

# Indian Literature Through the Ages

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### Ancient Indian Literature

Indian literature includes everything which is included in the word 'literature' in its broadest, sense: religious and mundane, epic and lyric, dramatic and didactic poetry, narrative and scientific prose, as well as oral poetry and song. In the Vedas (3000 BC-1000 BC), when one finds such expressions, "I am standing in water but I am very thirsty", one marvels at the continuity of a rich heritage which is both modern and traditional. It is, therefore, not very correct to say that ancient Indian literature includes only the religious classics of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Jain narrative literature in the Prakrit language is full of erotic stories and realism.



It is not true to say that the Vedas are a series of sacred texts used in religious rituals and sacrifices. The Vedas are essentially archetypal poetry of high literary value. They are mythical in nature and their language is symbolic. Being mythical, they have multiple meanings, and, therefore, the theologian moulds his rites, the preacher seeks his belief, the philosopher finds the clues for his intellectual speculation and the law-makers work out the social and political life-style in accordance with the archetypal truths of the Vedas.

Vedic poets are called the rishis, the seers who visualized the archetypal truths of cosmic functioning at all levels of existence. Devatas of the vedic poetry symbolise the manifestations of the divine force of the One Supreme. Vedas give importance to yajna (sacrifice). Purusa sukta of the Rigveda (10.90) describes the whole creation as a yajna extended by the divine forces of nature. Etymologically yajna means the worship of the divine, coordination and giving (sacrifice). These



three elements together, vision, coordination and giving provide a basic paradigm for any creative act.

The Yajur Veda is related to yajna, which is not just sacrifice, but also means creative reality. The mantras (verse with archetypal meanings) of the Rig Veda are adapted to certain melodies and this collection is named Sama Veda, and the Atharva Veda deals with the peace and prosperity of human society and is concerned with the daily life of man.

Vedic ritual is preserved in literary texts called the Brahmanas. The main division of the contexts of these extensive texts is twofold – the ritualistic injunction and discussions on the meaning of Vedic ritual and all that is related to it. The Aranyakas or the treatises of the forest present secret explanations of the ritual, have their origin in the philosophical discussions of the Brahmanas, find their culmination in the Upanishads and represent the transitional phase between the ritualistic symbolism of the Brahmanas and the philosophical doctrines of the Upanishads. The Upanishads, written both in prose and poetry, are expressions of philosophical concepts.

In the literal term, it means that knowledge which is imparted to the student who is sitting very near to the teacher. That knowledge by which all ignorance is destroyed. The knowledge of the identity of the self (Atman) with the eternal (Brahman). The Upanishads are the end of the Vedas. This is the literature in which ancient sages realised that in the final analysis, man has to know himself.

The great epics (Mahakavya), the Ramayana (1500 BC) and the Mahabharata (1000 BC) are the, repositories of the ethnic memory of the Indian people. Valmiki, the poet of the Ramayana, is known as Adikavi (first among the poets), and the story of Rama is occasionally referred to in the Mahabharata. But both these epics were composed over a long passage of time, not by one poet, but by many poets, for the purpose of oral transmission by singers and story tellers. Both are epics of the people, and as such, reflect the ethos and the psyche of a group of people, not only in a given temporal frame, but have a universal human context. The Ramayana tells us about how a man can achieve divineness, as Rama achieves divinity through righteous action. It also tells us about how to achieve the fourfold objectives (Purushartha) of human life, Dharma (righteousness, or loosely, religion), Artha (worldly achievement, mainly wealth and prosperity), Kama (fulfilment of all desires), and Moksha (liberation). Inwardly it is a quest to know oneself. The Ramayana consists of 24,000 verses and is divided into seven books, called Kandas, and known as

Kavya (poetry), which means that it instructs while it entertains. The Mahabharata consists of a 1,00,000 verses divided into 10 books, parvas, with many interpolations, known as Itihasa Purana (mythical history). Both are long, continuous narratives and deal with war. The king Rama fights a battle with the demon king Ravana, who steals his wife, Sita, and holds her captive in his palace at Lanka (now Sri Lanka). Rama, with the help of the monkey army and Hanuman, rescues Sita. His triumph over Ravana symbolises the victory of virtue over evil. This pattern, at the individual level, is a fight going on within the self between vice and virtue.

With the change in the social structure at the time of the Mahabharata, the fight now takes place between the human beings between Pandavas and the Kauravas, family members of the same royal clan, over succession to the throne. Written by Vyasa (Vyasa means a collector), the Mahabharata is mythical history, because history here does not denote merely an event that took place, but events that will always happen and repeat itself. The Pandavas are assisted by Lord Krishna, who is metamorphosed into a Godhead, and is shown as descending into the cycles of cosmic history to assist man in his struggle against the forces of evil. He recites the Bhagavad Gita (the song of the lord) just before the war to the Pandava Prince Arjuna, who is unwilling to fight because he feels that victory in the battle is not desirable. Thus begins the debate on an epic scale regarding the problems of action versus non-action, of violence versus non-violence, and ultimately about Dharma. The Gita is incorporated in the Mahabharata primarily to give an integrated view of Dharma. Dharma means to perform righteously one's duty in a selfless way (Nishkama Karma) with complete dedication to the will of God. The survivors of the epic war discover that public esteem and power are no more than hollow victories in an illusory struggle. It is not bravery but knowledge which is the key to the mystery of life. These two epics of ancient India are practically transcreated in almost in all Indian languages, and have also crossed the borders of this sub-continent and became popular in foreign lands, where they eventually get more or less adopted and adapted and recreated. This became possible because both these epics are rich in motifs which have universal appeal.

### **The Purana**

The word Purana means 'that which renews the old' and is almost always mentioned along with Itihasa. The Puranas were written to illustrate and expound the truth of the Vedas. The fundamental abstruse philosophical and

religious truths are expounded through popular legends or mythological stories. Nothing can exert greater credence on the human mind than when it is described as having happened. Thus, Itihasa combined with narration makes a story seem credible. Together with the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, they are the origins of many of the stories and anecdotes of the social, religious and cultural history of India.

The main Puranas are 18 encyclopaedic collections of legend and myth. Though the archaic form of the genre might have existed as early as the fourth or the fifth century B.C., the famous names of the 18 Mahapuranas were not discovered earlier than the third century A.D. The phenomenal popularity of these Mahapuranas gave rise to yet another sub-genre known as the Upapuranas or minor Puranas. They are also 19 in number.

The Mahapuranas have five subjects. These are : (1) Sarga, the original creation of the universe, (2) Pratisarga, the periodical process of destruction and re-creation, (3) Manvantara, the different eras or cosmic cycles, (4) Surya Vamsha and Chandra Vamsha, the histories of the solar and lunar dynasties of Gods and sages, (5) Vamshanucharita, the genealogies of kings. Around this core skeleton of the five subjects any Purana adds other diverse materials like matters of religious concern, customs, ceremonies, sacrifices, festivals, the duties of various castes, different types of donations, details of the construction of temples and images, and descriptions of places of pilgrimage. The Puranas are the meeting point of diverse religious and social beliefs, are linked with the vital spiritual and social needs and urges of the people, and are a unique outcome of the ever-continuing synthesis based on an understanding between various groups of vedic Aryans and non-Aryans.

### **Classical Sanskrit Literature**

The Sanskrit language is divided into the Vedic and the classical. The great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Puranas are part of the classical period, but are discussed separately because of their enormity and importance, and are undoubtedly the precursors of Sanskrit Kavya (epic poetry), nataka (drama) and other literature. Classical Sanskrit literature includes the Kavyas (epic poetry), the Nataka (drama), lyric poetry, romance, popular tales, didactic fables, gnomic poetry, scientific literature on grammar, medicine, law, astronomy, mathematics, etc. Classical Sanskrit literature is on the whole secular in character. During the classical period, language was regulated by the rigid rules of Panini, one of the greatest Sanskrit

grammarians.

The tallest figure in the sphere of epic poetry is Kalidasa (between A.D. 380- A.D. 415). He wrote two great epics, *Kumarasambhava* (the birth of Kumar), and *Raghuvamsa* (the dynasty of the Raghus). In the *Kavya* tradition, more care is bestowed on the form, such as the style, figure of speech, conceits, descriptions, etc., and the story-theme is pushed to the background. The overall purpose of such a poem is to bring out the efficacy of a religious and cultured way of life, without flouting any ethical norms. Other distinguished poets, like Bharavi (550 A.D.), wrote *Kiratarjuniyam* (Kirat and Arjun) and Magha (65-700 A.D.) wrote *Sishupalavadha* (the killing of Shishupal). There are several other poets like Sriharsha and Bhatti who are of great merit.

The main purpose of *Kavya* or even *Nataka* (drama) is to offer the reader or spectator diversion or entertainment, (*Lokaranjana*), and also stimulate his feelings, and ultimately give him a perspective to illuminate his vision of life. The drama is, therefore, stylized and is packed with poetry and descriptive prose. It moves on a level of worldliness as well as on another level of other-worldiness. Therefore, the symbolism of Sanskrit drama reveals that man's journey is complete when he moves from attachment to non-attachment, from temporality to eternity, or from flux to timelessness. It is achieved in Sanskrit drama by arousing *Rasa* (theatrical experience or aesthetic sentiment) in the minds of the spectators. The rules and prescriptions regarding performance, the theatre hall, acting, gestures, *Rasa*, stage direction, are all given in the first book of dramaturgy, *Natyashastra*, by Bharata (1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.). Kalidasa is the most distinguished dramatist and his treatment of the *rasa* of love in all its possible manifestations in the three plays *Malavikagnimitra* (Malavika and Agnimitra), *Vikramorvasiya* (Vikram and Urvashi) and *Abhigyan Shakuntala* (the recognition of Shakuntala) is unparalleled. He is the poet of love and beauty, and believes in the affirmation of life, the joy of which lies in pure, sacred and ever-widening love.

The *Mricchakatika* (the clay-cart) by Sudraka (248 A.D.) presents a remarkable social drama with touches of grim reality. The characters are drawn from all stratas of society, which include thieves and gamblers, rogues and idlers, courtesans and their associates, police constables, mendicants and politicians. In Act III an interesting account of a burglary is given in which stealing is treated as a regular art. The interlinking of a political revolution with the private affairs of the two lovers adds new charm to the play. The 13 plays of Bhasa (4th century B.C.-2nd century A.D.), which were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century, are accepted as the most stagable plays of

Sanskrit theatre. The most popular is Swapnavasavadatta (Vasavadatta in dream) where the playwright has displayed his skill of characterization and a fine manipulation of the plot. Bhavabhuti (700 A.D.), another great dramatist, is well known for his play Uttara-Ramacharitam (the later life of Rama), which contains a play within it in the last act of a love of exquisite tenderness. He is also well known for directly rebuking his critics by saying that his work was not intended for them, and that some kindred soul would surely be born; time is endless and the earth broad. These are some of the best dramas out of more than six hundred written during that period.

Sanskrit literature is replete with lyrical poetry of great merit. This poetry constitutes a fusion of erotic and religious sentiments. In fact, division between art and religion in Indian culture seems to be less sharp than in Europe and China. In Kalidasa's narrative lyric poem, Meghaduta (the cloud messenger), the poet makes a cloud a messenger to tell the story of two lovers who are separated. This is also quite in keeping with the sublime conception of love, which looks dark in separation, like a black cloud with a silver lining. Jayadeva (12 century A.D.) is the last great name in Sanskrit poetry, who wrote the lyric poetry Gitagovinda (the song of Govinda) to describe every phase of love between Krishna and Radha – longing, jealousy, hope, disappointment, anger, reconciliation and fruition – in picturesque lyrical language. The songs describe the beauty of nature, which plays a prominent part in the description of human love.

The didactic fable Panchatantra (five chapters), dealing with politics and practical wisdom, which was written by Vishnu Sharma, and the Hitopadesha, the bird, animal-human and non-human stories of advice for the benefit of the listeners, which was written by Narayan Pandit, are literary masterpieces which cross the borders of the sub-continent and became popular in foreign lands. These books of fables also indicate that the whole of Sanskrit literature was just not religious or elitist. These popular fables are obviously a retelling of folklore.

### **Literature in Pali and Prakrit**

Pali and Prakrit were the spoken languages of Indians after the Vedic period. Prakrit in the widest sense of the term, was indicative of any language that in any manner deviated from the standard one, i.e. Sanskrit. Pali is archaic Prakrit. In fact, Pali is a combination of various dialects. These were adopted by Buddhist and Jain sects in ancient India as their sacred languages. lord



Buddha (500 B.C.) used Pali to give his sermons. All the Buddhist canonical literature is in Pali which includes Tipitaka (threefold basket). The first basket, Vinaya Pitaka, contains the monastic rules of the Order of Buddhist monks. The second basket, Sutta Pitaka, is the collection of the speeches and dialogues of the Buddha. The third basket, the Abhidhamma Pitaka, elucidates the various topics dealing with ethics, psychology or theory of knowledge. The jataka Kathas are non-canonical Buddhist literature in which stories relating to the former births of the Buddha (Bodhi-sattva or the would-be Buddha) are narrated. These stories propagate Buddhist religious doctrines and are available in both Sanskrit and Pali. As the jataka tales grew in bulk, they assimilated popular tales, ancient mythology, stories from older religious traditions, etc. Jatakas are, in fact, based on the common heritage of the Indian masses. Buddhist literature is also abundantly available in Sanskrit, which includes the great epic Buddhacharita by Aswaghosha (78 A.D.).

Like the Buddhist stories, the Jain tales in general are didactic in character. They are written in some forms of Prakrit. The word Jain is derived from the root ji (to conquer) and signifies the religion of those who have conquered the lust for life. Jain canonical literature by Jain saints, as well as a large number of works on lexicography and grammar by Hemachandra (1088 A.D.-?), is well known. Much also in the way of moral tale and poetry are to be found. However, Prakrit is well known for Gathasaptashati (700 verses) by Hala (300 A.D.), the best example of erotic literature. It is a compilation of 700 verses along with his own contribution of 44 poems. It is interesting to note that quite a few poetesses like Pahai, Mahavi, Reva, Roha and Sasippaha are included in the anthology. The vast Katha (story) literature of Prakrit, written with a conspicuous religious overtone, even by Jain saints, is full of erotic elements. The author of the Vasudevahindi ascribes this changed approach of the Jain authors to the fact that it is easy to teach religion cloaked by erotic episodes, like sugar-coated medicine. The characteristic of Prakrit poetry is its subtlety; the inner meaning (Hiyaali) is its soul. Jain literature is available in Sanskrit too, like the Upamitibhava Prapancha Katha of Siddharasi (906 A.D.).

### **Early Dravidian Literature**

The Indian people speak languages belonging to major four distinct speech families: the Austric, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European. In spite of these four different language groups, there is an Indian characteristic running through these language groups, which forms one of the bases of that certain underlying uniformity of life described by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as unity in

the midst of diversity.

Dravidian literature mainly consists of the four languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Out of these, Tamil is the oldest language which preserved its Dravidian character the most. Kannada, as a cultured language, is almost as old as Tamil. All these languages have borrowed many words from Sanskrit and vice versa. Tamil is the only modern Indian language which is recognizably continuous with a classical past. Early classical Tamil literature is known as Sangam literature meaning 'fraternity', indicating mainly two schools of poets, aham (subjective love poems), and puram (objective, public poetry and heroic). Aham deals purely with the subjective emotions of the lover, and puram with all kinds of emotions, mainly the valour and glory of kings, and about good and evil. The Sangam classics, consisting of 18 works (eight anthologies of lyrics and ten long poems), are well known for their directness of expression. These were written by 473 poets, among whom 30 were women, the famous poetess Avvaiyar being one of them. In the case of 102 poems, the authors are unknown. Most of these anthologies are of the 3rd century B.C. During this time, a Tamil grammar Tolkappiyam, was written, to understand early Tamil poetry. Tolkappiyam indicates five landscapes or types of love, and outlines their symbolic conventions. Critics say that Sangam literature is not just the earliest evidence of the Tamil genius. The Tamils, in all their 2000 years of literary effort, wrote nothing better. The famous Thirukkural by Thiruvalluvar, in the 6th century A.D., serves as a manual of precepts to guide one to noble living. It expounds a secular, moral and practical attitude towards life. The twin epics, Silappadhikaram (the story of the anklet), written by Ilango-Adigal, and Manimekalai (the story of Manimekalai) by Chattanar, were written sometimes in A.D. 200-300 and give vivid accounts of Tamil society during that period. These are valuable storehouses and epics of dignity and sublimity, laying stress on the cardinal virtues of life. In Manimekalai there is an elaborate exposition of the doctrines of Buddhism. If Tamil reveals a triumph of Brahmanic and Buddhist knowledge, Kannada shows Jain ascendancy in its ancient phase. Malayalam absorbed a rich treasure contained in the Sanskrit language. Nannaya (A.D.1100) was the first Telugu poet. In ancient times, Tamil and Telugu spread to distant places.

If one were to identify another striking feature of ancient Tamil literature, the obvious choice would be Vaishnava (pertaining to Vishnu) bhakti (devotional) literature. In Indian literature the effort has been to find out how a man can achieve divinity. The secret behind a tendency for hero worship is love and



regard for humanity. In Vaishnava bhakti poetry, God descends on this earth as a human being, to share with us our suffering and turmoil, our happiness and prosperity. Vaishnava bhakti literature was an all-India phenomenon, which started in the 6th-7th century A.D. in the Tamil-speaking region of South India, with twelve Alvar (one immersed in God) saint-poets, who wrote devotional songs. They revitalized Hinduism and checked the spread of Buddhism and Jainism, while absorbing some of their features. The religion of Alvar poets, which included a woman poet, Andal, was devotion to God through love (bhakti), and in the ecstasy of such devotions they sang hundreds of songs which embodied both depth of feeling and felicity of expressions. Devotional songs in praise of the Hindu god Shiva (the worship of Shiva and Vishnu forms the basis of the broad division of Hindus into Shaiva and Vaishnava sects) were also written by Tamil saint poet Nayanar (leader, master) in the 6th-8th Century A.D. Besides its importance as poetry of emotional bhakti, it guides us into the world of classical Tamil civilization and explains to us the ethnic-national consciousness of the Tamils as a whole. The flowering of bhakti literature as a pan-Indian consciousness took place in almost all the Indian languages during medieval times.

### **Medieval Literature**

Around 1000 A.D. local differences in Prakrit grew more and more pronounced, which later came to be known as Apabhramsa, and this led to the modern Indian languages taking shape and being born. These languages, conditioned by the regional, linguistic and ethnic environment, assumed different linguistic characteristics. Constitutionally recognised modern Indian languages and Konkani, Marathi, Sindhi, Gujarati (Western); Manipuri, Bengali, Oriya and Assamese (Eastern); Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada (Southern) and Hindi, Urdu, Kashmiri, Dogri, Punjabi, Maithali, Nepali and Sanskrit (Northern). Two tribal languages, Bodo and Santhali are also recognised by the Constitution. Out of these 22 languages, Tamil is the oldest modern Indian language maintaining its linguistic character with little change for about 2000 years. Urdu is the youngest of the modern Indian languages, taking its shape in the 14th century A.D., deriving its script from an Arabic-Persian origin, but vocabulary from Indo-Aryan sources, i.e. Persian and Hindi. Sanskrit, though the oldest classical language, is still very much in use, and hence is included in the list of modern Indian languages by the Constitution of India.

The most powerful trend of medieval Indian literature between 1000 and 1800

A.D. is devotional (bhakti) poetry which dominates almost all the major languages of the country. Unlike the dark middle ages of Europe, India's middle ages brought about a very rich tradition of devotional literature of remarkable merit which dispels the superstitious assumption of a dark period of India's history. Bhakti literature is the most important development of the medieval period. It is love poetry. Love for one's Lord, Krishna or Rama, the two main incarnations of the great God Vishnu. This love is depicted as love between husband and wife, or between lovers, or between servant and master, or between parents and child. This is personalisation of the godhood, which means a truthful perception of God residing in you, and also harmony in life which only love can bring. Worldly love is Kama (Eros) and divine love is Prema (mystic Eros). The dominating note in bhakti is ecstasy and total identity with God. It is a poetic approach to religion and an ascetic approach to poetry. It is poetry of connections – connecting the worldly with the divine, and as a result, the old form of secular love poetry began to have a new meaning in all languages. The rise of bhakti poetry gave rise to regional languages (Bhasa). The conception of bhakti did away with the elite tradition of Sanskrit and accepted the more acceptable language of the common man. Kabir (Hindi) says that Sanskrit is like water of a well stagnant, Bhasa like flowing water. A seventh century Shaiva Tamil writer Manikarvachakar has something similar to say about in his book of poetry Thiruvachakam. Bhakti also attacked the age-old caste system and devoted itself to the worship of humanity, because the catch-word of bhakti is that God is there in every human being. The movement was in essence subaltern, as most of its poets belonged to the so-called 'lower' castes. Bhakti is antitheology and against any kind of conceptual erudition.

The power of ancient bhakti poetry in Tamil set in motion what might well be considered a pan-Indian efflorescence. After Tamil, Pampa's great court epics were composed in Kannada in the 10th century. Devotional literature in Kannada, the Vachanas (sayings) of the various saints of the Krishna, Rama and Shiva cults, is well known. Basavanna was a famous Kannada poet, a Shiva devotee and a great social reformer. Allama Prabhu (Kannada) wrote great poetry under the garb of religion. Chronologically, Marathi, the close successor of Kannada, became the next venue for bhakti. Gyaneswar (1275 A.D.) is the first and foremost bhakti poet in Marathi. In his teens (he died at the age of 21) he became famous for his poetic contribution to bhakti for Vithal (Vishnu). Eknath wrote his short poetic narratives and devotional abhangas (a literary form), and after him it was Tukarram (1608-1649 A.D.) whose songs cast a spell all over Maharashtra. And then it is Gujarati in the 12th century. Gujarati

poets like Narsi Mehta and Premananda occupy a prominent place in the galaxy of the Vaishnava poets. Afterwards, the sequential order is as follows: Kashmiri, Bengali, Assamese, Manipuri, Oriya, Maithili, Braj, Avadhi (the last three languages come under the umbrella language, Hindi) and other languages of India. Chandidas, a Bengali poet, is acclaimed as a great genius for the lucidity and sweetness of his poems. Similarly, Vidyapati in Maithili created a new poetic language. Lal Ded, a Kashmiri Muslim poetess, gave a new dimension to mystical bhakti. Jayadeva, a Sanskrit lyric poet of the 12th century, influenced a large number of devotional Bengali poets like Govinda Das (16th century), Balaram Das and others. Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533), a great Bengali saint, helped Vaishnavism to turn into a religious and literary movement, made it a living faith and became a source of never-ending inspiration to a host of Bengali poets, including Jiva Goswami. Sankardev (1449-1568), an Assamese devotional poet, used plays (Ankiya-Nat) and Kirtan (devotional songs) to propagate Vaishnavism and became a legend. Similarly, Jagannath Das is a legendary devotional poet in Oriya who wrote Bhagavat (the story of Krishna), which has spiritually united all the people of Orissa and created a living consciousness. Muslim and Hindu saint-poets of rural Bengal known as Bauls (mad lovers) created oral poetry of divine intoxication under the influence of both Vaishnava and Sufi (Islamic mysticism which enunciates the doctrine of divine love) philosophy. Medieval Muslim Bengali poets like Daulat Kazi and Saiyad Alaoal (17th Century A.D.) wrote narrative poems based on Sufistic philosophy, betraying a happy cultural and religious synthesis of Islam and Hinduism. In fact, bhakti became a great platform for Hindu-Muslim unity. Kabir (Hindi) is the foremost among the poets of the sant tradition (faith in one omnipresent god and not in many gods like Rama and Krishna). Kabir's poetry touches upon the various aspects of devotion, mysticism and social reforms.

Hindi literature, with its supra-regional character, attracted Namdev (Marathi) and Guru Nanak (Punjabi) and others to write in Hindi, which by then had developed into a conglomeration of many languages and dialects, and came to be known as an umbrella language. The centrality of Hindi and its vast geographical area was the reason for it. Surdas, Tulsidas and Meera Bai (15th to 16th Century A.D.) point to the great heights of Vaishnavite lyricism achieved by Hindi. Tulsidas (1532 A.D.) was the greatest of the Rama-bhakti poets who wrote his famous epic, the Ramacharit Manas (the lake of the deeds of Rama). In fact, epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata received a rebirth in the new languages. These languages gave a fresh life, a renewed relevance, and a meaningful reincarnation to the great Sanskrit epics, and

these epics in their turn provided substance and style to the new languages too. Kamban in Tamil, Krittibasa Ojha in Bengali, sarala Das in Oriya, Ezhuttacchan in Malayalam, Tulsidas in Hindi and Nannaya in Telugu are well known and legion. Muslim poets like Malik Muhammad Jayasi, Raskhan, Rahim and other wrote Sufi and Vaishnava poetry. The religious and cultural synthesis that was a special feature of medieval India finds abundant expression in its literature. The Islamic element is all-pervasive, next only to the Upanishadic Hindu element. Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, wrote in many languages, but mostly in Punjabi, and was a great poet of inter-religious communication. Nanak says truth is supreme, but above truth is truthful living. Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus belong to the sant tradition, which believes in one omnipresent God, and not in many gods like Rama and Krishna. The poetry of the Sikh Gurus is collected in the Guru Granth Sahib (the Revered Book), a multilingual text which talks about the unchanging one reality (Sat) the cosmic law (Hukum), meditation (Satnam), compassion and harmony (Daya and Santosh). Bulleh Shah, the most famous Muslim Punjabi poet, popularised Sufism through Punjabi Kafi (verse-form). Kafi is a small poem in stanzas followed by refrain and is sung in a dramatic way. Shah Latif, the famous Sindhi Muslim poet (1689 A.D.) in his sacred work Risalo explained Sufi mystic love as the divine truth.

### **Women Poets of Bhakti**

The contribution of women writers in different languages during that period deserves special attention. Women writers like Ghosha, Lopamudra, Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, Romasha Brahmavadini, etc., right from the days of the Vedas (6000 B.C. – 4000 B.C.), focused on the image of women in mainstream Sanskrit literature. The songs of Buddhist nuns (6th century B.C.) like Mutta and Ubbiri and Mettika in Pali express the torment of feelings for the life left behind. The Alwar women poets (6th century A.D.), like Andal and others, gave expression to their love for the divine. Lal Ded (1320-1384), the Muslim poetess from Kashmir Lalded & Habba Khatun, represented the sant tradition of bhakti and wrote Vakhs (maxims), which are peerless gems of spiritual experience. Meera Bai, in Gujarati, Rajasthani and Hindi (she wrote in three languages), Avvayyar, in Tamil, and Akkamahadevi in Kannada, are well known for their sheer lyrical intensity and concentrated emotional appeal. Their writings speak to us about the social conditions prevailing at that time, and the position of woman at home and in society. They all wrote small lyrics or poems of devotional fervour, metaphysical depth, and with a spirit of dedication and utmost sincerity. Behind their mysticism and metaphysics is a

divine sadness. They turned every wound inflicted by life into a poem.

### **Other Trends in Medieval Literature**

Bhakti was not the only aspect of medieval literature. Love ballads and heroic poetry in Punjabi, known as Kissa and Var, were popular Punjabi medieval forms. The most famous Punjabi love ballad is Hir Ranjha, an immortal book by a Muslim poet called Warris Shah. A popular Punjabi heroic ballad, sung by village bards orally, is Najabat's Var of Nadir Shah. Var is the most popular form of Punjabi poetry, music and drama, all rolled into one, and has been in vogue since the earliest times. In Hindi, between 1700 and 1800 A.D., many poets like Bihari Lal and Keshav Das created secular poetry of Sringara (erotic sentiment), and a large number of other poets, wrote academic accounts of the entire range of poetry, in verse form.

During the medieval period, Urdu, as a language, came into being. It was Amir Khusro (1253 A.D.), an early architect of India's composite culture, and a great Sufi poet, who first experimented with Persian and Hindi (then known as Hindavi) mixed poetry, which was the genesis of a new language, subsequently recognised as Urdu. Urdu has largely followed Persian forms and metres in poetry, but it has adopted some of the purely Indian forms also. Ghazals (lyrical couplets), marsia (elegy) and qasidah (ode of praise) are of Iranian origin. Sauda (1706-1781) was the first among the late medieval poets who gave vigour and versatility to Urdu poetry, which his predecessors had been struggling to accomplish. Then, it was Dard (1720-1785) and Mir Taqi Mir (1722-1810) who gave Urdu maturity and class, and ushered it into the modern period.

### **Modern Indian Literature**

#### **The 19th Century Indian Renaissance**

In almost all the Indian languages, the modern age begins with the first struggle for India's freedom in 1857, or near that time. The impact of western civilization, the rise of political consciousness, and the change in society could be seen in what was written during that time. Contact with the western world resulted in India's acceptance of western thought on the one hand, and rejection of it on the other, and resulted in an effort made to revive her ancient glory and Indian consciousness. A large number of writers opted for a synthesis between Indianization and westernization, in their search for a national ideology. All these attitudes were combined to bring about the



renaissance in 19th century India. But it was a renaissance in a country which was under foreign domination. So it was not that kind of renaissance which had spread in 14th-15th century Europe, where scientific reasoning, individual freedom and humanism were the dominant characteristics. The Indian renaissance took a different shape, in the context of the Indian race, moment and milieu, and as a result, nationalistic, reformistic and revivalistic thinking found its way into literature, which slowly turned itself into a pan-Indian movement, spearheaded in different parts of the country by renaissance leaders like Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Madhav Govind Ranade, U.V. Swaminatha Aiyer, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, K.V. Pantulu, Narmada Shankar Lalshankar Dave and others. The leaders of the renaissance, in fact, succeeded in instilling nationalistic fervour in the people, and induced in them a desire for social reform and a sentimental yearning for their past glory.

The most important literary event that revolutionised literature was the emergence of literary prose in all the modern Indian languages, and the advent of the printing press, under the patronage of an Englishman, William Carey (1761-1834), at Serampore, Bengal. It is true that Sanskrit and Persian had a vast body of prose, but the necessity for prose in modern Indian languages, for use in administration and higher education, led to the emergence of prose in different languages at the beginning of the modern period. The birth of newspapers and periodicals in Indian languages between 1800 and 1850 was extremely important for the development of prose. and the missionaries of Serampore started off Bengali Journalism on its career. The emergence of prose as a powerful medium brought a kind of change that coincided with the process of modernization.

### **The Emergence of Nationalism**

It is true that the idea of a modern state took root in Indian society because of India's contact with western ideas, but very soon, Indian writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali, 1838-1894) and others made use of this newly acquired concept of nationalism to attack colonial rule, and in the process created their own brand of nationalism, rooted in the soil. Bankim Chandra wrote many historical novels like *Durgesh Nandini* (1865), and *Anand Math* (1882), acquired a pan-Indian popularity and made nationalism and patriotism a part of dharma. This alternative was a distinctive civilizational concept of universalism that was accepted by many as a reply to western colonialism. Revivalism and reformism were natural corollaries of the newly emerging idea



of nationalism. Rabindra Nath Tagore (Bengali, 1861-1942), the greatest name in modern Indian literature, made federalism an important part of his concept of national ideology. He said that the unity of India has been and shall always be a unity in diversity. The foundation for this tradition had been laid in India at the social level, not the political, by saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. It is this solution-unity through acknowledgement of differences-that India has to offer to the world. As a result, India's nationalism is mingled with its spiritual tradition, with truth and tolerance preached by Mahatma Gandhi, and non-alignment advocated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, showing India's concern for its pluralism. Modern Indian pluralism is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, secular, national-state concept.

### **The Literature of Nationalism, Reformism and Revivalism**

Patriotic writings proliferated almost spontaneously in different languages, as the resistance of a community against foreign rule. Rangalal in Bengali, Mirza Ghalib in Urdu and Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi expressed themselves as the patriotic voice of that era. This voice was, on the one hand, against colonial rule, and on the other, for the glorification of India. Besides, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) wrote ghazals in Urdu, about love, with unusual imagery and metaphors. He accepted life both as a joyous existence and as a dark and painful experience. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) wrote the first modern epic in an Indian language, and naturalised blank verse in Bengali. Subramania Bharati (1882-1921) was the great Tamil patriot-poet, who revolutionized the poetic tradition in Tamil. Themes from mythology or history were taken to write epics, by Maithili Saran Gupta (Hindi, 1886-1964), Bhai Vir Singh (Punjabi, 1872-1957), and others, with the express purpose of fulfilling the needs of the patriotic reader.

The birth of the novel is associated with the social reform-oriented movement of the 19th century. This new genre, borrowed from the West, is characterized by a spirit of revolt, right from its adoption into the Indian system. The first Tamil novel, Pratap Mudaliyar Charitram (1879) by Samuel V. Pillai, the first Telugu novel, Sri Ranga Raja Charitra (1872) by Krishnamma Chetty, and the first Malayalam novel, Indu Lekha (1889) by Chandu Menon were written with didactic intentions and to re-examine evil social customs and practices like untouchability, caste distinctions, denial of remarriage of widows, etc. In other first novels, like the Bengali novel, Phulmani O Karunar Bibaran (1852), by an Englishwoman, H. Catherine Mullens, or the Hindi novel, Pariksha Guru (1882) by Lala Srinivas Das, one can discover shared patterns of response and

articulation towards social problems.

Historical novels were written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali), Hari Narayan Apte (Marathi), and others, to describe the glorious past of India, and to instill nationalist fervour in her people. Novels were found to be the most appropriate medium to eulogize the intellectual and physical richness of the past, and reminded Indians about their obligations and rights. In fact, in the 19th century, the idea of national identity emerged from literature, and most Indian writings turned into the voice of enlightenment. This paved the way for India to understand the real, factual position by the time it reached the threshold of the 20th century. It was during this time that Tagore started writing the novel Gora (1910), to challenge colonial rule, colonial criteria and colonial authority, and to give new meaning to Indian nationalism.

### **Indian Romanticism**

The trend of Indian romanticism ushered in by three great forces influenced the destiny of modern Indian literature. These forces were Sri Aurobindo's \* (1872-1950) search for the divine in man, Tagore's quest for the beautiful in nature and man, and Mahatma Gandhi's experiments with truth and non-violence. Sri Aurobindo, through his poetry and philosophical treatise, 'The Life Divine', presents the prospect of the ultimate revelation of divinity in everything. He wrote mostly in English. Tagore's quest for beauty was a spiritual quest, which attained fruition in the final realisation that service to humanity was the best form of contact with God. Tagore was aware of a supreme principle pervading nature and the entire universe. This supreme principle, or the unknown mystique, is beautiful, because it shines through the known; and it is only in the unknown that we have perpetual freedom. Tagore, a many-splendoured genius, wrote novels, short stories, essays and dramas, and never ceased to try out new experiments. His collection of poetry in Bengali, Gitanjali (song offerings), received the Nobel Prize in 1913. Tagore's poetry, after the award, inspired writers of different Indian languages to popularize the age of romantic poetry. The age of romantic poetry in Hindi is known as Chhayavad, the age of romantic mystery, in Kannada, is Navodaya, the rising sun, and in Oriya, it is known as Sabuj, the age of green. Jaishankar Prasad, Nirala, Sumitra Nandan Pant and Mahadevi (Hindi); Vallathol, Kumaran Asan (Malayalam); Kalindi Charan Panigrahi (Oriya); B.M. Srikantayya, Puttappa, Bendre (Kannada); Viswanath Satyanarayana (Telugu); Uma Shankar Joshi (Gujarati), and poets of other languages highlighted mysticism and romantic subjectivity in their poetry. The poets of Ravikiran

Mandal (a group of six poets of Marathi) searched for the hidden reality in nature. Indian romanticism is fraught with mysticism – not like English romanticism, which wants to break puritanic shackles, seeking joy in Hellenism. In fact, the romantic trend of the modern times follows the tradition of Indian poetry, where romanticism indicates the Vedantic (the philosophy of one Reality) oneness between Nature and man, more along the lines of Vedic symbolism and not Paganism. Muhammad Iqbal (1877-198), the greatest poet that Urdu had produced, second only to Ghalib, went through initially a romantic-cum-nationalistic phase in his poetry. His best collection of Urdu poems is Bang-i-Dara (1924). His quest for Pan-Islamism did not deter him in his concern for humanity at large.

### **The Advent of Mahatma Gandhi**

The emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Gujarati, English, and Hindi, 1869-1948) and Tagore, influencing Indian life and literature, were quite often complementary to one another. Gandhi spoke the language of the common man, and was for the outcasts. His weapon was the weapon of truth and non-violence. He was for traditional values and against industrializations. He very soon turned himself into a medieval saint and a social reformer. Tagore called him Mahatma (saint). Gandhi became the theme of both poetry and fiction of cultural nationalism. He became an apostle of peace and idealism. Poets like Vallathol (Malayalam), Satyendranath Datta (Bengali), Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali) and Akbar Allahabadi (Urdu) accepted Gandhi as a challenge to western civilization, and as an assertion of the dignity of Asian values. Gandhian heroes swamped the fictional world of that time. Raja Rao (English), Tara Shankar Bandyopadhyay (Bengali), Premchand (Hindi), V.S. Khandekar (Marathi), Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali), Lakshmi Narayan (Telugu) all created Gandhian protagonists as rural reformers or social workers with moral and religious commitments. It was not the writers, but the people, who created the Gandhi myth, and the writers, in their turn, used it effectively to mark a period of great awakening.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) was one of the most popular Bengali novelists, whose popularity continues unabated even today, not only among Bengali readers, but also among people in other parts of India, by means of the numerous translations of his books, which are available in various Indian languages. His pet theme was the man-woman relationship, and he was well known for his portrayal of women, their sufferings and their often unspoken love. He was both a Gandhian and a socialist.

Premchand (1880-1936) wrote novels in Hindi. He was a true son of the soil, deeply attached to the Indian earth. He was the finest literary exponent of the Indian peasantry in Indian literature. As a true Gandhian, he believed in the idealistic theory of 'a change of heart' in the exploiters. But, in his magnum opus, *Godan* (1936), he becomes a realist and records the suffering and struggle of the Indian rural poor.

### **Progressive Literature**

The advent of Marxism on the Indian literary scene in the thirties is a phenomenon which India shared with many other countries. Both Gandhi and Marx were driven by opposition to imperialism and concern for the dispossessed sections of society. The Progressive Writers Association was originally established in 1936 by some expatriate writers in London, like Mulk Raj Anand (English). However, soon it became a great pan-Indian movement that brought together Gandhian and Marxist insights into society. The movement was especially conspicuous in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu and Malayalam, but its impact was felt all over India. It compelled every writer to reexamine his/her relationship with social reality. In Hindi, Chhayavad was challenged by a progressive school that came to be known as Pragativad (progressivism). Nagarjun was undisputedly the most powerful and noted Hindi poet of the progressive group. The Bengali poets, Samar Sen and Subhas Mukhopadhyay, added a new socio-political outlook to their poetry. Fakir Mohan Senapati (Oriya, 1893-1918) was the first Indian novelist of social realism. Rootedness to the soil, compassion for the wretched, and sincerity of expression are the qualities of the novels of Senapati. Manik Bandyopadhyay was the most well-known Marxist Bengali novelist. Malayalam fiction writers like Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, S.K. Pottekkat and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, made history by writing progressive fiction of high literary value. They covered fresh ground exploring the life of ordinary men and the human relations that economic and social inequalities fostered. Shivaram Karanath, the most versatile fiction writer in Kannada, never forgot his early Gandhian lessons. Sri Sri (Telugu) was a Marxist, but showed interest in modernism at a later stage in his life. Abdul Malik, in Assamese, writes with an ideological bias. The critical norms of progressive literature were established by the pioneer of this phase in Punjabi by Sant Singh Sekhon. The progressive writers' movement attracted the attention of eminent poets of Urdu, like Josh Malihabadi and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Both imbued with the Marxist spirit, infused in the age-old love symbolism a political meaning.

## **Making of Modern Theatre**

Sanskrit drama after the 10th century lost its tenor. It strove no more through symbol and gesture to realize the truth behind human experience. Medieval Indian literature was glorious, but it was an era of devotional poetry, which was a little indifferent to secular representation of life on stage. The Islamic taboo against such forms of entertainment was also responsible for the decline of Indian theatre, and, therefore, drama remained in a state of oblivion. However, folk plays continued to entertain the audience.

With the advent of the modern period and the impact of western literature, drama took a new turn and developed as a form of literature. The Parsi theatre, around 1850, started staging plays based on Indian mythology, history and legends. With its moving troupes, they travelled to different parts of the country and made a tremendous impact on their audience. Agha Hashr (1880-1931) was an important playwright of the Parsi theatre. But Parsi plays were mostly commercial and cheap. In fact, modern Indian theatre grew mainly as a reaction against its initial crudity and superficiality. Baratendu Harishchandra (Hindi), Girish Chandra Ghosh (Bengali), Dwijendra Lal Roy (Bengali), Dinabandhu Mitra (Bengali, 1829-74), Ranchodbhai Udayram (Gujarati, 1837-1923), M.M. Pillai (Tamil), Balvant Padurang Kirloskar (Marathi, 1843-1885) and Rabindra Nath Tagore delved into our folk tradition to create plays to protest against colonialism, social injustice and westernization. Jaishankar Prasad (Hindi) and Adya Rangacharya (Kannada) wrote historical and social plays to highlight the clash between idealism and the harsh realities by which they were surrounded. P.S. Mudaliyar gave Tamil stage respectability and new direction. But in all, Indian literature before Independence is generally poor in drama. The making of modern theatre became complete only after India achieved independence in 1947.

## **Search for Modernity**

A great work of art, in the Indian context, is the expression of both the traditional and the actual. As a result, the concept of modernism grew in the Indian context along different lines. The urge was to create something new. Even the imitations of western modernism came as a challenge to understand their own realities. Writers during this time presented their manifestos, explaining their ideas of modernity. A new language was found to articulate their own historical position. Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) was the most important Bengali poet after Tagore who had a total sense of poetry. He was an

imagist and used language not just to communicate, but to grasp reality. Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay (1899-1950) the Bengali fiction writer, whose novel *Pather Panchali* (The Saga of the Road) was filmed by Satyajit Ray, and which received international acclaim, presents the unsophisticated and warmhearted village life that is passing away. In his quest for identification with man's everyday relation with nature, he proved himself to be no less modern. Tara Shankar Bandyopadhyay (Bengali 1898-1971) depicts in his novels the pulsating life of a whole generation staying in a village or a city, where society itself becomes the hero. In depicting regional life, the social change and human behaviour, he achieves utmost success. Uma Shankar Joshi (Gujarati) initiated new experimental poetry and spoke of the shattered self in the modern day world. Amrita Pritam (Punjabi) creates an intensely personal poetry of an unearthly glory, without losing contact with the earth. B.S. Mardhekar (Marathi, 1909-1956) reflects in his poetry contemporary reality with the help of images, indicating the limitations of man and the inevitable despair arising from them. Gopal Krishna Adiga (1918-92), the famous modern Kannada poet, developed his own personal idiom, and became mystical. He also displays the agony of his time. Practically all the writers reflect the despair of man, arising out of his sense of helplessness in society and in the larger sphere of history. The limitation of the West, the degeneration of canons and the disillusionment of the middle-class psyche, are some of the characteristics of Indian modernity. However, the tradition of humanism is also very much alive and hope for a better future is not discarded. In western terminology, modernism is a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, but in India, it is a search for alternatives to existing literary models. But one cannot identify one single reference point of modernity and, therefore, one may conclude that Indian modernity is like a mosaic.

### **The Indian Literary Scene After Independence**

After independence, in the fifties, the disillusionment became more vivid because of the pressure of the disintegration of society and a broken relationship with India's past heritage. In 1946, India witnessed the worst bloodbath in the memory of the sub-continent, just before it became Independent, after the partition of the country. India's nationalism at that juncture was a nationalism of mourning. At that time, a majority of new writers portrayed a dreadful artificial world, based on the formulas of western modernism. There were experimentalists who showed concern for the inner reality – intellectualism entered the realm of modernity. In a culture like India's, the past does not pass off. It keeps on providing paradigms for the



present, but the rhythm broke down because of modernistic experimentations.

Most Indian poets looked outside, and accepted T.S. Eliot, Mallarmé, Yeats or Baudelaire as their masters, and in the process, rejected Tagore, Bharati, Kumaran Asan, Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi. But then, these poets of the fifties, and even the sixties of 'dark modernism', developed an identity crisis. This specific identity crisis, the conflict between traditional Indianness and western modernity, is discernable in the writings of the major language areas in India during those days. Those who adhered to western modernity separated themselves from the common masses and their reality. But the concept of experimentation (Prayog) sometimes developed independent of western influence, as a quest for new values and a searching examination of the basic sanctions or sources of value. S.H. Vatsyayan Ajneya (Hindi), Navakanta Barua (Assamese), B.S. Mardhekar (Marathi), Harbhajan Singh (Punjabi), Sharatchandra Muktibodh (Marathi) and V.K. Gokak (Kannada) emerged with a distinct voice and vision, enriching the new movement.

Besides, the literature of social realism, having its roots in the soil, became a dominant trend in contemporary literature. It was a continuation of the progressive literature of the thirties and forties, but definitely more militant in its approach. G.M. Muktibodh (Hindi), Bishnu Dey (Bengali) or the Telugu naked (Digambar) poets revealed the poet's solitary struggle in opposition to the mounting crisis of uprooted identity. They wrote political poetry on the theme of agony and struggle. It was a poetry of commitment. Literature now moved to the downtrodden and the exploited. The Kannada Bandaya (the rebels) were concerned with forms of violence in a class society. People like Dhumi (Hindi) showed a great range of social realism. O.N.V. Kurup (Malayalam) added to his lyricism the sharpness of anger towards social injustice. Then came the Naxalite movement of the seventies, and with it post-modernism entered the Indian literary scene. In the Indian context, post-modernism arrived as a reaction to media-operated and market-guided reality – a reaction to the modernism of the sixties of the existential anguish, of the crisis of identity, and of the frustration of the idealist, but it carried with it the trend of progressive literature of protest and struggle.

### **Dalit Literature**

One of the most significant features of the post-modernist era was the emergence of writings of the outcasts, as a major literary force. The word Dalit means the downtrodden. The literature which is concerned with the socially

underprivileged, and which asserts the socio-political stature of the underdogs, is known by this name. The Dalit movement was started in literature by Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada writers under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It came into the limelight because of progressive literature moving nearer to the downtrodden. It is a literature of militant protest against upper caste literature upholding Brahmanical values. Marathi poets, Namdev Dhasal or Narayan Surve, or novelists like Daya Pawar, or Laxman Gaikwad, reflect in their writings the anguish of a community, and demand the shaping of a just and realistic future for the underprivileged and the outcast in society. Mahadev Devanur (Kannada) and Joseph Macwan (Gujarati), in their novels, deal with the experience of violence, protest and exploitation. It challenges the tone and context of existing literary canons and decentralises the whole process of a literary movement. It creates an alternative aesthetics and extends the linguistic and generic possibilities of literature. Dalit literature introduces a new world of experience in literature, widens the range of expression, and exploits the potentiality of the language of the outcasts and underprivileged Dalits.

### **Use of Mythology**

In order to bridge the gap between urban and rural consciousness, between the past and the present, another trend which is very much visible in the post-modernist poetry scene is the use of mythology to present the modern predicament. Mythic thoughts, in fact, are attempts to mediate the gaps between continuity and change, thereby authenticating the idea of 'total poetry'. By using similar mythological situations, a broader dimension is given to the present-day chaotic condition in which humanity is living today. The mythical past affirms man's relationship to the transcendent. It has a value-structure. It is a rediscovery of the past for the present, and an adaptation for the future. In Ajneya's (Hindi) poetry, one finds a shift towards the realisation that the individual's entity is just a humble part of a larger reality. Ramakanta Rath (Oriya) and Sitakant Mhapatra (Oriya) use mythology or folk legends to contemplate on man's alienation from a life of nourishment and grace. One comes across many instances of writers trying to explore their roots, find their moorings, and probe whole areas of experience, blurred during a period of extreme modernism during the last several decades. In contemporary Indian poetry, along with a sense of urbanity, an attitude of irony, frequent use of mythological sequences as structural images, and a continuous involvement with the problems of expediency and eternity, are very visible. Playwrights like Girish Karnad, Kambar (Kannada), Mohan Rakesh, Mani Madhukar (Hindi),

G.P. Satish Alekar (Marathi), Manoj Mitra and Badal Sircar (Bengali) are using myths, folk legends and religio-centric tradition to understand India's present-day existence. The departure from Euro-centric modernism has created a new socio-cultural mythical code, which is used in the poetry of Kunwar Narayan (Hindi), Dilip Chitre (Marathi) and Sankho Ghosh (Bengali), and in novels by Bhyrappa (Kannada), Prapancham (Tamil) and others. Myth is now accepted as a meaningful sub-text of the literary text. U.R. Anantha Murthy (Kannada), in his stories, explores the relevance of some traditional values in today's changed context. His novel, *Samskara*, is a world classic, which portrays the spiritual struggle of man in terms of the urgency of life's demands. These writers have made an effort to retrieve, rediscover, and redefine elements of culture in a creative way, by a return to pride in one's roots, while looking ahead.

### **Contemporary Literature**

In the *uttara Adhunik* (post-modern) era the effort is to be natural, to be Indian, to be near to the common man, to be socially conscious. The third generation of Malayalam writers like N. Prabhakaran, and P. Surendran prefer the term anti-modernism to post-modernism and are content simply to narrate human tales without any explicit social message or philosophical pretensions. Vijayadan Detha (Rajasthani, under the umbrella language Hindi) and Surendra Prakash (Urdu) are now writing stories without any ideological prejudices. The modernist idea that anything simple should not be accepted is now questioned. It is established now that simple texts may present complex extra-textual structures. Even cultural references simply stated in poetry can have different semantic values.

In the contemporary Indian novels by Jayamohan (Tamil), Debes Ray (Bengali) and Shivprasad Singh (Hindi), dealing with various neglected regions, and the spoken dialect of that area, a composite picture of a total India, pulsating with new experience and struggling to hold on to the old values, and in the process sometimes discarding them, is also easily discernible. In this period of *Uttara Adhunik* (post-modernism), these novels dramatise the shift of the dominant from problems of knowing to problems of modes of being. It gives a glimpse of the actual India of the villages, and also makes it amply clear that this country belongs to the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Its culture is a composite culture. These regional novelists have forcefully demolished the myths created by the western Indologists that Indianness is just fatalism, or that Indianness is to be identified with harmony and order, and Indian vision

cannot perceive its own reality.

The central tension experienced by the vast majority of contemporary Indian novelists is that of transition from the rural and traditional to an urban and post-modern situation, expressed either through a romantic nostalgia for the village left behind, or through fear and hatred of the cruel impersonal city, with all its sex, horror, murder and cruelty. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya (Assamese), Sunil Gangopadhyay (Bengali), Pannalal patel (Gujarati), Mannu Bhandari (Hindi), Nayantara Sahgal (English), V. Bedekar (Marathi), Samaresh Basu (Bengali) and others, with their rural-urban sensitivity, have portrayed the Indian experience in its totality. Some fiction writers, with the help of symbols, images and other poetic means, magnify a particular moment in life. Nirmal Verma (Hindi), Moni Manikyam (Telugu) and many others have made their presence felt in this area. Emancipatory women's writing has emerged strongly in all Indian languages, seeking to subvert the man-dominated social order, forging revisionary myths and counter-metaphors by women writers like Kamala Das (Malayalam, English), Krishna Sobti (Hindi), Ashapurna Devi (Bengali), Rajam Krishnan (Tamil) and others.

The present-day crisis in India is the conflict between expediency and universality, and as a result, a large number of writers are in the process of identifying a pattern of problem-solving within the traditional system, vigorous enough to generate and sustain an indigenous process of modernization, which does not need readymade external solutions, and is in accord with indigenous needs and attitudes. The new crop of writers are concerned with truth as they see it in life around them. Even for the Indian English writers, English is no more a colonial language. Amitabh Ghosh, Shashi Tharur, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Arundhati Roy and others are using it without showing a lack of commitment to Indianness. Those writers who are aware of their inheritance, complexity and uniqueness, express in their work, without any conscious effort, both tradition and the actual.

One may conclude that no single Indian literature is complete in itself, and hence no study of it, within a single language context, can do justice to it, or even to its writers, who grow in a common cultural ambience. What is noteworthy is that Indian literature is written in many languages, but there is a vital, living relationship among them, because of polyglot fluidity, inter-language translations, shared themes, forms, concerns, direction and movements. All these keep the ideals of Indian literature dynamically alive

even today.