

THE INCREDIBLE GODMEN AND THE INDIAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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But what went ye out for to see?

A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in king's courts.

But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.

As always the passage to India has been more than a physical pathway. More often it has been an intellectual journey or a spiritual odyssey. Walt Whitman in his poem rhapsodically celebrates the digging up of the Suez Canal as an opening of a new avenue for metaphysical quest and making the scriptures of India and the wisdom of its sages accessible to the West. E.M. Forster in his novel presents the mystique of the orient and the inscrutable complexity of its life through suggestive symbolism and unresolved experience that is beyond the range of ordinary comprehension or expression. Birds of passage have passed through India deriding it as an Area of Darkness or a Wounded Civilisation or even a Continent of Circe. But, there have been others, more serious minded perhaps, who have undertaken a pilgrimage to savour not only the sights and sounds of an exotic land but also study and unravel the arcane wisdom of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the *Gita*, and establish contact with the innumerable holy men and women who continue to perform not only astounding miracles but also preach the tenets and eternal verities of the perennial philosophy. Paul Brunton, Howard Murphet, Arthur Osborne and the pioneers who established the world headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar near Madras bear testimony to the vibrant spiritual concerns that still condition the life of this ancient land.

In a rather dramatic statement, Arthur Koestler in his preface to the book *The Lotus and the Robot* says that:

Rome was saved in AD 408 by three thousand pounds of

pepper imported from India as part of the ransom the Senate paid to Alaric the Goth; ever since, when Europe found itself in an impasse or in a questing mood, it has turned yearningly to the land of culinary and spiritual spices. The greatest influence during the Dark Ages was Augustine, who was influenced by Indian mysticism. Long before Aldous Huxley found in Yoga a remedy for our Brave New World, Schopenhauer called the Upanishads the consolation of his life; and the first generation of the Nuclear Age seems to have found a like solace in Zen. On the whole, the West's receptiveness to the voice of the East was limited to periods of spiritual emergency, to moods of futility and despair; its attitude to Asia was either that of the conqueror armed with his gun-and-gospel truth, or that of the pilgrim in sackcloth and ashes, anxious to prostrate himself at the guru's feet (p.585).

Later on in the tract, Koestler rightly disapproves of the uncritical adulation of India's spiritual heritage. Undoubtedly, many a charlatan has attempted to imitate and echo the genuine eschatology, parading specious trickery as the gospel truth. This ersatz packaging of instant nirvana, increasingly resorted to in recent times by jet-set gurus and godmen, with all the glitter of Madison Avenue hype, is clearly dishonest and ignoble and has thus rightly attracted widespread disgust and disapprobation.

But, reverting to the main concern of this brief essay, let us trace out the historical dynamics that generated the Indian literary renaissance and the remarkable men who inspired the movement as a whole. By the beginning of the 19th century the East India Company or more precisely imperial Britain had established almost absolute control over most parts of India. Besides the executive, administrative and juridical functions the restructuring of the educational system had assumed great importance. The missionaries by then had founded several private schools and had published dictionaries, grammars and treatises in English translation. The existing Oriental education was on the verge of yielding place to the English model and rapid Anglicization was taking place all over the country. Macaulay's celebrated Minute proved to be decisive. The avowed purpose was to make the natives good English scholars. On the 7th March 1835, Lord William Bentinck resolved that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and

science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone".

Under the impact of the West, India was undergoing a transformation from a decadent medieval state to a restless but recognisable modern nation. The somnolent and soporific sense of acceptance, the passive testament of karmic inevitability, the ancient doctrine of defeatism and determinism, seems to have got a severe jolt, resulting in the reawakening of the dormant Indian spirit. The cultural conflict between the Orientalists and the Anglicists and the collision of two disparate civilisations produced a "moment" that gave birth to a distinct social reformation and literary renaissance. As Professor K.R.S. Iyengar suggests:

The exhausted, almost sapless, native soil received the new rich fertiliser from the West, and out of this fruitful union - as it happened in Elizabethan England - a new literature was born. Bengali led the way, but the others were not slow to follow. And Indo-Anglian literature had the same origin as the other modern Indian literatures, though here the foreign element may seem to be more prominent and more obvious (p.30).

Come the moment and cometh the man. In the extraordinary figure of the well bred aristocrat, Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) not only a bridge between the East and the West was established, but a mediating messiah was found to unite the forces of religious reformation and literary renaissance. While still young, Rammohan Roy mastered several languages such as, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Hindustani, besides his mother tongue Bengali. Under the tutelage of two British officials - Woodforde and Digby - he mastered the English language. Acutely agonised by the plight of the poor widows, the superstitious practices of the Hindus and several other rampant social evils, he single-handedly started a reform movement to eradicate these pernicious practices. As an intensely religious person, a Hindu and a Brahmin, he set about the cleansing process by founding the Brahmo Samaj. In the words of Ranade he "aspired only to establish harmony between men's accepted faith and their practical observances by a strict monolatrous worship of the heart and not of the hands, a sacrifice of self and not of the possessions of the self" (Iyengar p.31). According to Satish Chandra Chakravarti "Rammohan's idea was that

his Samaj was to be, not a temple of a new sect, but the unifier of all India through the common worship of the God by the members of all denominations" (Iyengar p.31). By precept and practice he advanced the cause that he cherished and is considered to be not only one of the great builders of modern India but also an idealist and a reformist. He in fact set the fashion of writing autobiographies by publishing his own sketch in *the Athenaeum* and the *Literary Gazette*. Subsequently several other distinguished Indians including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were to excel in this genre.

The Brahmo Samaj founded in 1828, was to become a major movement under Keshab Chander Sen, who was considered to be a sort of Martin Luther by Max Muller. Sen adroitly forged the links between Christianity and Hinduism and drew men to his impassioned oratory. The Rev. Joseph Cook described Sen as "an orator born, not made. He has a splendid physique, excellent quality of organization, capacity of sudden heat and of tremendous impetuosity, and lightning-like-swiftness of thought and expression, combined with a most iron self-control". Both Rammohan and Sen although attracted to the Western ideas knew that there existed a great chasm between profession and practice. Through their deep insight they were able to see beneath the appearances and recognise the bigotry that exists both in Hinduism and Christianity. Hence the Bramho Samaj propagated only the perennial truths. Christ and his Gospel, fused with the quest for Brahman became the credo of the new church that was to usher in a renewed cultural renaissance.

The impact of the West was a mixed blessing. Along with the elixir of benevolent Christianity and scientific learning there was the poison of Mammon worship and soulless materialism. India was caught at the cross-roads of a civilisational dilemma. There was no turning back on the West and yet a new path had to be mapped out to redeem the soul of an ancient nation groaning under the burden of history's debris. All the reform movements provided only partial relief. The pillar of light to lead the people to the promised land was nowhere in sight. As K.R.S. Iyengar avers in an eloquent statement:

But none of these movements - neither the Bramho Samaj nor the Theosophical Society, neither the Arya Samaj nor the Prarthana Samaj - was a really effective or final answer to the challenge from the West, which, paradoxically enough, had a Janus - face; the face of English education and its sense of power, and the face of Jesus Christ, and its transcendent light

of holiness. If the doubting Hindu was to be made to believe, a new living manifestation of Indian spirituality was called for. The old avatars and Messiahs - Rama and Krishna, Mahavir and Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja, the mystic singer saints - were dimmed by distance, while Rammohan Roy, Keshub Sen, Dayanand, and Ranade were but superlatively gifted men, not avatars or Messiahs. And Ramakrishna Paramahansa occurred at the nick of time, occurred in Bengal and modern India to set it on new foundations. Romain Rolland rightly saw in Ramakrishna "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people"; and though no more present in the flesh, "his soul animates modern India" (p.51).

Ramakrishna (1836-1886) was born in a village called Kamarpukur very close to Calcutta. He became a priest of the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar. Right from his childhood he was different from the other children and was given to falling into an ecstatic state of mind and prolonged trances. Thinking that matrimony would cure him from such a pattern of behaviour, a young bride by name Sarada Devi was found for him. It turned out to be a marriage in spirit rather than a normal conjugal bond.

Ramakrishna took to a transcendental path of meditation to purge his mind of all selfish and narrow ideas. His *sadhana* to overcome the body-consciousness and exorcise the illusion or *maya* born out of one's ego resulted in perceptible changes. He was well on his way to become a fully realized soul or godman. Henceforth he was a Paramahansa. Free from all bonds he was transfigured into the universal self itself. His heart went forth to all without any distinction of class, creed or religion. He would meditate and play like a guileless urchin. He would pray like a Christian or perform *namaz* like a Muslim. Oftentimes, he would pass into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* or a state of transcendental beatitude.

By any reckoning he was an extraordinary godman. He didn't seek gurus, they came to him. Some of the greatest intellectuals of India sat at his feet to savour the nectar of his sage counsel and laugh at his witty homespun anecdotes. He was virtually illiterate and yet rich in learning that matters. His disciples established the Ramakrishna Order and the Mission. Numerous schools and colleges and charitable organizations bear testimony to the far reaching social benefits ushered in by this great man who taught in parables the gospel of the new age.

Swami Vivekananda once paid rich tributes to the sage by observing:

I do not find a more marvellous miracle than the manner this mad Brahmin used to handle human minds like lumps of clay, breaking, moulding and remodelling them and filling with new ideas by a mere touch.

When Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa passed away in 1886, his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda took over the spiritual and humanitarian movement. After undertaking the task of discovering his own India by traversing the length and breadth of this vast land, the young Swami meditated for three days on a rock at the southern most tip of India - the Cape Camorin - and then decided to discover the world, nay conquer it by preaching his gospel of universal brotherhood.

The momentous impact he made on the audience at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in September 1893 has been well documented by now. His French biographer Romain Rolland in his book the *Prophets of the New India* cites *The New York Herald* as extolling:

He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.

The Boston Evening Post considered him to be "the great favourite of the parliament" and it is told that whenever he crossed the platform he was greeted with resounding applause and the only way of keeping the restive audience quiet was to announce that Vivekananda would speak at the end of the session.

The towering moral figure of Vivekananda left an indelible imprint on the Western mind. He was well received by the intellectuals and the aristocratic circles and even the heads of the churches showed him respect. His motto of tolerance and religious universalism impressed everybody. He was invited to speak in places such as New York, Boston, Detroit, London, Berlin and Kiel. He addressed the Metaphysical Society of Hartford, the Ethical Society of Brooklyn and the students of Harvard. He was offered the chair of Oriental philosophy at Harvard and at Columbia the chair of Sanskrit. In America he had met noted intellectuals such as the philosopher William James, Professor Wright, the great scientist Nicolas Tesla and others. While in England he met the Mage of Oxford Max Muller,

Edward Carpenter, Frederick Myers, and in Germany the great scholar Paul Deussen. In Italy many things reminded him of India. The tonsure of the priests, the sign of the cross, the incense and the music were one with the customs of Hinduism. The Holy Sacrament suggested the temple Prasada that is first offered as food to the diety and immediately eaten. In Romain Rolland's words:

He left England on December 16, 1896, and travelling by Dover, Calais, and the Mont-Cenis, he crowned his stay in Europe by a short journey across Italy. He went to salute da Vinci's Last Supper at Milan, and was especially moved by Rome, which in his imagination held a place comparable to Delhi. At every instant he was struck by the similarity between the Catholic Liturgy and Hindu ceremonies, being sensible of its magnificence and defending its symbolic beauty and emotional appeal to the English who were with him. He was profoundly touched by the memories of the first Christians and martyrs in the Catacombs, and shared the tender veneration of the Italian people for the figures of the infant Christ and Virgin Mother. They never ceased to dwell in his thought, as can be seen by many words that I have already quoted in India and America. When he was in Switzerland he came to a little chapel in the mountains. Having plucked flowers he placed them at the feet of the Virgin through the hands of Mrs. Sevier saying: "She also is the Mother". One of his disciples later had the strange idea to give him an image of the Sistine Madonna to bless, but he refused in all humility, and piously touching the feet of the child he said: "I would have washed His feet, not with my tears, but with my heart's blood".

It may indeed with truth be said that there was no other being so close as he to the Christ. And nobody felt more clearly that the great Mediator between God and man was called to be the Mediator also between the East and the West, since the East recognizes him as it's own. It was from thence that he came to us (pp.311-312).

Swami Vivekananda's own writings and speeches fill several volumes. Though he departed in 1902 his invocative voice still echoes the

moving words: "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached." As a creative writer he occasionally wrote English verses. "Kali the Mother" is an apocalyptic vision of the terrible Mother's dance of doom. But his philosophical poem 'Song of the Free' (Iyengar pp.53-54) is worth quoting:

Let eyes grow dim and heart grow faint
 And friendship fail and love betray,
 Let Fate its hundred horrors send
 And clotted darkness block the way...

All nature wear one angry frown
 To crush you out... still know, my soul,
 You are Divine. March on and on,
 Nor right nor left, but to the goal!...

From dreams awake, from bonds be free!
 Be not afraid. This mystery,
 My shadow, cannot frighten me!
 Know once for all that I am He!

Purely in the literary tradition, Swami Vivekananda belongs to the American Transcendentalist school of Emerson, Thoreau and Walt Whitman. The great Indian literary renaissance ushered in by Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Ramesh Chunder Dutt, Manmohan Ghose and Sri Aurobindo would not have been possible but for Vivekananda and his guru Sri Ramakrishna. Before the Gandhian era in Indian Writing in English commences, one may quickly audit the significant contribution of two great sages who have inspired and provided new directions in the first cycle of the literary renaissance. Sri Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo provide two facets of radically differing personalities, the twin contrastive polarities of education and experience, and yet demonstrate the essential oneness and non-duality of godhead or Brahman and the Universe.

Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) is considered to be the supreme sage of modern times. Paul Brunton, Arthur Osborne, Devaraja Mudaliar and Narasimha Swami have written copiously about Ramana Maharshi and his extraordinary yogic powers. Although he overtly performed no miracles, prayers to him were answered, sickness cured and dangers were averted. It is said that he used to

radiate enormous power and by merely looking at a person transmit beneficial influence that would alter one's destiny for the better. The Divine Grace used to manifest itself in his presence but most of the time he would sit still in a trance like state or *samadhi* but miracles used to happen on their own accord. When asked for an explanation for this he said that: "It is enough for the thoughts of a *Jnani* to be turned in any direction and the automatic divine activity begins". These manifestations took place discreetly and inconspicuously. All great spiritual masters have abstained from flaunting their powers. As Christ stated, and the Maharshi knew well, such thaumaturgical powers were not always spiritual in provenance.

Larry the protagonist in Somerset Maugham's novel *The Razor's Edge* seeks answers to his existentialistic dilemmas. The *ashram* of a sage in South India provides the setting for his ontological quest. Nearly sixty pages are devoted to this heuristic exercise. Maugham himself relates his encounter with a guru in his *Notebook*. All the details mentioned by him and the characteristic dialectical approach to the discovery of truth resembles the Maharshi's own method. One is almost certain that Maugham was depicting the Maharshi: the sage of Arunachala or the Hill of the Holy Beacon.

The Maharshi has not written much. All his preachings and the notes that he had written down in 1900-1901, are translated into English and published under the title *Self Enquiry*. But he has been an inspirer and a begetter. Paul Brunton in his book *A Search in Secret India* portrays the Maharshi in these words:

He sits there on Olympian heights and watches the panorama of life as one apart. There is a mysterious property in this man which differentiates him from all others I have met. I feel, somehow, that he does not belong to us, the human race, so much as he belongs to Nature, to the solitary peak which rises abruptly behind the hermitage, to the rough tract of jungle which stretches away into distant forests, and to the impenetrable sky which fills all space (Brunton pp.154-155).

Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi had a very modest school education and had never left his chosen Arunachala and yet he inspired a legion of truth seekers from the West. Sri Aurobindo ironically enough spent all his formative years in England and then returned home to discover and reclaim his native cultural and spiritual heritage. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was sent to England along with his brothers to acquire an

European type of education by his anglophile father Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. He entered St. Paul's in 1884. The young Aurobindo wrote verses in English, studied Greek and won several prizes for proficiency in various subjects. He befriended poets such as Laurence Binyon and Stephen Phillips. In Cambridge, he passed the first part of the classical Tripos with a brilliant first class and secured the Rawley prize for Greek iambics. He also passed the Indian Civil Services examination securing the eleventh rank. Aurobindo returned to India and was appointed as a Vice-Principal of a College at Baroda in 1904. After a stint in politics and some revolutionary activities, he retired to the French enclave of Pondicherry to become a Yogi, wrote profusely and preached his gospel of a dynamic spiritual principle called *Vijnana* or supermind and prophesied the emergence of Gnostic Man. Sri Aurobindo's incredible life belongs to the pages of romance. The Aurobindo canon is so vast and all pervasive, it touches every phase of the Indian Writing in English. He represents in his own person the embodiment of the superman, the propounder of integral Yoga, the prophet of the Gnostic man, the evangelist of patriotic Nationalism, teacher, scholar, critic, poet, dramatist and philosopher. It is not an easy task to appraise his literary and philosophical works. Treatises such as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essay on the Geeta*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Future Poetry*, the great epic *Savitri* and several lyrics demonstrate the range of his interest and his stupendous versatility. The evocative power and the resilience of his narrative discourse has not only enriched the English language but has also lent dignity and respectability to the whole of Indian Writing in English.

Roughly the period from 1910-1950 is considered to be the Gandhian era in literature. The greatness of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is universally acknowledged. Trained at the Middle Temple as a Barrister, he gave up his successful practice in South Africa to plunge into the thick of the freedom struggle. His life touches every segment of our national life - politics, economics, religion, education and literature. His own autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* is a classic of our time. In the introduction Gandhi explained the purpose of writing it thus:

My experiments in the political field are now known, not only to India, but to a certain extent to the "civilised" world. For me, they have not much value, and the title of Mahatma that they have won for me has, therefore, even less. Often the title

has deeply pained me, and there is not a moment I can recall when it may be said to have tickled me. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field (pp.xiii-xiv).

The Bible, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau and Edward Carpenter influenced him a good deal in corroborating his own innermost convictions. All of Gandhi's actions spring from a profound conviction in the essential righteousness of his cause based on soul-force. He was no systematic thinker or a system builder but he had an unerring intuition to utter the right word and perform the appropriate task at the right moment. He gave memorable expression to even trite political expediency. In 1942 he had to tell the British to "Quit India and leave us to God or anarchy." That became the battle cry to rally all nationalistic forces in their non-violent struggle for achieving freedom from colonial rule. His periodic purificatory fasts and the constant enforced incarceration strengthened his moral responsibility towards fellow human beings. His personal suffering was used as a means to prick the conscience of the adversaries and convert them to the way of love. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Mahatma has always been compared to Jesus. Once after his release from prison, his friend C.F. Andrews had this to say:

There is a ruler of India here, in this hospital, Mahatma Gandhi, whose sway is greater than all imperial power. His name will be remembered and sung by the village people long after the names of the modern governors in their palaces in New Delhi are forgotten. When all the buildings of Raisina have crumbled into ruins, such as those around the Kutub Minar and Tughlakabad, the name of Mahatma Gandhi will still be taught by mothers to their little children as one of the greatest of India's saints and saviours. For there is a spiritual palace which Mahatma Gandhi has built up out of an eternal fabric. Its foundations are deeply and truly laid in the kingdom of God. No oppression of the poor has gone to build it, love and devotion to the poor are its golden decorations. No military pomp reigns within its borders, but only the peaceful harmony of human souls ... Its empire is the heart ... Let me keep pure the vision which God has given me. For when such a gift has come, there is nothing else in life except to hold it

fast (Iyengar p.269).

On 30th January 1948, when he was felled by an assassin's bullet, his murder was widely recognised as a martyrdom. Among the vast outpouring of tributes, Pope Pious XII called him "an apostle of peace and a friend of Christianity". George Bernard Shaw observed: "that the murder shows how dangerous it is to be good." But the most appropriate tribute was paid by the *Hindustan Standard*. The entire front page was left blank, ringed by a black border. At the centre was a brief paragraph set in a bold face type. It simply said:

Gandhiji has been killed by his own people for whose redemption he lived. This second crucifixion in the history of the world has been enacted on a Friday - the same day Jesus was done to death one thousand nine hundred and fifteen years ago. Father forgive us.

The Gandhi literature is vast and growing. It has even a quarterly journal called *Gandhi-Marg* that prints and provides informative or critical articles on Gandhiana. S. Radhakrishnan, Romain Rolland, Arthur Koestler, Richard B. Gregg and various Indian scholars have written about Gandhi the man. The Gandhian image has become part of the literary lore. There is a whole corpus of novels making use of the Gandhian impact on Indian life. K.S. Venkataramani, Shankar Ram, Humayun Kabir, Kamala Markandeya, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, K. Nagarajan, Babhani Bhattacharya, and several other well known writers have employed the theme of the Mahatma's austere life or stunning martyrdom as conditioning the contemporary Indian ethos. K.R.S. Iyengar's words neatly sum up Gandhi's influence on Indian literature:

Although no great scholar, Gandhi knew very well the New Testament in English, and his writing in English had accordingly a simplicity, pointedness and clarity that was in refreshing contrast to the heaviness often characteristic of earlier Indian writing. Thanks to the Gandhian example, Indian Writing in English became recognizably functional. Gone were the old Macaulayan amplitude and richness of phrasing and weight of miscellaneous learning. Gandhian writing was as bare and austere as was his own life; yet who will say that either the one or the other lacked the fullness of

fulfilment? (p.272).

The modern political history of India can be divided into three phases - that of the Company, the Crown and the post-colonial era. Similarly the literary chronology also falls into a trine unfolding of recognizable sensibilities. The period from 1835 to 1910 constitutes the rediscovery of the tradition and the usable past. Writers such as Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and S. Radhakrishnan looked back into the rich cultural past and retrieved and salvaged whatever was precious to establish a vibrant continuing tradition. 1910 to 1950 constitutes the Gandhian era in literature. Highly educated Indians who had imbibed the Judaeo-Christian culture and the liberal humanistic tradition of the west turned the tables against the English by using all these resources in order to win freedom for the country. Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and Patel among others represent the cream of this generation of founding fathers. Their speeches and writings, the debates in the constituent assembly and their autobiographical sketches and books provide the model and inspiration for contemporary writers to organise their themes and legends. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand have made use of the folklore that had developed around Mahatma Gandhi into anew anthropomorphic avatar like Rama or Krishna. Nehru, Bose and other prominent figures assume appropriate secondary roles in the epic struggle that is converted into a modern myth: a veritable re-enaction of the ancient battle between the suras and asuras or the Gods and the Titans. This period is the dawn before the resplendent daylight. From 1950 onwards there has been a definite Indian literary diaspora that has surprised many by its energy and vitality, its range and sweep of topics and themes.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, Farrukh Dhondy's *Bombay Duck*, Firdous Kanga's *Growing Up*, and Bharati Mukharjee's *Jasmine* have created a new idiom and a new narrative discourse to express the complexity and the rich amplitude of the Indian heritage. The graphic vividness of their narratology and the infinite variety of their themes and anecdotes represent the whole spectrum of the Indian experience embracing the mundane and the metaphysical, the past and the present, the local and the global. Some of them are trying to come to terms with the searing dynamics of the cultural conflict in a global village. Others have dramatized the comic-heroic saga of an Indian emerging from his spiritual carapace to discover the mystery and the marvel of a

technological age that has overtaken both his individual and collective destiny. In a reversal of roles, it is like Mark Twain's Arthurian Knight Errant exploring the wonderland of the modern Yankee and stopping the rush towards the Disneyland by waving his charmed magical wand.

At this stage it is rather difficult to evaluate the precise influence of the living godmen on contemporary creative writing. But across the board, all the major novels, plays and poems are peppered with laudatory references to them. Some of these godmen such as Bhagawan Rajneesh, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi and Swami Prabhupada are immensely erudite persons who have authored a host of books. Others, such as Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Swami Muktananda Paramahansa and Mother Teresa seem to wield a subtle but nonetheless powerful influence.

The controversial Rajneesh who died a couple of years ago gave up the Professorship in Philosophy to devote his life to a spiritual quest. His method of meditation called *Rajneesh Dhyana Yoga* is popular with a wide range of people and it is credited with the power of self-transformation and a great Awakening of Spirit:

It is because of this mystery of the energy that emanates from Bhagawan as an Enlightened one that his followers confirm that they experience deep inner transformation. Many say that just by sitting at his feet when he lectures, or during *darshan* (meeting with the Master), they suddenly feel a deep bliss and are enveloped by a fragrance not known before. They say that he emanates a love, a compassion and an energy, that just being near him makes them blissful and silent. Swami Prem Amitabh, a psychotherapist from California, USA who received his Ph.D from the University of California at Berkeley, says of Rajneesh, "I feel him (Bhagawan) as an incredible Teacher, a World Teacher, a unique Teacher, and also, a unique man - a man that I cannot describe. My feeling, is that where he is I could place none higher." Asked how he came to join Bhagawan's organization, Swami Amitabh says that by accident he attended a class in Rajneesh Dhyana Yoga held at a conference of the American Humanistic Psychology Association. "It was very intense ... It was like an atomic blast ... I went to more dynamic meditation classes. Again, again and again I kept having profound experiences ... The very first thing that happened to me was the feeling of being a child". Of another experience he reports, "I would be sitting, talking with

friends, and all of a sudden my whole inside would vibrate and all I wanted to do was to close my eyes. Energy would be pouring all over". He reports many similar happenings around Bhagawan on a recent visit to India. "All I know is that it is just overwhelming ... My body is just filled with life." (Khushwant Singh, 1975, p.13).

Sri Sathya Sai Baba is generally considered to be the most extraordinary spiritual teacher alive today. Howard Murphet an Australian disciple was largely instrumental in making him known to the western world. His books *Sai Baba, Man of Miracles* and *Sai Baba, Avatar* not only present a portrait of a many splendoured godman but also carefully document all the miracles performed by him. But the greatest miracle has been his efforts in spreading his gospel of love and peace through the means of a restructured educational system which includes exemplary spiritual values and respect towards universal brotherhood. The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, which is a deemed University is the vital centre for disseminating his ideals and humanistic philosophy.

But the best loved Indian citizen who has influenced all aspects of Indian life and literature has been Mother Teresa. Everyone agrees with Malcolm Muggeridge's assessment that: "She is a unique person in the world today, it is not in the vulgar celebrity sense of having neon lighting about her head. Rather in the opposite sense of someone who has merged herself in the common face of mankind". How a delicate Albanian nun from Skopje, Yugoslavia became a Nobel Laureate of Peace and is universally recognized as a saintly figure is one of those great miracles of God. She is known as the lady of the slums, the champion of the poor, the apostle of the unwanted, the angel of mercy, the Saint of the gutters, the gentle Mother". She is the recipient of innumerable international awards and honours. She has founded Nirmal Hriday (Sacred Heart): *Home for Dying Destitutes* and a missionary order called the Sisters of Charity. But the major portion of her work and life's mission is yet to be completed. How does one sum up the picture of a great Indian, a great Catholic, who acknowledges nothing but the benign influence of Jesus Christ and the scripture? Does she perform any miracles? Or is her life itself a great miracle? Malcolm Muggeridge in his book *Something Beautiful For God* records a miracle that he had witnessed when the B.B.C. Television was recording a film on her life. The camera crew was of the opinion that the light in the interior of an old structure where the film was

being shot was very poor and felt that the footage would be spoiled. However, when the film was developed the indoor scenes were much clearer than the one's taken in sunlight. When it was narrated to her, Mother Teresa simply replied: "Of course! Such things happen all the time. Every day, every hour, every single minute God manifests Himself in some miracle".

In such a climate can literature fail to find its authentic voice and tonal brilliance? Can the Muses remain silent in the presence of such incredible godmen? In the words of Longfellow's "Ladder of St. Augustine":

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight:
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

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