms like *Barmasa* arose, describing the twelve months of Radha's (the soul's) pangs of separation from the Lord, in various dialects of Hindi, in Punjabi, Rajasthani and Gujarati.

The Bhakti singers were common, often low caste persons. Raidas was a *chamar* (tanner), Namdev, a tailor, and Akho, a goldsmith. Kabir, Dadu, Rahim and Raskhan were Muslims. They were against all outward show and sham. They wanted to be genuinely God's men. Ramanand, the guru of Kabir, is credited with bringing Bhakti from Tamil Nadu. 'Bhakti Dravid upaji, laye Ramanand; pragat k ini kabir-ne....'. It was Kabir who was responsible for its manifestation. Both Ramanand and Kabir were great rebels. Ramanand was a disciple in the line of Ramanuja Acharya but after propogating Bhakti in the north he discarded the rigid ceremonies of the Ramanuja sect, abandoned caste and began talking in the language of the people, i.e. in Hindi. Kabir exposed the hypocrisy of the learned sanctimonious big-wigs: 'Ramaiya-ki dulhan-ne lutal bazaar' (The bride of the Lord has looted the bazaar). She (Maya) has completely robbed those who observe silence or practise penance, those who are taken as spiritually arrived, of everything they had. He addresses the mind: "How can my ways be compatible with yours? I talk about things seen by eyes, you repeat what is written on paper." The Gujarati philosopher-poet Akho says: "Wherever

I look, I find roguishness. Owls are sitting facing one another. If somebody comes and gives news of the sun, they step forward and uphold their beaks. We have been in darkness for a thousand years. How come, you dare pose as wise children ?”

There is a satiric vein in the utterances of many a saint poet. They come down heavily on idolatry, pilgrimage, repeating God's name or *mantras*, listening to sacred tales, running after gurus, etc.

The fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries evince a specific satiric outburst, may be as a result of the socio-cultural, especially religious, state of affairs. One voice not to be missed is that of the Malayalam poet, Kunjan Nambiar, and another, an earlier one, that of the great Telugu poet Vemana.

Bhakti provided a forum which could be shared by both Hindu and Muslim men of God. Already Sufism had found a home in Persia, Central Asia and North India. Ramanuja (12th century) posited God as apart from one's individual soul and propounded that He could be realized only through passionate love. Prof. Zaehner shows how the position that Hujiwiri and Farid al-Din Attar take *vis-a-vis* the monist Sufi Abu Yazid's 'Miraj' in order to conform to Islamic tenets is almost similar to that of Ramanuja. India drew great Muslim saints to her. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, the first Sufi who came to Delhi in 1193 and settled down near Pushkar in Ajmer, had had disciples from both Muslims and Hindus. Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen notes that he came across, in Pushkar, Christians who called themselves 'Hussaini Brahmins'. Shaikh Nur-ud-din (born 1377), the 'milk-child' of Lal Ded, sang *shrukh* i.e. *sloka* (the Sanskrit word for stanza), patterned on the Persian *bahar*-rhythm and was also known as Sahajananda.

The aspiration for a synthesis became a living reality in the personality of Kabir (born 1398). Legend says he was a Brahmin widow's child, left near a lake and found by Niru, a weaver, who brought him up. Kabir lived in Varanasi as a Muslim weaver. All his life he stood like a rock against the rot and degradation that was going on in the name of religion. As there is a belief that those who die in Varanasi achieve salvation, he shifted to another place before his death. He lived as a liberated soul. A great seeker, he combined in himself all that was best in the Nath, Bhakti and Islamic traditions. Kabir is a seminal poet and his quintessential utterances constitute not only the best that medieval Indian literature has

to offer but also something which is compelling in world poetry. Nanakdev, another master synthesiser was to follow. The *Guru Granth-saheb* includes songs written in other languages, those of Kabir, Dadu and the Marathi saint poet Namdev.

The narrative compositions played a great role in the Bhakti movement, e.g. the rendering of the Valmiki *Ramayana* by Kamban, Kritubasa and Tulsidas, that of the *Mahabharata* by Kashiram Das and Sarala Das and the Telugu Kavitraya, that of the *Bhagavata* by Shankardev and the *Krishnalila* part of it by Surdas. The medieval poets did not translate, nor even transcreate, they re-created the works. It is not merely the case of making a few interesting changes or adding some significant details. Kamban, respecting the Tamil insistence on the bond of premarital love working as a sure basis for wedded love shows Sita and Rama attached to each other well before marriage. Sarala Das has added quite a few things in his rendering. The rendering does not remain a mere retelling. It is the tone and tenor of the renderings that make them original works, creations, in the respective languages. An important thing which distinguished most of the renderings from the original *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* is that while Valmiki's and Vyasa's works remain mainly imaginative works, even though the moral fervour and an overall elevating effect also were not a little responsible for their deep impact at home and abroad, the medieval renderings are mainly religious works and as such became extremely popular.

Comparative studies of the Puranic narratives written in different languages on, for instance, Abhimanyu and Sudama, happily called *kuchela* in the Southern languages, would give some insight into the poetic activity of the languages concerned.

When we take leave of Bhakti literature and turn to other narrative works, based on historical events, folktales, popular stories, Jain myths, legends and tales we find the bulk no less impressive. The Jain narrative works await the comparatist's efforts to assess how they differ from narratives on the same theme by Buddhist, Brahminical or secular writers. The Jains have a penchant for adopting secular stories and giving it a religious turn by making the main characters embrace the Jain faith at the end. Rarely the result is a happy one as it is in the case of the Tamil Jain epic *Silppadikarnam*. But the works do contain moments of imagi-

native handling. The interior monologue of Nala at the moment of cutting with a knife the cloth that he shared with his wife is visualised by the Gujarati Nayasundar as a dialogue between Nala and his hand and by Samayasundar as one between the right and the left hand.

The historical narratives in Hindi and Gujarati refer to Muslim invasions, one in Oriya to the Maratha invasion and some record the career of a patron king.

The *champukavya*, a poem using both verse and prose, has flourished particularly in all the four Southern languages; for example, the early Tamil *Shilappadikaram* is a *champu*, early Kannada (10th century) *Adipurana* and *Pampa Bharata champus* by its first, and according to some greatest, poet Pampa. Sanskrit poetics always accepted both verse and prose as vehicles of poetry ('Gadyam padyam cha mishram cha'). Sanskrit has specimens of *champu*, but the new Indo-Aryan languages showed scant interest in this form.

The pursuit of the pure literary art at royal courts degenerated into much too sophisticated and rather laboured writings of what is known in Hindi as the *Riti Kala* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bihari with his *Sata-sai*, reminding one of Hala's *Sapta-shati*, showed great craftsmanship in turning out vignettes in the *doha* metre.

Folk-drama has been popular all through the medieval period in many parts of the land. Malayalam has its *Kathakali* dramatic writings, Kannada its *Yakshagana* cycles. Marathi developed *Lalit* and *Tamasha* folk forms. Gujarat, especially *Anarta* (North Gujarat) which also means 'theatre' has a long tradition of *Bhavai* ('Bhavana', emotional representation) which is secular, romantic and at times sarcastic. Shankardev wrote many *Bhavanas* in Assamese on religious topics Bengali has *Jatra* and *Pala* Hindi Navtanka and Telugu its *Burra-katha*.

Prose on the whole, remained undeveloped, even though there are specimens of cultivated prose in quite a few languages. One of the earliest books in Urdu is *Merajul - Ashkin*, a treatise on mysticism in prose by Syed Gesudaraz (15th century). Assamese has *buranji*, i.e. chronicles which were treatises on state affairs including various aspects of warfare and Marathi has its historical *bakhars*. In Gujarati there are on the one hand specimens of prose explaining Sanskrit grammar and on the other those of cadenced prose with assonance and internal rhymes. In early Panjabi there is Sikh biographical literature in prose. The *champuepics* of the Dravidian

languages contained some prose.

The creativity of the Tamil language showed signs of ebbing after Kamban (12th century). An age of prose commentaries began. A new style of writing, *manipravalam* (diamonds and corals) was developed by Jain and Vaishnava scholars by juxtaposing Sanskrit and Tamil phrases. The other three Dravidian languages also used *manipravalam*, till it went out of vogue in modern times. Pp. 35

Thus we find that there is quite a significant sharing of a total ethos, and of literary forms and themes among the writers of the modern Indian languages during its second, middle phase of development, which makes a comparative study of their works imperative.

An important feature of the life of the medieval saint poets is that some of them travelled a lot and met at an intimate level and seem to have benefitted from one another's experience. Nanakdev went round the land. Namdev travelled northwards and settled in Panjab. Shankardev went on a long pilgrimage with a large group of chosen companions and again at the ripe age of 91 with some associates. Meerabai visited Vrindavan and left her home for good for Dwaraka. Perhaps most of them did not move out of their place. However, wherever the Bhakti poets were scattered in this vast subcontinent, their consciousness seemed to be at the same wavelength.

They sang in the language of the common fold. The superb *abhangas* of the semi-lettered Tukaram did not need embellishment or metaphor. Often the short *abhangas* piece was by itself a metaphor. The Sufi poet, Mallik Mohammad Jayasi, was learned and sophisticated and wrote the epic, *Padmavat*, on Padmini of Chittor, as an allegory depicting the quest of the soul for the beloved. He moulded Awadhi into a poetic speech and evolved the *doha-chopai* structure and bequeathed both on Tulasidas, who with the greatest felicity of expression and tremendous spiritual fervour reached the hearts of millions through his *Ramacharitmanas* as even Kamban had done through his *Ramayana*.

The literary performance during the medieval period is impressive. However, as the eighteenth century approached, there were hardly towering Bhakti singers around. The secular narratives ceased to have the verve and gusto and seemed to tend to be just versifications. Court poetry had already shown signs of decadence. The medieval period which began with a bang ended with a whimper, as it were.

When an overall view of Indian literature produced during the whole of the medieval period is taken, it is difficult for it, even at the present stage of our study of that period, to escape one pertinent criticism. Dr. Anandshankar Dhruva, a critic, who could see things in a wide perspective, hinted at the fact that the medieval poets' universe of poetic discourse was limited. Himself a deeply religious man and an authority on Sankara and Ramanuja, he does not mince words when in a mood of self-introspection he says: "... life had ebbed out of a major part of our consciousness, which had lost its power of observation. Its taste for life had died. Its interest for concepts and institutions like the home, the state, that are cultivated by man, had evaporated. It was alive to some extent only in a part of itself. And that was Dharma . . . Even at a time when all life had subsided within us, vitality kept throbbing in the vein of Dharma. That is why we see only poetry composed on that theme in our literature."

One example of the mortifying sluggishness and torpor and complete lack of interest in vital things will suffice. The first printing press was installed by the Portuguese in Goa in A.D. 1556. It took almost three centuries for Surat, the biggest port during the Muslim period and about four hundred miles away from Goa, to have its first printing press which a teacher got installed as late as 1842 and that too beyond the city limits.

The Common Denominator

If the life of the Indian people was moribund at the end of the medieval period, the consolidation of the British occupation by early nineteenth century had, as later described by Gandhi, an emasculating effect on it.

Political subjugation and economic exploitation were not the only traumatic experiences. India found herself faced with the fact of the Western civilization. She stood utterly exposed socially. The evils in the social order, the custom of *Sati* and the oppression of women and untouchables, in particular, became glaringly manifest. The impact of the egalitarian and humanistic ideals of the West on a closed and stratified society were bound to be far-reaching in its results. Little surprise that many of the first generation of writers were staunch reformers.

The modern phase of Indian literature is generally taken to begin

from A.D. 1800, when the Fort William College was established in Calcutta. About the same time the Baptist Mission started a printing press in nearby Serampore. The Baptist William Carey alone published the grammars of Bengali, Marathi and Panjabi. Textbooks were published, translations began to appear and several newspapers and periodicals in Indian languages came into existence.

When we examine the literary output of the first half of the nineteenth century, the first thing that strikes our attention is the emergence of prose as a potent vehicle of social intercourse. Prose had been sadly neglected in the past. With India's coming on the periphery of the industrial civilization and the consequent increase in mobility, communicational needs increased considerably and prose was developed to meet the new needs. The essay (*nibandha, prabandha*) was the most popular form for a long time. As late as 1874 Chiplunker chose to call his Marathi monthly *Nibandhamala*.

But prose came to be employed very soon for avowedly artistic purposes. Western literary genres were borrowed and the novel was naturally the more popular one. Fiction of all sorts was written, wild romances, exciting time-killers, historical novels and social novels.

The first plays that were written were after the Western model. In some cases they bore the influence of the local folk-theatre tradition and that of Sanskrit plays also which had newly become familiar. Adaptations of Shakespeare and Moliere were put on the stage.

As to poetry, it never ceased to be written. The tradition of poetry writing was live and continuous. The first modern Gujarati poet had his education in poetry writing in a traditional poetry school in Kachcha. Poetry written by about the middle of the nineteenth century evokes a staggering sense of novelty : there are new metres, new forms, new themes. For the first time poets sing uninhibitedly of personal love. Even in the depiction of nature, what was predominantly enjoyable was the colour lent by the subjective mood of the poet.

By far the most significant modern poet that emerged after the mid-nineteenth century is Michael Madhusudan Dutt. He began with writing poetry in English. In response to a copy of his book of English poetry a certain English gentleman advised him to write in his own language, Bengali. His being involved in a theatrical performance in Calcutta stimulated him to write his first Bengali play, *Sharmishtha*, in 1859.

Between 1859 and 1862 he wrote four plays, three long poems and an epic. He introduced the sonnet form. He was the first Indian poet to forge the blank verse. While he pays homage to Valmiki in his epic *Megha-nada-Vadha*, the work bears imprint of the influence of Milton and Virgil. It was propitious that the compulsions of the British-created cultural situation were overridden by Michael's inner compulsion to articulate himself in Bengali. What is equally propitious is that the Bengali language never failed him. He confides to a friend: "I had no idea, my dear fellow, that our mother tongue would place at my disposal such exhaustive materials. The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves — words that I never thought I knew."

It would be a fascinating study to watch how Ghalib succeeded in poetic achievement during the same period. Urdu was a court language and one of its great poets, Mir was alive till 1810 'Mir bhi tha'. Ghalib, who followed, did not have to wait for newer tools of poetic expression to be forged. A shrewd observer of things, he did possess a modern outlook as evinced in his letter, discouraging the publication of *Ain-e-Akbari* because, he thought, it would not be helpful in bringing about the change that was needed at the moment. Master of the simple colloquial Urdu, he blew such spirit into it as to achieve in poetic terms something which will remain phenomenal.

As the first graduates came out from the three newly established universities at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, the newer tradition gained ground. The Western lyric became current as a genre, with all its variety, ode, elegy, dramatic lyric, monologue, etc. The satirical, socio-philosophical and epic novels were written. The short story, biography and autobiography became popular. Discerning creative writers and scholars took to book-reviewing and criticism developed as an important activity.

The post-1857 period of literary harvesting lasts up to 1930, when a new ferment of ideas is evinced. The harvesting period varies from language to language, depending not a little on the accident of arrival of men of genius. It does not require much argument to visualise that all the languages were producing works, mainly under the same overwhelming influence of Western ideas and literary models and that of the Indian heritage. It will require detailed studies to be able to visualise how every language was groping and struggling to solve its problems of evolving

newer literary tools and techniques almost in isolation, without any effort to profit from each other's experiences and experiments. What could be more ludicrous than many of our languages producing translations of *Gitanjali*, after Tagore's getting the Nobel Prize, from the English version rather than the original which would have made handy much of the diction if not the rhythm also?

One distinguishing feature of the pre-1857 literary activity needs to be emphasised. Rationalism as a value seems to be taking roots during that period. The reformers were busy fighting against superstition, dogma, cramping social customs. It would be worthwhile to undertake a study of the names given to newspapers, more especially the little magazines and to associations and societies. A daily is called *Samsar Darpan*, it is to mirror the world around. The journals in Western India bear the names *Buddhi-Prakash*, *Satyaprakash*, *Jnan-Sudha*, *Vijnan-Vilas*. Young Dadabhai Naoroji edited *Rast Gofar* (one that speaks out the truth). There is an unmistakable accent on *Buddhi* (reason), *Jnan* (knowledge), *Satya* (truth), *Vijnan* (science). Indeed the pre-1857 literary activity laid much store by rationalism.

The post-1857 writings gain in depth and width of vision. The new graduates studied Sanskrit works also, which were just being studied by the Westerners and earning the highest encomium from them. This was a discovery that strengthened the colonial Indians' sense of dignity. Krishna Kripalani says, "So deep was the impact of the discovery that as late as 1946 Jawaharlal Nehru named the book in which he surveyed his country's past as *Discovery of India*!" As he further observes, "Discovery of ancient heritage was in a sense a partial recovery and became an inspiration as well as a burden, at once a spur and a shackle."

Unfortunately it soon degenerated into a revivalist tendency in certain sections of the society. A masterly attempt at counteracting it is seen in Sir Ramanbhai's satirical novel — *Bhadrambhadrā* (1900), in which the Quixotic hero is shown using unnatural high-flown Sanskrit idiom.

Kipling's 'East is East and West is West' had generated in the minds of Indians a tension between orientalism and occidentalism. Just as there were attempts at arriving at a synthesis of the ancient Indian ideas and those obtaining in the contemporary society, without having any truck with the revivalists, some thinkers pursued the idea of evolving a synthesis of all that was best in the East and in the West. Tagore's *Gora*

boldly embraces the problem of this twofold synthesis.

Tagore aimed at something which he thought was very significant for humanity. He felt that what the East, for example, the Upanishads and Lao-tze, had to offer was the awareness of the unity of all manifestations. New *mantras* were chanted at the convocation ceremony of the Vishva-Bharati which was founded in 1920, beginning with 'Dve Vidye, prachi pratichi cha ...' There are two lores — ways of knowledge, the Eastern and the Western. Has Tagore's dream fallen by the road side? When in the twenties he was invited to China, he found for himself that the new resurging China had no stomach for it. But it may yet get relevant, if man is not to rest satisfied with being just a well-fed, well-clothed, well-housed and well-entertained creature and is to manage a breakthrough from the present day ecological problem as well as the threat of total annihilation.

The romantic spirit dominated the post-1857 literature, though there were some novelists who were adept at realistic portrayal of life. The prevalent mood was patriotic.

By 1930 there was a definite emphasis on social consciousness. Of the three big movements started under Gandhi's leadership in the beginning of the twenties, thirties and forties, that of the thirties was the purest. The first one lacked proper preparation and ended up in what the leader owned up as the 'Himalayan blunder'. The last one was a desperate final bid for power. That of the thirties was started after Gandhi went into retreat on coming out of jail in 1924 and concentrated for some years on the constructive programme, put the village at the centre of things and awakened the masses. 1930 saw a real mass movement and the wave of Satyagraha engulfed the length and breadth of the country. It was a patriotic movement, that helped a great widening of sympathies. It was a moment of the awakening of the springs of creativity. Literature benefitted not a little from it. By then it had become increasingly difficult for writers to dream their way out of reality. A new band of writers appeared in the various national languages. Many of them were actively involved in the freedom struggle and courted imprisonment.

I prefer 1930 as the cut-off year for another reason also. It was Gandhi who inspired the young men to go to jail and it was His Majesty's government whose hospitality they enjoyed there, but it was socialism which they studied in their spare hours while in jail. Marxism gave an edge

to their sense of reality, helped in augmenting their social consciousness. That is why when Mulk Raj Anand and other friends in London formed the nucleus of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association and the movement started a year later in India, it did not remain just 'a returned-from-abroad-students' movement. Believe it or not, Narahari Parikh, who became later Gandhi's secretary after Mahadev Desai's death, took classes at Gujarat Vidyapith (founded by Gandhi) on the Russian Revolution in mid-1931. Dharmanand Kosambi, the great Buddhist savant, who had just returned from Russia had already spoken about his experiences and held discussions with students for hours. If a personal reference is pardoned, I wrote as early as 1932 in jail: "Bhukhya janono jatharagni jagashe..." - the fire of hunger will rise, leaving not a speck of the burnt up palaces behind.

In mid-thirties the Gandhian and the Marxian ways of thinking seemed to go well together, for they shared two important things, anti-imperialism and concern for the have-nots. Rabindranath and Gandhian stalwarts had participated in the Progressive Writers' conferences. The parting of ways came rather much too soon, when during the Second World War the Marxist slogan of people's war assigned an absolutely subsidiary position to the Indian patriotic struggle.

After Gandhi's martyrdom, the Gandhians did not raise a Church in his name. Some of us felt happy at it. There is no Gandhian literature as such, though he remained a great liberating influence for three decades and will remain for a long time to come, gaining fresh relevance with the passing of time. A Gandhian poem is best written not so much in words as in action.

The Progressive Movement gained roots especially in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu, Malayalam and other languages. During the pre-Independence decade there developed a reaction against the Gandhian and Marxian preoccupation with social consciousness and in favour of achieving beauty in poetry under the influence of Eliot, the French and German symbolists and nearer home Tagore, the writer of mystic songs. While in Hindi one finds the experimentalists pitted against the progressives, in Bengali the progressive Bishnu De is a considerable experimentalist also.

Interest in psychological handling of characters grew during the thirties and Freud became a universal influence especially in the short story, novel and drama.

Social consciousness was to assert itself soon, due to the disillusionment of the fifties not only at the local level because of the tragic upheavals that took place after Independence but also at the global level because of the no less depressing aftermath of the Second World War. The writer in India found himself as a citizen of 'one world' and got involved in its spiritual drama. Social consciousness articulated itself in a much finer manner. It got, however, drowned in the writer's much too facile a sharing of the global consciousness that was emerging in the world of letters. Apart from some regional novels that were written in several languages during the fifties and the sixties, and the work of Progressive Writing, the writer leaned heavily on the Western attitudes, — a sense of alienation, fragmentation, existential anguish, and that of the absurd. Not that he had experienced all that on his own nerves. But he tried to benefit from the growing importance of the aesthetic aspect of a literary work, viewed as something of a firm rock in the midst of a crumbling universe. This he did at a great risk, not only that of moving farther away from those who speak his language but also sometimes that of slipping into sterility. Structuralism had already put the formalist approach in its place. Things like the emergence of Dalit literature began to emphasise the need of a sense of roots and that of the historical context.

It is not for nothing that from the sixties onwards the question of Indianness is raised again and again. What is Indianness in Indian literature ?

Indianness

'Any discourse, in which the word 'Indian' occurs, is beset with some difficulties. It will all depend on what kind of a bell rings in one's mind, as one hears that word. There are some who would have little to do with the Aryans' coming to this land. There are some who would like to pick up the thread of history from about A.D. 1000 and others who are left rather cold about things that happened here before that date. There are some nationalists who would not take kindly to anything connected with the British. There would be some for whom history gets significance with October 1917 or with October 1949. There are again some who refuse to accept that the political map of this subcontinent was redrawn in 1947 and again in 1972.

Such limitations of perception are bound to blur or truncate the view of things. Each of them is likely to develop fundamentalistic overtones. A variegated and most fascinating fabric of human life has been woven in India through the ages. Each epoch has contributed one or the essential element to the composite culture of India. If one discards any of them, one chooses to remain poorer to that extent.

The limitation of perception is manifesting itself in the post-Independence period in, for examples, rejection of words which have been long in usage. Recent Tamil writers are eschewing studiedly words of Sanskrit origin. A living language rather freely incorporates words, found useful, from anywhere and everywhere. Sanskrit has kept on borrowing all through as the *Natyashastra* and works on music etc. show. Hemchandra collected such indigenous words in his lexicon *Deshinamamala* in the twelfth century. Even the small *Oxford Concise Dictionary* has such Indian words as *oont* (camel), *atta* (flour). Dravidian words like *neera* (water), *meena* (fish) are freely used in Sanskrit and other languages.

So also it would be unwise to stop using Persian-Arabic words. In the title of a Tagore-poem *Viday-Abhishap*, how comfortably does *viday*, a word of Arabic origin sit side by side with the Sanskrit word *abhishap*. Bhadrabhadra, the hero of the Gujarati satirical novel of that name, originally bore the name 'Dolatshankar'. Lord Shankar appeared in a dream and said he did not like to be joined with the foreign word *dolat* (Arabic 'daulat'). He consulted the priest and changed the name into a high-sounding one Bhadrabhadra. This is how the saga of the Quixotic casteist revivalist hero begins.

During the first decade after India got independent, Hindi seemed to be overburdening itself with Sanskrit words and showed signs of becoming like the language ridiculed half a century ago in *Bhadrabhadra*. Thanks to the newer generation of Hindi writers, who instinctively revolted against it, Hindi became again a normal, sprightly, living medium.

While one talks of Indian culture or literature the idea of an Indian state is not predicated. Firstly, there was no unified state in India during the first and second phases of Indian literature. During both periods even though the country was divided politically, the people had developed a fair measure of cultural unity. While the political activity divided the people and the feudal princedoms went on warring amongst themselves, the poetic activity united them in a surprisingly abundant measure. Secondly,

even during the third i.e. modern phase, even as of today, one does not contemplate a centralism with respect to either Indian culture or Indian literature, to which the culture or literature in each of the various parts of the country is to conform. It is rather an ongoing search for, a vision of, a pattern of Indian literature and culture to which the literature and culture in every part of the country is more or less converging.

We may have to however, after independence, restrict the meaning of the word 'Indian' to 'national', so as not to imply any disrespect to the national statehood of our neighbours, i.e. 'Indian literature' now means Indian national literature. The nature of the study remains the same, because the same highly multilingual situation continues. We share Sindhi, Punjabi, Urdu with one neighbour, Nepali with another, Bengali with the third one and Tamil with the fourth one. If we care to get acquainted with the literature in Sinhalese and in Pushto and some important dialects in Pakistan, we can qualify to scan the whole literary landscape of the subcontinent.

Even when we talk of Indian national literature it will be never in any chauvinistic sense. And we shall always be viewing the composite identity of Indian literature within the parameters of the composite culture of India.

I cannot do better than refer to how Rabindranath looks at the problem of Indianness. In his novel *Gora* he shows how Gora, who was the protagonist of all that was best in the Hindu religious tradition, all of a sudden discovers that he was not a Hindu, not even an Indian either, but the son of European parents. The question posed by Tagore in this novel is : Has India nothing to offer now to Gora, an outcast ? Tagore has already supplied the answer through the characters of Anandmayi and Pareshbabu. Both of them had been outcasts long before, and unlike Gora, by choice. They preferred to be outcasts from traditional or revolutionary religious societies with the one supreme craving for love. To me it has always seemed that Rabindranath suggests through these two characters and the special predicament in which he has put Gora that true Indianness transcends India, that genuine Indianisation is a synonym for humanisation.

This also hints at what is generally referred to as the Indian ethos, which is rather something that is more felt than defined. A unique and immortal picture of the life shared by human beings, beasts and birds is given by Kalidasa when Shakuntala is given a touching send-off from the

hermitage— which gains relevance when man has recently awakened to the problem of ecological imbalance. India's genius for synthesis is seen in the attempts at evolving patterns of composite culture during the ancient as well as medieval periods. We can see some integrating factors which have been lending Indianness to Indian literature all through the ages : symbols and myths which refer to the inner psyche, the epics and the sports of child Krishna that touch the emotional life of the people, the *Brihatkatha* type narratives, folk tales, etc. which cater to the imaginative nature of man and which along with folksongs have played no small part in keeping the common people culturally literate. It should be added that all that is significant in the oral tradition is not yet rendered into written texts. The Khamba-Thoibi love saga of Manipuri, a Sino-Tibetan language, found its way into writing when Angnghal of Imphal, a poetic-playwright took down in his own way in more than 30,000 lines what he heard every week from Vaje Guruji, a master folk-poet, who sang the story with the accompaniment of a musical instrument.

When we are thinking of the Indianness in Indian literature it would be in place to discuss the problem of our utter dependence on Western poetic theory in all our critical activity. We have a rich tradition not only of creative writing but also of poetic theory. As early as 1907, Anand-shankar Dhruva raised this question in the obituary note on Govardhanram Tripathi, the author of the Gujarati epic-novel *Sarasvatichandra*, with a sense of dignity and real understanding of literary creation. While discussing the question of its form, he said :

To call it a novel or not is a question of semantics. This is not to say that the principles of narrative fiction current to date in English literature are absolutely meaningless. One cannot agree with the proposition that the whole charm of a novel lies in its form. To think that aesthetic principles should be deduced only from literary models given by only one people, either the English or the Greek, is sheer intellectual dependence. We feel that *Sarasvatichandra* would be rated very high if it is evaluated by remaining free from such dependence.

Slavery has entered into our very soul, said Dr. K.C. Bhattacharya, principal of Hoogly College, in a discourse given during 1928-30, on not literature in particular but the whole intellectual activity, entitled 'Swaraj

in Ideas'. Far from being chauvinistic or averse to a healthy process of assimilation, he sounded a warning against 'rootless' universalism.

Even after a one sided preoccupation with Western critical theories and Western literary models on our part for a long period, the West has had hardly any worthwhile feed-back from us. It should have occurred to us, at least, that there was some poetics implied in the literary models in our languages and we should be trying to formulate it. As it is, we have a rich tradition of poetical theorising which has thrown up some seminal ideas. Standing at an advantage as we are, we should be availing of the opportunity of assessing the worth of these ideas in the light of those of the West and vice versa. While we do follow the great debate in the West in the field of poetics, even master the forbidding terminology presently employed and contribute significantly to its outcome, our practical criticism in our languages will show how it is the Indian tools of literary perception that help surprisingly to the largest extent a sound appreciation of our creative works.

As Marxian critical theory has become a part of the critical apparatus during this century and more recently feminist critical theory is gaining in relevance, it would be worth examining if a newer theoretical approach would be in place in order to assess Dalit literary works which are coming up in Marathi, Kannada, Gujarati and Punjabi.

A Vision of Indian Literature

Barely we were out of the colonial stage when we almost overnight found ourselves caught up in a Third-World situation. I can hardly make a detour in order to discuss the implications of the new predicament we are in. Whatever one's idea of Indianness, the Third-World situation is bound to cast its shadow over it. And one does not know how long. So long as about 20 per cent of the world population intends to continue to eat up about 80 per cent of the world's total production, because of its being in possession of very advanced technologies, the Third-World situation may last longer than it should. It is something which the West has thrown up. Measures like the Group of '77 do not seem to have made a dent. What sanctions can be built up, by writers amongst others?

Firstly, the writers can compare notes while they react to this situation in their literary creations. This can be done as outsiders as once

the Westerners as well as some Indians treated problems of Indology as foreigners. (Nehru disliked the word 'Indology' for its often showed preoccupation with the dead things of the past).

Viewing with clinical aloofness the literary scene in Third World countries along with Westerners, as foreigners, in the light of literary techniques of the West, is not so important as viewing it as insiders and making well-meaning Westerners also do so. It would be good, for a change, at long last to deduce literary principles that inhere in the Third World literary models and attempt an assessment of the Western literary works also with their help. The idea is literary exercises in the Third World should have a way of helping build social consciousness both at home and in the rest of the world, if possible, about the prevailing stifling condition and try to rouse the conscience of mankind.

On the contrary what we witness is something alarming. What was a common feature of our colonial existence has got far too much aggravated in the Third World situation, a super-colonialism. We want to catch the ear not so much of Indians as of Westerners. We want mainly to talk to and preferably as Westerners as if we do not expect Indians to follow a literary discourse and the only response we think they are capable of is that of being mightily impressed by our performance whatever it is. This tendency has throttled not a little our creative efforts also.

The second thing we are called upon to attend to because of the Third World situation is to make the right use of the technologies, sometimes outmoded, passed on to us. Take the TV, the so-called 'idiot-box'. It is a toy mankind has newly found and is bound to be overused, misused, abused. Priorities will not be rationally adhered to in the case of importing technologies. Even before we can tackle the problem of starvation, coloured TV will claim a precedence. However, if we can make some sound use of it, it would be no small satisfaction. Can the TV establishment be pressed into the service of mass education ?

TV has turned out to be a great time killer and it makes one dispense with the thinking habit, leads to the atrophying of the mind. Already in the advanced countries a class of neo-illiterates is emerging. Young boys and girls are more and more dispensing with reading. And yet they are not caught as illiterate. They are smart enough, modern enough, are able to discuss, even though superficially, many matters of daily interest. This

is so because they imbibe enough of such things from viewing the TV. What will happen to the book? It is anybody's guess. Perhaps the audio-visual aspect of presentation of literature may gain ground in these changed circumstances. Ballads, poems, may as in olden days be recited and the personal factor, that of the author's or a great actor's presence may lend some special attraction to such programmes. Short stories and even novels can be presented in this live fashion. After all the literary art is a voice. The audio-cassettes and more especially video-cassettes can preserve, as never before, both the voice and the living presence of the author or a great reciter or reader for the coming generations. The writers, while trying to avoid the evil effects of available technology and to benefit the most from it can help build consciousness which may delimit the power concentrated in the hands of those who possess advanced technologies.

One question that is likely to haunt all those who get interested in the study of modern Indian literature, relates to the difference between what Raja Rammohun Roy intended to achieve for India through a new educational policy and what the Macaulay-inspired ruthless policy did actually achieve. The Raja could not be more right when he wanted Indians to study modern Western science and see that education did not end with the activities of Pathshalas and Madressas. Sanskrit and Arabic were not the common media of communication, social intercourse. Even when Persian was the court language, the media of instruction were the local languages. And there were quite a few people who specialised in Persian. Even as English became the court language, there would have been people who would have specialised in it. The Macaulay policy led to something atrocious. It made English the medium of education and created a class which got alienated from the masses. Were the British really interested in the education of the Indian people? Their policy ended up in creating a class of English educated persons who were by the time they left India one per cent of the population but were of an adequate size to help them in economic exploitation and maintaining the regime. If the British were really concerned about educating Indians they with their organisational capacity would not have left only 15 per cent of the vast population literate after 112 years of Macaulay's Minute. Even when long after the installing of the printing press in Calcutta and Bombay by about the turn of the eighteenth century, one reached Surat in 1842, the magistrate did not allow it to be set up within the walled city.

A Chicago scholar describes Indian literature as everything which is written by an Indian. Perhaps it is necessary to rephrase it. Indian literature includes everything which is written by an Indian and is shared by a sizable Indian community. So it will be necessary to include all Persian works written by Indians. They may not necessarily form a part of the literature of Iran. There was a flutter in Indian literary circles when a prestigious Persian delegation referred to Iqbal's Persian work rather indifferently. Iqbal's *Asarar-e-Khudi* and other poetic works in Persian and Persian poems of Ghalib and others form a legitimate part of Indian literature as do those of English irrespective of whether they form a part of English literature or not. (The 1965 *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* does include Anglo-Indian Literature)

Two factors that can help in making the idea of Indian literature a reality are translations and courses in comparative Indian literature at universities.

- The mills of translation activity must work overtime in a multilingual country like India. If only one work from each of say twenty languages is to be published in all other Indian languages, three hundred and eighty translators have to be at work. All incentives and encouragement should be provided for translation work. Can we expect the Hindi and English and other language departments and the new universities established for some languages make translation work an important part of their projects? There should also be a central pool of translated works both in Hindi and English. As all Indian languages are national languages, the habit of referring to some languages as 'regional' should better be discarded as early as possible, except where the reference is specifically to the official language of a particular State. The constitution lays down that Hindi (and for some time English) will work as the official language of the Union Government and the region States which opt for it and the other languages will be official languages of particular region States and will be in that context called 'regional'. In no other context, i.e. where no reference to 'official' language is meant, the languages should be referred to as 'regional'. Certainly, there is no 'regional' literature. Hindi, over and above, being the 'official' language of the Union Government, can work as a link language and it can commend itself to the people of the country by proving its usefulness through various cultural services, by creating a central pool of important works of Indian

literature as already suggested. This should be a joint venture of writers of Hindi as well as those of the other national languages.

Sir Ashutosh enjoined upon us as early as 1916: "If we have to bring about the literary unity of India, we shall have to do so through our universities ... " He was the first to establish the Department of Modern Indian Languages at Calcutta University in 1919. How many of our hundred and odd universities can boast of having such a department? The building up of comparative Indian literature as an essential discipline in language studies deserves top priority today.

Thus we see that there is a living continuity, there is no break, in the four thousand years of the growth of Indian literature. There are shared interests and common pursuits in different periods, in almost every epoch, at every important stage of development.

At every stage it has been possible for a writer to avail of much that is ever present as a living part of the literary tradition. Take the case of *Gitanjali*, the most translated modern Indian work. It is in the tradition of the Bhakti movement, though the word 'Hari' is referred to only once. It is more in the tradition of Kabir. Without the Upanishads it could not stand. It has not a little to do with the Baul folk-songs, with the outpourings of the God-drunk Aulias and Bauls of Bengal. It would also remind a student of Tamil Sangam and post-Sangam poetry how expression of intense human love gets lifted up into that of divine love.

The present-day Indian writer functions from within a long, commonly shared living literary tradition and a common nationalist historical situation, which makes a writer like me often ever that I am an Indian writer who writes in Gujarati, U.R. Anantha Murthy an Indian writer writing in Kannada.

Thus we have tried to examine the idea of Indian literature as an aggregate of all writings in all our languages presenting itself as a pattern with common strands through the ages, now after 1947 to be described as Indian national literature and to be closely and assiduously studied as comparative Indian literature. This configuration is of course, a (not the) vision of Indian literature.

The present day writer, in whose work the idea of Indian literature is to incarnate is, for all one can say, in the late eighties poised for strengthening his sense of roots by incorporating in his artistic ventures as much of life as is genuinely felt by him, thereby giving an unmistakable identity to his work, i.e. an authentic stamp of its having emerged from this part of the world, as a contribution to world literature.

