

CONFLICT AS A BRIDGE
SOME ASPECTS OF THE FICTION
OF MODERN INDIA

That the Indian approach to literature has always been different from the Western one would be a trite observation. To add that the Indian tradition distinguished literature, or more specifically poetry, from art, because the aims of the two were different would be correct but not sufficiently explanatory. To arrive at a fair appreciation of the predicament of the contemporary Indian writer who is heir to two incompatible literary traditions, it is most useful to compare the traditional or classical author-audience relationship in India with the one obtaining now and set the two in the perspective of historical development.

The classical Indian audience—we use the term comprehensively to denote the receiving end of any process of artistic communication, whether through poetry or drama or painting or

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sculpture or any other art—was not a “democratic” or representative one in the ordinary sense. It was an elite, quite as much as the community of artists (again we ignore as not immediately material the distinction between “poet” and “artist”) was an elite. This does not however connote a body of special social privilege, but rather a community of people endowed with certain qualities of mind: a certain discipline, a certain sensibility or power of sympathy, a certain capacity—resulting from combined qualities of intellect and emotion—to reach out to the heart of things and there recognise “bliss”—the ultimate which was always there and the identification of, and with, which was the aim and purpose of art. Those who did not have this power or quality were NOT the audience. For them other pleasures were recommended and prescribed—a kind of sub-art, sub-literature, sub-drama.

If this quality of being a *sabrdaya*—which might be vulgarly but entirely accurately rendered as “having a heart”—was a desideratum for the audience, it was an absolute essential for the artist. “Having a heart” meant, for the author, a capacity for perceptive and intuitive knowledge, a power of “attunement”—the power to reach out to, to recognise, to hold to the core of bliss which is within every artistic experience—which indeed *is* the artistic experience as distinct from a real one—and to communicate this experience: in other words to create the precondition for the audience’s identification with this experience.

Art (i. e., the art of literature) was therefore something more than communication: it was an act of communion. Between the two parties involved there already existed not only an understanding on certain basic premises but something of the nature of a solemn covenant. Art was a dialogue, not between two strangers but between, shall we say, two repositories of a common trust; and the dialogue revealed, not each to the other, but to both the treasure that lay between them.

Such a situation between author and audience, or rather such a stipulation of the relationship that should exist between them, has several important implications.

There is, first, the obvious one: literary emotion is unique; it is different from any emotion felt in real life. It is always pleasurable: even literary pain, grief, anger, and disgust are

pleasurable, unlike their real-life counterparts. How could it be otherwise, since artistic emotion is by definition "bliss-oriented?"

Second: art is not just a safety outlet for real-life emotions. Catharsis is irrelevant; it is not through relief from real-life emotions that art gives pleasure, but from a recognition of the true source of those emotions.

Third: everyone—everyone "having a heart," that is—has the innate ability or potentiality to enter into literary or artistic emotion, regardless of whether or not he has experienced its real-life counterpart. This innate ability is a means of access to the store-house of collective and cumulative experience through which the hitherto unacquainted or uninitiated can enter into artistic emotion. (There are several hypotheses to explain this innate ability: we do not need to go into them; it is enough to suggest that an analogy may be found in Jung's *Collective Unconscious*.)

Fourth: Real experience, i.e., real-life experience, only establishes a relationship with the phenomenal world, with things, with an IT, even if with an immediate and urgent IT. Literary experience, the experience of literary emotion involving literary reality, relates one to a larger if less immediate world: the world of the All.

Fifth: Art is not in the thing, the object, the work of art; it is rather something that happens *between* the thing and the audience, or between the artist and the audience.

Sixth, and this is perhaps more important than the other five put together: art is even less in the artists, in the subject. The artist who insisted on "being himself" or on giving expression to his self could not possibly fulfill the basic condition of art—the throwing of a bridge to "the core of bliss" within the experience. It was always the bridge that was supremely important, not the territory on either side of the bridge; and the stream which the bridge spanned sufficed to give it meaning: the continuous flow of *ananda* within all experience.

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This general view of the aim of the artists, the function of art and the nature of the artist-audience relationship, developed in India some time before the beginning of the Christian era.

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The earliest preserved formulation¹ is variously dated by historians, by some as late as the sixth century A. D., but may, without the possibility of serious error in either direction, be placed somewhere between the first and third centuries of the Christian era. Early theory concerns itself primarily with drama and with the dance; but since it recognises poetry as the primary art, drama being but visual poetry, it would not be wrong to describe it in more general terms as a theory of artistic communication.

Elaborations, some displaying great intricacy and finesse as well as a wonderful power of precise formulation, continued throughout the mediaeval period and into the seventeenth century, that is, up to the end of the pre-modern period. The pursuit of this development is an engrossing study in itself but irrelevant here. We may sum up directly by saying that the concept of artist-audience relationship did not change in its essentials, nor did the idea that the poet-artist must lead the audience to the reality which was at the core of reality, the innermost sheath of *ananda*. What did change was the concept of reality itself: aesthetic theory, parallel with and influenced by metaphysical speculation, went almost full circle from a hierarchy of realities to complete denial of the reality of phenomena and back again to qualified reality. Perhaps inevitably, the arts and especially creative literature declined and then resuscitated themselves.

To the classical Sanskrit dramatist, reality was real enough. It was not that the world of phenomena was *unreal*, but that there was an apparent duality: *ananda* was also real, more real; in fact that was the basic reality which vested other things with reality, and the problem was only to recognise this identity. It was to the solution of this problem that the artist applied himself. Of course, such a view of drama ruled out conflict in the sense in which western drama understands the term—indeed in the western view it ruled out the possibility of drama itself. The assurance of ultimate identity—identity furthermore in bliss—ruled out the polarity which western drama pre-

¹ The *Natya Shastra* of Bharata.

eminently requires. (As for tragedy, the tragic view could only be a perverted view.)

But the denial of reality to the world was also denial of reality to *ananda*. In Buddhistic thinking this was explicitly so: the release from the illusion of sorrow did not lead one to joy but merely to—release; to nonfeeling, to an Ultimate which was ultimate nothingness. This could hardly inspire artistic creation: creation itself was so unreal! In any case, if the world was only sorrow, then it was better for it to be unreal, for thus sorrow as unreal. In Hindu thought, though reality was not denied to *ananda*, and the ultimate, the divine, continued to be described as the “abode of bliss,” the concept of the world as the “causeless sport” of the divine made aesthetic identification difficult, permitting only a religious one. The classical dramatist had led from the stage presentation of reality to a greater reality (which encompassed the presentation); with the new metaphysic the dramatist had to lead from the stage presentation of the illusion, and a causeless one at that, to the reality (which rejected the illusion)—a very different proposition. It is not to be wondered at that there was no great literature in this period except religious literature. Art needs reality to come to grips with immediacy. At that time the only reality was God.

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From this beatific vision one came awake with a rude jolt to find oneself in the modern world. The effects of the shock of recognition were far-reaching and long-lasting. The fact that the impact of a new reality coincided in time and in degrees with the impact of the West has had an effect on India's relations with the West which will endure—for better or worse—but the intrinsic force of the new reality continued to exercise an incalculable influence. This new reality had manoeuvrability, fire-power, a variety of increasingly efficient hardware, and it was laden with goods, commodities, “things”... In the face of this it was difficult to believe in “divine sport” and impossible to regard it as “causeless.” A lean and tenuous existence had suddenly come face to face with Things and more

Things: the utter "thinginess" of the world gave it a new and intense reality. That it was in considerable measure the denudation of India itself which had provided England the wherewithal for her Industrial Revolution was not registered immediately: when it *was* registered it as etched in with a bitterness which only made the reality more galling.

It is not necessary to go into more recent history: readers will be familiar with its broad outlines. One need only refer to the telescoping of some three centuries of European experience into a few Indian decades and to its effect on the new relationship between author and audience: the modern relationship as contrasted with the classical one. Literature—poetry—became an "art": the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure replaced the quest of philosophical identity. We were introduced to the cult of the artist: the rebellious romantic hero who owed allegiance to no one but himself. A clear image had hardly emerged when it was swept away by a deluge of quasi-Marxian thinking. And then, of course, we had democracy with its varied implications. Whatever its effects in other fields, in that of artist-audience relations democracy bestowed equality on everyone—except the artist. All men were equal, but the artist was less so: all men, being born, had the right to become readers, viewers, critics, i.e., the audience: it was no longer necessary for them to "have a heart." Hereafter it was always the artist who was to be blamed if he failed to put his art across; the hollow sound always came from the book, never from the head that struck it. The head was equal by definition; the book was not.

And in order to reduce this handicap—for democracy is committed to the removal of distinctions and restrictions—the Public Relations man gradually took over from the artist. He implicitly accepted what he would have been scandalised to hear suggested: that equality was uniformity, that identity was nonentity. Inspiration, creation, revelation were uncomfortable words, of dubious lineage moreover; he was concerned with the highest common factor which he "communicated" with the maximum of skill and efficiency through "mass" media of "communication".

It was against the background of this inheritance of tradition and historical experience that the modern Indian writer attempted

to formulate his ideas, to integrate his reactions into a new pattern of contemporary validity. The world was real, indubitably; this in itself was not an entirely new proposition but what was new was that it seemed to posit the inevitability of conflict. That meant continually taking sides. Now the necessity to choose was not again a new burden; but the suggestion of *partisanship* went against the grain. There had been a militancy in the past, but that had been the militancy of, or for, the Whole; the semblance of conflict on the surface had only emphasised the unity below. But now the world seemed all surface; below was only the abyss.

What seemed called for was therefore a restatement of issues; a redefinition of what constitutes conflict and a fresh examination of the relationship that one must establish with it in order to resolve it, to make it fruitful or constructive, or—in the event of its proving unresolvable,—of rendering it harmless or inoperative—sequestering it.

Since the impact of a new kind of reality had coincided with the impact of the West, it was perhaps natural that the first attempts at definition of the nature of the conflict—or rather of the nature of conflict itself—should have sought to state in concrete terms the confrontation with the West. Rabin-dranath Tagore was one of the early ones to attempt this in fiction; he was also perhaps the only one with whose attempts the West is in some measure familiar.² One may note how already at that time the East's awareness of the area of bias and warped realisation was greater than that of the West. The East was much more ready to recognise that man's essential nature was the same, East or West, and that the "differences" were not basic contrasts but rather aspects of the dominance of certain qualities and patterns in each culture which had never been completely alien to the other. It saw that involuntary membership of a national or racial group obliged one to cultivate certain loyalties even if they led to a schism within. With the exception of E. M. Forster, there was hardly a western writer who dared to explore the difficult and explosive field of East-West relations on the personal level; for the rest,

² Raja Rao being another, more recent, instance.

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there was no more empathy than is to be found in travel or holiday brochures inviting people to the colorful, the quaint, the paradoxical, the fabulous, the exotic...

But even for Tagore the East-West confrontation was primarily an aspect of India's emergent nationalism. Though he did attempt to put nationalism within the framework of a larger concept of universal brotherhood (this more in his essays than in fiction), as an artist his main concern was with the individual conscience and with the relation of the individual to the All. The crisis of religious belief, which with a sort of mystique of nationalism, is the theme of the early novel *Gora*, is part of his statement regarding this relationship. Thus in one sense there was no real confrontation at all: it was a meeting with an *internalised image* of the West. The problem was still a private one, the search was for a clue to the Whole, which of course was tacitly assumed not only to be present but within reach.

It is less difficult to concede today, than it was for some a generation ago, that Tagore was on the right track. In any case, he was on a pursuit for which India's cumulative experience best equipped him and through which therefore he had the best prospect of finding something significant. Yet other writers did not pursue the path: early in the inter-war period the socio-economic struggle became the main theme of fiction and soon the broad outlines of early Marxist or socialistic thinking set the grooves along which the artist moved in his delineation of this struggle. The individual conscience was set aside as irrelevant; indeed the individual himself all but disappeared, and stereotypes of economic conflict took over: the money-lender, the peasant, the millowner, the laborer (without skills), the white man as colonialist-capitalist, the missionary as his advance agent and accessory... Since stereotypes of this sort are generally built around an archetype of some sort, these images were neither intrinsically false nor totally without artistic validity; yet the naïveté of the presentation, and the too easy assumptions on which it was based, made it curiously unreal. Such being the case with the socio-economic struggle which was the most immediate in experience (and of which the political struggle was a part), the degree of concern—or rather lack of it—with the

whole predicament of man may be imagined. It was only a small and rather withdrawn minority that involved itself with those issues; for the rest the stereotype of economic exploitation continued to be the reigning divinity.

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It was only in the late thirties, immediately before World War II, that the novelist re-focused his sights. The East-West relationship took on a new perspective because the images of both changed and became more real, truer. The artist began to look with changed eyes on the home scene as well. In other words, his vision no longer restricted by the strain of concentration on one single issue, he began to see more and in a truer relationship. He also became more ready to assess what he saw, not only with the newly acquired tool—or tools—of western-style analysis, but on the touchstone of older experience. It is the period of two generations or so since then that has set the pattern of India's relationship not with just the west but with the world as a whole, as well as of the Indian writer's artistic integration of that relationship. It would be natural, in discussing modern Indian literature, to draw one's examples and illustrations from the writing of this period. If one could assume the reader's close familiarity with the wide and varied and often poorly-publicised creations of these highly productive decades, one would select groups of writers from each decade to indicate the general direction of development and to emphasise what was most significant. The limits of this essay rule out such an ambitious plan. The present attempt, while in the main following the method indicated for selection of material, does not present that material logically: the conclusions are given before the rigorously restricted evidence is produced. This would admittedly keep us in the field of generalities, but we can console ourselves for this inadequacy with the reflection that, in art, the particular statement that the artist makes is particular only to that work of art; whatever it says about anything else is in any case a generality.

We have already spoken of the fiction of socio-economic struggle in the period between the two wars, and the general

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Marxian pattern in which it was set. The Indian writer has been introduced by the west to three main concepts of conflict which we might, for the convenience of an individual name-tab for each, describe as Darwinian, Marxian and Freudian. These represent very broad categories, and there is no doubt that it would be better to talk of biological, socio-economic and psychological conflict. Each has had its immediate enthusiasts; but very quickly the writer has realised that there is more to be said; in India this has generally included the recognition that a great deal has to be unsaid; i.e., that many of the premises do not fit in with the Indian way of life.

Now it is of course possible to dismiss this reaction as unrealistic, or conditioned by peculiar circumstances. But to do so would be futile, because that aspect is irrelevant. The area of conflict is not that of reality in itself but of the reaction to reality. The proposition that "Man is what he does" is no more a guarantee of the discovery of his essential nature or reality than the opposite proposition that "Man can only do what he is." The first proposition becomes even less meaningful when one proceeds to find what man does or might do by a study of what mice do or what dogs do!

Let us consider the broad statement that establishes man at the apex of evolution: lesser animals adapt themselves to nature, but man adapts the environment to him. One can restate this, in a way more immediately relevant: *in lesser animals there is no conflict, in man alone can there be conflict.*

Conflict, therefore, stems from an awareness of the possible. Where it is present, the important thing to recognise is not that a change in the environment can be brought about, but that a new capability in oneself has been revealed. This, and this alone, is the constructive use of conflict: when it is made to serve as a window to a higher degree of self-awareness and knowledge. To regard conflict in such a situation as a sign of the natural struggle for mastery can *only* be destructive: failure leaves a deep scar while success bloats the ego and creates the situation for further destructive conflict.

Conflict is an analogue of pain. Pain is a symptom rather than a disease, and a symptom is only the evidence of the body's struggle for health. (Death is not a symptom; it is the end of

the struggle in defeat.) Conflict also is a sign of the struggle for adjustment between the individual and the environment. Apart from the fact that resolution is not in the removal of the symptom but elsewhere, adjustment also is more likely to be the search for *modus vivendi* than absolute mastery, particularly when the conflict involves other individuals. Here again what is essential is the effort to reach out beyond oneself; and the ego-oriented personality can only raise a fresh barrier for itself to cross.

Of course there is a distinction between natural environment and human environment. But in either case the resolution of conflict is made more difficult by the premise of a contest for mastery.

The East generally, and India in particular, has traditionally emphasised the prevalence of psychological and spiritual forces, the value of asceticism. The West—in so far as that label has any meaning—might sum up its approach in the terse formula: "More Want; More Luxury." It posits the pursuit of pleasure against the East's search for happiness. Since neither approach is totally alien to the other side, it has been possible for the contemporary writer in India to present examples of the effects of the western approach applied to Indian conditions. The pampering of the senses—who today is unfamiliar with endless campaigns to pamper the hands, the palate, the complexion?—as a prelude to pampering the ego, can only set up the vicious spiral that ends in conflict of the most virulent and destructive form. This is the basic fallacy of the "contest-for-mastery" approach: it first creates the climate of tension which it then proceeds to conquer!

There are those who will see the validity of the eastern approach and even point out just parallels from mediaeval Europe, and then proceed to argue that the speed of technological advance has done such damage to the development of the vital unconscious forces in man that they can no longer be constructively employed. The argument of speed is at best the argument of exigency; and it is demonstrably true that exigent solutions create quite as many problems as they solve. Certainly the problems of the human personality are not solved this way; and driving a conflict deeper under the surface only makes

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more work bringing it up to the surface again so that it might be resolved.

It has been suggested that technology is driving man towards a conformity, an institutionalization which is comparable to the family, or group, or community life basic to eastern cultures. This again is hardly true; institutional life does not provide the intimacy of the family or group life of the east, nor does it provide a comparable kind of privacy. In the eastern pattern, even in isolation, the individual is part of the group; western man, institutionalised, only emphasises his loneliness and isolation.

The distinction has been made between shame cultures and guilt cultures; it is a valid one up to a point. But there is more than the normative effect of shame to be considered in evaluating the Indian experience. There is an important difference in the relationship of the individual to the group. The fact that the Indian community—even the religious one—demands certain patterns of action but gives complete freedom of belief is a profoundly significant one. It is this that minimizes conflict and obviates guilt. There is no pressure to reconcile action with belief, since no belief is prescribed; nor is there pressure to repress an inability to believe. The exclusive, intolerant credal emphasis produces either or both of these pressures, and guilt inevitably results: a considerable part of modern European fiction is witness to this phenomenon. There is the possibility of hypocrisy in the Indian approach, but of hypocrisy of the relatively less dangerous kind. The implacable necessity to believe, on the other hand, creates an unconscious hypocrisy: the repressed contradiction breaks out in violent prejudice and other destructive forms.

The guilt, the isolation, would appear to be inherent in the western formulation of the predicament of man. There is no human *equation*: the "I" and the "We" are set up in a relationship of total opposition, and the only possibility of solution is in the dominance of one or the other. This relationship itself is mutually restrictive and isolating and must set up a pattern of conflict.

India has a different view of the human situation. There is a comprehensive equation: indeed there is a continuous flow

of valence between *two* possible equations. The "I" is never counterposed to the "We"; the question is only whether the totality, the product of the two is a unity or a plurality. To state it a little more in the form of mathematical equations, we have

either: $I \text{ plus } We = k$, a constant,
or: $I \text{ plus } We = x$, a complex variable.

There is never a polarity between the individual and the group; no prefiguration of conflict.

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These are some of the ideas developed in Indian fiction by contemporary Indian writers. We have tried to extract them from the fictional material of which they are a part and to organise them into a statement;—we hope without violence to their essence. We have further tried to give them the necessary context, for any statement by a culture, before being considered for possible application to another one, must be tested in relation to the experience behind it.

It is true, it might even be considered obvious, that these ideas have been triggered by contact with the West. But it would be a mistake to regard them either as borrowings or as a reaction. In a tradition where one who, *through experience*, was a Witness to Truth was as important as the one who, through accident, intelligence, diligence, or—grace—was a discoverer of truth, the experiential verification continues to be most important. *This* is what writers have been seeking or doing. Contact with the West has been most valuable to India; the results of that contact would be of comparative value to the West, if only they were viewed in context and their significance brought out. Only then would it be possible fully to realise what it is that is being said, and what it is being said in relation to.

Not all these ideas, of course, have been explicitly stated in fiction, or cogently reasoned out. The novel or the short story as an art form gives only limited scope for essays of this sort. In a few cases this has actually been done; in fact here

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the working out of the idea has been the central motive and the characters are almost constructs rather than creations. Such, for example, is a novel dealing with the theme of the resolution—or rather the obviation—of conflict through non-resistance.³ Non-resistance as an aspect of *ahimsā* is not a new concept, but this novel applies it to a contemporary situation, a triangle in which the husband's long-lost school-friend suddenly appears and is attracted to the wife. Actually even the situation was not new: Rabindranath Tagore had earlier written a novel dealing with the identical situation.⁴ In Tagore's novel, however, the aggression of the "World" on the "Home" was not vacated or contained; it was suddenly cut off by the death of the aggressor. Thus there was, in the theoretical sense, no "resolution"; it was this that the younger writer sought to provide. To try to tell the story here would be to throw it away: the essential point is the husband's injunction to the wife on no account to arouse, or permit to be aroused, any feelings of guilt in the friend: resistance would isolate him and turn him destructive. The alternative of absolute non-resistance works: the husband's hope is justified and danger disarms itself through self-realisation. The theoretical case is complete. Whether the story is convincing or even plausible may yet remain a question. Are there such husbands, one might be tempted to ask? Or another might object: "But this calls for infinite courage and infinite faith." The author would answer by saying that he never suggested that this was an easy solution; only that it was the permanent one. Also that it was a constructive one, enriching all the personalities involved and doing damage to none.

Almost equally explicit is the statement another novel⁵ makes on the individual's freedom of choice—the right to the pursuit of ego-satisfactions. Again the point is made that such a pursuit must necessarily be self-defeating and destructive.

³ Jainendra Kumar, *Sunita* (1936).

⁴ *Ghare-Bahire* (Bengali, 1916); the English translation appeared in 1919 under the title *The Home and the World*.

⁵ Agyeya, *Apne Apne Ajnabi* (1961); an English translation under the title *To Each His Stranger* may be published soon.

What is not made explicit, but is certainly inherent in the author's purpose, is the equation of this approach with that of the West, a few hints being provided of a contrasting one which, we may safely assume, represents that of the East.

An inversion of the Pygmalion legend is used to make a fresh statement on the subject of the freedom of the artist.⁶ Pygmalion does *not* enthusiastically accept the statue brought to life; the beneficent goddess indulges him to the extent of giving him a chance to realise what he might be missing in rejecting the gift. The living flesh is turned to stone again; the sculptor is given the option of asking for the return of the perfect woman next day if he should miss her. But Pygmalion suddenly takes the statue from its pedestal and smashes it to bits on the studio floor. Suddenly he realises that he is free: he has attained the final nakedness of the renunciation of the ego *and* of the favour of the gods—that nakedness which is a precondition for freedom, the renunciation which alone makes art timeless. The story goes on to suggest that it was only *after* this that Pygmalion created the works on which his fame rests, not before; what had gone before was only a preparation. It may be excusable to record an irrelevance here, if only because it is amusing. A critic facetiously remarked of this story that the sculptor had not attained real freedom if he went back to sculpture; why couldn't he have cultivated cabbages thereafter? The author's rejoinder accepted this criticism; certainly Pygmalion could have grown cabbages and that would have been equally indicative of his freedom; the sculpture was incidental because it was a part of the classical legend which had been taken as the starting point!

There are less direct statements: those in which the attitudes towards conflict are implicit and the lines of resolution only suggested or left altogether to the sympathetic reader. I will limit myself to one example: in a short story entitled *A Living Thing*⁷ the author presents a narrator who has seen a bird struggling to free itself from a puddle of tar by the roadside and studied his own emotions while watching. There is the

⁶ Agyeya, *Kalakar Ki Mukti* (1954).

⁷ Raghuvir Sahae, *Jita-Jagta Vyakti* (1958).

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desire to help; it is coloured by the consciousness of power and almost a sense of self-admiration: "Look how capable I am; and what a fine thing I am going to do—rescuing the bird!" It is not the desire to help that is wrong; it is the aim of ego-satisfaction. The bird is frightened by the approaching human being; its already frantic efforts are spurred by a more immediate fear and it suddenly wrenches itself free. It is the protagonist, the Living Thing, that has freed itself; the helpful narrator is somewhat frustrated. But not too frustrated to have learned his lesson from the bird. Perhaps it would be best to quote *verbatim* a translation of the end of the story:

Let me, I said again; though I realised how futile I was. For me the bird was only a part of the whole crowded scene, a living part which I had just seen and recognised, but all the same it was an existence apart and inaccessible. I had only struck terror into it and that was all I could do; but the bird had summoned all its strength and that was something it alone could do. I looked at it fixedly for a moment: it stared at me as if transfixed, then shivered and flapped its wings as if in final agony, stretching them wide. Suddenly it was free.

A couple of yards away it scraped its claws in the dirt and flew off towards the housetops. The crows cawed once, then began hopping up and down the heap of gravel, looking foolish.

Go on, said my companion: You are a good-for-nothing nitwit.

The bird was still floating into the sunset sky, off towards the distant housetops. I turned my eyes away from it and said,

What?

I thought you'd found something on the road at last that you could pick up, (said my friend).

But I did, I said. Only—

Only what? he said.

Only the bird flew away with it, I said.

It is the inflated ego that the bird has flown away with, and it is the resulting peace of mind that the narrator has found.

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Since the conclusions have, in the main, already been offered before presenting the evidence, it remains only to add a post-script. It should be obvious that no attempt has been made to

draw a complete picture of the contemporary Indian writers' concerns, nor even of the approaches to the specific question of conflict in human relations. Such was not the intention: our aim was only to present certain points of view which might stimulate thought.

There are, doubtless, many situations where these considerations do not apply: the whole field of relations with the modern superstate of the machine. But the conflict between the person and the impersonal, as much, is outside our scope. If met on the impersonal level, it is on par with the battle against the forces of nature; or else it has to be translated into personal terms: man-to-man relationships. The protest against what might be called nonentitization—the ugliness of the word bringing out the ugliness of the phenomenon—the process by which man is itemised and atomised—is, or should be, a new self-confrontation. This, followed by a fresh dialogue between such reintegrated entities, would be the beginning of a new bridge rather than of a breach. It is in this that there is hope, however flimsy.

The struggle against the impersonal has also a sector where effort, so far, seems hopeless—east or west. If it seems less hopeless in the East it is only a time-lag. But a struggle of which the outcome is known is perhaps not to be defined as a situation of conflict. And in such a situation one recalls, without falling back on them, the remedies that the past has suggested. There is only one remedy, a sort of cure-all for which only the blurb changes from age to age. That universal salve is Courage, or Fortitude. Courage in the face of the tragic was the classical formulation; courage in the face of the perverse the mediaeval one; courage in the face of the inhuman is the modern restatement. Or perhaps it is only the pre-modern one, and the ultimate is Courage in the face of the Absurd.