

## INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Indian writing in English (or Indo-Anglian literature, as it is often called) may now be said to have come of age. It is a subject for post-graduate students in English at the Baroda University. Last year, the young Indian poet, Dom Moraes, was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for Poetry. In May 1958, the 'Times Literary Supplement' carried a full-page article on the novels of R. K. Narayan. During January-March 1959, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar gave a course of 20 lectures on this unique literature to post-graduate students in English of the University of Leeds. Not Indian publishers alone, but enterprising British and American publishers also have been of late readily sponsoring books in English by Indian writers—both creative literature and the literature of knowledge, including sensitive translations in English. In a way, never were times more propitious than now for the healthy growth of this literature.

Two notable anthologies have recently attempted the unusually difficult task of projecting Indian poetry in English: *Modern Indian Poetry*, edited by A. V. Rajeswara Rau, and the special Indian Issue of 'Poetry' (January 1959), published from Chicago, and edited by Henry Rago. Besides Indo-Anglians like P. Lal, Dom Moraes, K. Raghavendra Rao, B. Rajan, Mary Erulkar and Bharati Sarabhai, there are others like Buddhdeva Bose, Umashankar Joshi, P. S. Rege, V. K. Gokak and Srinivas Royapuro who have rendered their own Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada or Telugu into English, and still others like Tambimuttu who figure as accomplished translators. These two ventures are a good augury for the future.

Dom Moraes's *A Beginning* was a good promissory note, signifying even finer things to come. His keenness of sensory perception is on a par with his feeling for the right poetic word, and his best poems have an elusive and haunting quality. Nissim Ezekiel's *The Third* includes 36 pieces, which, if they are less sensuous than the poems in the two earlier collections, are on the whole artistically more satisfying. Dilip Kumar Roy's verse narratives, *The Immortals of the Bhagvat*, vividly bring before

as god-intoxicated *bhaktas* like Ambarish and Prahlad. Several other poets, known and coming to be known, appear more or less regularly in the pages of the 'Illustrated Weekly', 'Thought', 'Mother India' and other magazines.

Sri Aurobindo's posthumous publications — the unfinished epic in quantitative hexameters, *Iliion*, and the blank verse tragedy, *Rodogune* — are impressive achievements. *Iliion*, although incomplete, has the true epic surge, massiveness of conception and splendour and detail in execution; it is both a technical and poetic triumph. *Rodogune*, like Aurobindo's other plays, *Perseus* and *Vasavadatta*, has Elizabethan echoes, but it is Aurobindonian too in its undertones. And Rodogune herself is a wholly lovable tragic heroine.

Fiction in India is a popular literary form. Collections of stories by S. K. Chettur, G. D. Khosla, Mulk Raj Anand, Manjeri Isvaran and Khushwant Singh have recently appeared, and each has merits of its own. Of the novelists, B. Rajan has made history with his first effort, *The Dark Dancer*, which was the Book Society's Choice for April 1959 and has been hailed as something of an achievement. The theme is the clash of cultures, the plight of the Indian intellectual who wanders between two worlds, the one dead and the other powerless to be born. R. K. Narayan's latest, *The Guide*, recalls in one respect Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *He who rides a Tiger* — there are bogus 'guides' in both; and new novels by Mulk Raj Anand and Anand Lall, and first novels by V. Anant and Ruskin Bond have also appeared. In Nayantara Sahgal's *A Time to be Happy*, the story of Sanad is told in the context of the Congress movement and the events of 1942. Krishnalal Shridharani's *Adventures of the Upside-down Tree* is a book out of the ordinary, and breathes the spirit of our old old tales. "My entire childhood heritage is reflected," he says, "in the adventures of the Upside-down Tree."

An example of translated fiction of high quality is Ram Deshmukh's rendering of Vyankatesh Madgulkar's *The Village has no Walls* from the original Marathi, which may be almost described as a prototypical study of Indian village life. Representative

modern Bengali fiction has been presented to Western readers in *Broken Bread* by Lila Ray and *Green and Gold* by Humayun Kabir.

Of autobiographies, Ved Mehta's *Face to Face* is the story of a blind boy's battle against adverse circumstances to win for himself a chance to live a reasonably full life. The reminiscences of Rajendra Prasad and of the late M. R. Jayakar, Maulana Azad, and Acharya P. C. Ray have their value as history as well as autobiography. Iqbal Singh's biography of Raja Rammohan Roy bids fair to be a definitive work. Following the centenary of Lokmanya Tilak, yet another biography by T. V. Parvate has lately appeared. Hiren Mukherji's *Gandhiji* is a biographical study with a Marxian slant. *A Bunch of Old Letters* contains letters written to Jawaharlal Nehru and several written by him. K. M. Munshi's versatility is as much in evidence as ever, and his fiction as well as 'Kulapati's Letters' are regularly appearing in the pages of 'Bhavan's Journal.' *Sothe Voce* by N. Raghunathan is a collection of journalistically written essays, but it exudes scholarship and wisdom on every page, and is written in flawless prose. Rajaji's dialectical contributions no less than his discourses on religion are in a class apart. Radhakrishnan's discourses, too, invariably raise the discussions — whatever the theme — to a high plane.

Among brilliant journalists in English are Frank Moraes (who has also biographies of Nehru and Purushottamdas Thakurdas to his credit), Pothan Joseph, Khasa Subba Rau, J. Vijayatunga, Iswara Dutt, M. Krishnan, Chalapati Rau and Frene Talyarkhan. Of exceptional interest is *The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja*, which carries an illuminating Introduction by V. Raghavan. It is also gratifying to note that the third and final volume of Hari Prasad Shastri's prose translation of the *Ramayana of Valmiki* has been published at last. Shuda Majumdar's *Ramayana* from the original Bengali of Krittivasa is another splendid labour of love and service to humanity. Philosophical writings like *Dattatreya* by Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar of Mysore and *Concerning Human Understanding* by Nikunja Vihari Banerjee, historical writings like Radhakamal Mukherji's *Culture and Art of India*

and Haridas and Uma Mukherji's *Origins of the National Education Movement*, and critical writings like that represented in the 'Literary Criterion' edited by C. D. Narasimhaiah, are fairly indicative of the volume and variety of the literature of knowledge produced by Indian writers in English.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since writing the above, a few books have appeared that deserve mention. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England*, like its predecessor, his *Autobiography*, has provoked wide comment, generally appreciative. As an account of his few weeks' stay in England, it is both perceptive and well-informed and is redolent of his wide-ranging knowledge. Jawaharlal Nehru's seventy-first birthday has been the occasion of several commemorative publications. Of particular interest is C. D. Narasimhaiah's monograph on Jawaharlal Nehru as writer and speaker which inaugurates a new series 'Indian Writers and their Work', rather modelled on the British Council series on the British writers. Narasimhaiah knows his Nehru through and through, and his citations are apt and his appraisements are judicious. D. V. Tahmankar has followed his biography of Lokamanya Tilak with a study of Rani of Jhansi; yet another of Sri Aurobindo's posthumous publications, the play *Viziers of Bassora*, has come out; and a collection of M. C. Chagla's speeches and writings, *The Individual and the State*, has received adequate recognition. A slender anthology of *Indo-Anglian Poetry* has also lately appeared, edited by P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao; notwithstanding its needlessly aggressive Introduction, the anthology itself is very welcome.

*Prema Nandakumar*