

NEW SOUTH ASIAN–AMERICAN FICTION: MERGENCE OF A NEW GENRE?

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*Abstract: This paper, “New South Asian-American Fiction: Emergence of a New Genre?” focuses on a group of emerging South Asian- American novelists in the last decade, who give a new consciousness to fiction. With their multicultural, multireligious, multilingual and multiethnic traditions, the newly discovered writers settled in America are growing fast with new identity. Gifted with tremendous creative energy, they seize and give artistic shape to experiences in America. Enjoying a certain degree of critical contributions, their writings, as a distinct area of literary study, are unlike the other migrant ones which mostly have reflected the angst and trauma of the 'Nowhere man'. Their fictional writings have acquired a shape of spiritual quest that yields eventually towards a sense of equilibrium, establishing the in-between space as one of creativity, enrichment, and survival. The paper tries to show how the current crop of the South Asian writers in America creates a literary tradition that is formally and thematically different with a special reference to Manil Suri's *The Death of Vishnu*. With a spirit of religious revivalism, they try to re-make themselves in writing a new genre and new form being forged. Their individual styles, new idioms, and diversity of thematic patterns also point to the changing complexions of Indian-American Literature.*

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INTRODUCTION

The novels of the predecessors of the South Asian–American writers are generally termed with the problems of identity, homesickness, dislocations, nostalgia, rootlessness, to which multicultural contexts provide settings. They focus on the phenomenon of migration, their struggle to survive in a hostile world, their psychological stress and anxieties, the devastating effects of racism, even their suicidal thoughts. But the new Indian writers in America make a departure from these recurring stereotyped problems and deromanticize the idea of an emotional attachment to the homeland on the part of our contemporary Diaspora. Their dislocation is willed one, out of choice and in search of personal values, and not out of compulsion or a need to survive.

DEPARTURE FROM STOCK PROBLEMS

However, in the present milieu of a shrinking world order, globalization, multiculturalism, explosion of information technology, satellite communication system, and electronic media, travel—they all have changed the face of literary sojourns, nationalistic affiliations, traditional patterns of immigration for Indians who live and work in the United States, and how their cultural practices and aesthetic desires are fulfilled. They are presented as the twenty first century's “new cosmopolitans.” They go beyond the narrow personal problems and focus their attention on transnationalism, which pivots on the heightened interconnectivity between people all around the world and the loosening of boundaries between countries. These developments have forged to foster a new outlook of the new millennium South American writers, who have just burst into the literary scene in America. A few of them who can be

mentioned here are: Manil Suri, Shilpa Agarwal, Rishi Reddi, Vikram Chandra, Amitav Kumar, Sonia Singh, Sunny Singh, Lalita Das, Neela Vaswani, Tulsi Badrinath, Nandita da Cunha, Sheba Karim, Mohsin Hamid, Asma Mobin-uddin, Shaila Abdulla, Ru Freeman, Ameena Hussain, Mary Anne Mohanraj, V. V. Ganeshnathan etc. These writers of the new generation are different from their predecessors. They intend to emphasize religious tolerance, an end of racial discrimination, and cultural predicament. They have shown new patterns of migration and provoked divergent responses worldwide, deconstructing the stock problems such as nostalgia, pain and obsession for homelands.

This new body of writings is of quite different nature because it is trying to establish a distinct identity in multicultural society. Their novels are more creative and are produced out of security and stability, not out of insecurity. They are writing for transnational space with a distinct positive note in the new genre rather than the note of discontent found in them. Their writings are moving away from the protest and the feeling of marginalization, manifesting as to how they are positioning, relocating and reconstructing themselves, exploring root and stability in the uprootedness.

They seek their own space by rendering their distinctive voices and re-write their personal histories blending into the American stream. Their de-stabilization of identities compels reconceptualization of identities and their re-presentation in the corpus of literary texts. They are looking out for new avenues to interpret contemporary life intertwined with religious, moral, cultural and philosophical practices. And in this way, they emerge as cosmopolitan writers, thinkers, and free intellectuals. Consequently, the writers of the new generation address specific situations and devise particular strategies in order to produce a tradition that represents, at least partially, the South Asian community in the United States and the readers are coveted to read and understand them.

NEW SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN NOVELISTS

In addition to the critical study of Manil Suri's *The Death of Vishnu* undertaken, to support my conviction of a new mode of Indian-American writings, some of the other South Asian-American novels are explained here, which deal with the customs, traditions, tribal rituals, mythologies, religions, and philosophies, disregarding the cultural dilemmas, racial problems, and identity-crisis. They hold religion the very foundation of one's moral conduct, be it Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. From ancient time to the medieval period, man revolves around religion. Though it was the magic of scientific outlook that shattered the faith but it rebounds with a bang in the twenty first century. After a brief period of happy marriage with the Enlightenment and materialism, there is a U-turn towards spiritualism, tolerance, and faith healing. Civil societies worldwide have become religion conscious because people cannot get over their age old cultures and their practices. They tend to get integrated with their root, religion, and identity. With their new canon, the South Asian American writers try to explore the possibility of restoring religious and cultural harmony to create a transnational space.

Shilpa Agrawal's *Haunting Bombay* (2009) is an intriguing debut novel drawing on the broader mystical culture that envelops India, where there is always a supernatural explanation for everything that happens. Meanwhile, Rishi Reddy's *Karma and Other Stories* (2007) introduces a luminous new voice. In "Lord Krishna", a teenager who is a very religious minded gets furious when his evangelic history teacher likens the Hindu deity to Satan, but ultimately she forgives him against his father's wishes showing her virtue of tolerance. Rishi's other stories are "Karma," "Justice Shiva Ram Murthy," "Devadas," "Bangles" etc.—all coloured with the spirit of Indian philosophy and culture.

Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1997) also dealing with Indian culture, religion and philosophy focuses on the

setting of the 18th and 19th century Mogul India against the open highways of contemporary America and fusing Indian myth, Hindu Gods, magic, and mundane reality.

Lalita Das also manages to rise above the genre of books by Indian writers by her innate ability to describe her stories well and her deeply etched characters. *Her Dancing With Kali* (2010) is one more book which will find a place in the hearts of the women readers. The beauty of this book lies in how well the author writes about karma and the entwining sagas of love and retribution. We are mesmerized by the explanations of Hindu customs and mythology. Das handles the intermingling of Western and Eastern cultures and a philosophy in this novel is refreshingly different from the other books. The idea of the dance of Kali who saves her devotees from the clutches of karma gives a mystical feel to this novel. Kali in this narrative symbolizes the power of womanhood. An intricately woven saga of love, revenge, and retribution, the book resonates with the ethos of karma; the eternally intertwined dance of destruction and creation. The dance of Kali that wipes out the karma fulfils the desires of the devotees. Weaving in Hindu and Christian philosophies, Goan and hippie cultures, the modalities of Western urban gentry and the Indian rural structure, the lucid narrative skillfully juxtaposes human emotions and tribulations with failures; empathy with apathy; vengeance with resurrection, celebrating the poise and strength of womanhood.

Neela Vaswani, who lives in New York, is known for her innovativeness, wit, and intelligence. Her collection of short stories *Where the Long Grass Bends* (2004) clearly marks the arrival of yet another South Asian writer in the American literary marketplace. Her work distinguishes itself from the mainstream trends in contemporary South Asian American fiction. Whereas many of these South Asian American writers focus on such themes as culture clash, alienation in the new country, nostalgia for the old country, and critiques of nationalism and patriarchy, Vaswani's work emphasizes aesthetics.

She is highly experimental and her stories have a mythic quality to them. The characters are odd, the plots are bizarre and they invite the reader to question his/her expectations of fictional forms, cultural issues, and the relationship between fiction and fantasy. Her writing is also very beautiful and each sentence has a distinct poetic sensibility.

Vaswani offers us a glimpse into a new direction for South Asian fiction in the US -- one that can explore topics other than culture clash and identity problems. Although there is some extraordinary South Asian American writing emerging today, I can't help but rejoice at another thematic and aesthetic dimension to this emergent literature. (Review by Nalini Iyer 16 February 2009)

Tulsi Badrinath's *Meeting Lives* (2008) telescopes the time and space of myths, history and reality to recreate Aditi's experience of life. She is a wife and a mother trying to articulate her emotions in a cultural ethos that sanctifies matrimony and deifies motherhood; a seeker trying to live out her theoretical understanding of Vedanta gained from her father. The novel needs to be read slowly, with love and care, since it moves from the story of Shankara to that of Vivekananda to that of Aditi's son, Sanju. The narrative of many eras of the protagonist life is interspersed with the Upanishads and vignettes of Hindu mythology. She writes about Vasudeva and Kamsa and Devaki .

Nandita da Cunha is a management consultant from Mumbai.. Her first novel, *The Magic of Maya* (2006), was written when she was 24. And before she knows it, ten year old Tara, daughter of a fisherman, is spirited away from her village one peaceful morning, by a magical singing scarf, to the musical wonderland Maya - collage of three brightly coloured lands. The novel is filled with snatch snatches of songs of the musical Mayans, and moves back and forth between the picturesque village of Govan on Earth and the wonderland of Maya.

Sonia Singh is a first generation Indo-American, born and raised in Orange County, California. The heroine of her debut novel, *Goddess for Hire* (2004), a hip chick from Newport Beach, California, who's just turned thirty, discovered she's the incarnation of the Hindu goddess Kali, and happens to be unemployed and still living with her parents.

Sunny Singh is a former freelance journalist with *Cosmopolitan*, and now a novelist lives in Delhi. She has worked as a journalist, teacher, and as a management executive for multinationals in Mexico, Chile and South Africa. Her first novel *With Krishna Eyes* (2006) is concerned with the heroine Krishna who has been in New York, making documentaries. But, following the death of her grandmother, Krishna returns to her home village in a part of India so feudal, almost medieval in its ways, that she must make concessions to tradition. A strange bequest awaits Krishna upon her return. From beyond the grave, Dadiji directs Krishna to enact her dharma (duty), which, it transpires, is to document on film the last days of Damayanti, a strong-minded lawyer who, upon the death of her husband, will commit sati. Krishna, the warrior and the first girl child to be born to her family in five centuries, finds herself caught between the modern world of loose ties and casual relationships (as personified by her westernized lover, Natchek), and the older ties of blood and obligation, where honour transcends love. Always a rebel, Krishna has to confront the fact that her dharma comprises an act as conforming and backward as it is subversive.

In her debut novel *Skunk Girl* (2009), Sheba Karim, a Pakistani-American novelist, weaves a story of a young Muslim girl, Nina Khan, providing a rare exploration of Muslim culture. She tackles friend, family, and love, and learns that it is quite possible to embrace two very different cultures. Her parents come from middle class families in Pakistan. They are intelligent, confident, adults who regularly encourage their daughters to stay true to their Muslim

values and Islam even living in the main stream of American culture. Though Nina Khan stages a mild rebellion in the beginning, she develops even more deepened appreciation for her family's culture views. She becomes a responsible Muslim girl trying to navigate two cultures—her American culture and her Pakistani culture. The author dealing with Muslim culture and Islam uses everyday language, so anybody can read it.

In *A Party in Ramadan* (2009) Mobin-uddin and Jacobson explore a slice of the Muslim-American experience, focusing on the religious significance and customs during Ramadan. It is charming story of a young Muslim girl Leena, whose friend's birthday party falls on the first Friday of Ramadan. Although she is not required to fast like the adults in her family, Leena persuades her mother to allow her to both attend the party and abstain from food and drink. The hijab-girl resists temptations of lemonade and chocolate cake, diverting end. Although message-driven, this is a compassionate family story that functions beautifully as both mirroring Muslim-American and non-Muslim friends.

In *The Moon in the Water* (2009), Ameena Hussein, a Srilankan novelist, is proud of her culture, her community, her history, and her love for being Muslim, perpetually exploring her Islamic heritage. Ru Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) is a compelling map of womanhood, its desires, and loyalties, set against the backdrop of beautiful Srilanka. It is a novel about friendship, sanctity of mother, deeply looking into the complex layers of compassion, love, sorrow, and betrayal. It deals with corruption, violence and evils badly affecting human beings. Freeman illustrates contemporary Srilankan life through the battles waged between lovers, friends, and strangers alike in this study in dignity, strength of character, tolerance and perseverance.

In Jean Arasanayagam's short stories there is also something more than transience and decay. A cultural pattern is much more than a set of habits and rules. It is an attempt to give expression to the enigma of existence, the presence of God. And in this sense, Jean Arasanayagam seems to say, the old religions have to be defended against a new age of brutality, ethnic division and spiritual death: "She wakes early, the call of the prayer from the Muezzin and the Hindu theravams from the temple fill the whole city with the waves of sound. There is no contradiction, no argument between gods and prophets, only reminders of man's sinfulness and his need for both hope and penance."

Mitali Perkins's *Rickshaw Girl* (2007) captures contemporary Bangladeshi culture and customs. She draws on her family roots to tell the lively story of a young Bangladeshi girl who challenges the traditional role of women in her village so that she can help her struggling family in hard times. Funny, smart, and full of the sights, sounds, and smells of Bangladesh, Perkins offers us a delightful novel.

Rumki Chowdhury's *Her Feet Chime* (2009) is set in Bangladesh, highlighting its culture and values. The novel portrays the feelings of Bangladeshi-Americans, who are trying to maintain the Bengali culture, while adapting to the American environment.

Khaled Hosseini, a Kabul based American novelist, has written two novels—*The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). The novels with the local issues carry all of the sorrows and strife of outstanding classic Middle Eastern literature. The readers learn much about the country from the Afghan words and phrases, from the enticing cultural details, and symbolic meanings contained within their pages. Imbued with the Islamic spirit, Khaled Hosseini has captured the world's attention with his vivid imagery and compelling heart wrenching stories. His concern is that The Taliban is destroying so much of the identity of the culture of Afghanistan in the

name of religion. The Taliban is shown in these novels to demand complete allegiance to its supposedly religious laws and dictates under the threat of death and destruction, but internally the leadership is very corrupt and their decrees are immoral and often self-interested only.

Elias Rahimi, another Afghani novelist, also delineates the Afghani culture in his *The New Dress* (2006). This is a wonderful, magical, lyrical, coming-of-age novel of a young man on a dangerous, life-end soul altering quest to prove his love to his beloved, from his good life in America to the most dangerous corners in the world. Rahimi writes about not only what he knows, but also what he has experienced physically as well as emotionally.

Samrat Upadhyay, a Nepalese Professor of Creative Writing, lives in Bloomington, Indiana. His *The Guru of Love* (2003) reveals the customs and culture of Nepal against the background of a triangle love story. It tells how marriages are arranged in Kathamndu. One special joy of this novel is the depiction of daily life in Kathamandu. Such details as clothes worn, food cooked, and evening pastimes like caroms played. Many of these details have an Indian flavour. These new writers show religious fervor of all religions on a heightened and hitherto unprecedented scale at the grassroots level. In this context, Durkheim is quite true that religion is not going to disappear from the minds of the people, whatever be the deterministic march of science. The emergence of the religious landscape dotted with the traditional cordinal social, moral, and ethical values, which are lost substantially, lends a governing interpersonal relationship, within the family, kinship, and neighborhood bonds, building up a humane and healthy social system for harmonious living

Kunzang Choden (1952-) is the first Bhutanese woman to write a novel in English. Born in Bumthang in Central Bhutan, she belongs to a family of feudal lords. She received her schooling in India and then visited the U.S.A. for higher education, and lived there for some

time in Nebraska with her husband. Choden's first novel, *The Circle of Karma* (2005) is a simple but fascinating story loaded with meaning and Buddhist background and philosophy. It is an informative novel throughout about religious rituals, oral traditions, folklores, myths, customs, and age-old culture, of Bhutan. The plot of the novel revolves around a fifteen year old simple and illiterate Bhutanese girl, Tsomo, who belongs to a remote village. She has always passionately longed for religious knowledge, but it is denied to her, because it is not considered the domain of woman. Till 1950s, in Bhutanese society, education was almost synonymous with men and religion. An idea of education for girl was almost sacrilegious. Mostly boys would receive religious education in the Buddhist monasteries. Similarly, Tsomo's brothers are given religious education, and she is denied what her soul longs for. She wonders how girls would ever accumulate more merit for their next life, if they are not taught religion. Tsomo rebels her social systems and explores her own light to go on a pilgrimage and journey to self-realization. The novel weaving a complex tapestry of life from a relatively unknown part of the world achieves a classical quality.

Kunzang Choden's *Folktales of Bhutan* (1994) also records the oral traditions, legends, and folklores of Bhutan. The stories delineate the rugged and awesome terrain of Bhutan with self imposed isolation. They also reveal as to how the Bhutanese people are so closely related with nature, together with their philosophy of karmic life cycles, and unquestioning belief in unseen co-inhabitants of the earth such as spirits, ghosts, and demons.

MANIL SURI'S *THE DEATH OF VISHNU*

To advance and validate my argument as to how a group of the contemporary South Asian novelists differ from their predecessors and write for a transnational space, I offer a commentary

on the innovations *The Death of Vishnu* introduces into contemporary South Asian-American fiction. It is Suri's hot debut. Woven in the texture of realism, mysticism, the Hindu culture, and mythology, it is fraught with references to Bollywood actors, songs, and movies; it is a puzzling and agitating novel. Against the backdrop of the swirling activities and myriad issues, Suri focuses his attention on the spiritual quest through the Hindu philosophy, mythology, and mystic teachings of Lord Krishna in the Bhagvad Gita—the seminal text of the Indian scriptural tradition. Suri states: “*Writing The Death of Vishnu* led me to Hindu mythology and to the works of India like the Gita. It helped me the spiritual side of myself that had been dormant for a long time.” (Nov. 29, 2009:1). The epigraph of the novel, the verse No. 21 taken from Chapter X of the Gita reveals the crux of the whole story:

“I am Vishnu striding among sun gods,
the radiant sun among lights ...
I stand sustaining the entire world
with a fragment of my being.”

(From Krishna's discourse to Arjun,
Translated by Barbara Stoler Miler)

Manil Suri, a Mumbai based American mathematics professor-cum-novelist, is a man of logic and fact. With his deep knowledge of philosophy, different religions and social and scientific theories, he gets convinced that sheer intellectuality cannot allay the spiritual restlessness of man. *The Death of Vishnu*, a saga of his personal thought, depicts a microcosm of heaving Mumbai metropolis. It is a story of an alcoholic handyman, Vishnu, who is lying in an unconscious state on the landing of a three floored - apartment around him a swirl of activities occurs incessantly. Mr. Jalal, the mouthpiece of Suri, an intellectual gymnast, an atheist, mainly dwells on a life of rationalism, skepticism, and agnosticism. But suddenly there comes a

drastic change in his life. He thinks that a life of austerity, strictness, physical tortures, faith in metaphysics, and living in the company of the poor can bring enlightenment in his life. He, therefore, sleeps with the dying man on the bare landing. In the night, Vishnu shows his cosmic body, as does Lord Krishna in the Gita, and orders Mr. Jalal to be his prophet and spread his message among the people. He sees a sun emerge from behind Vishnu. He watches two suns, then four, then eight, and sixteen. The sun keeps multiplying, and rising into the air, until the sky is covered with suns, and there is no more blue to be seen, just the brightness of incandescent discs stretching from horizon to horizon and pouring their brilliance down on him.

Vishnu's body is metamorphosing into something liquid and luminous, that sucks light from the air and releases it back with a concentrated intensity. Limbs start appearing from all round Vishnu's perimeter, and at their ends Mr. Jalal sees exquisitely carved conches and fabulous jewel-encrusted maces. Some of the hands that emerge held lotuses, which open to reveal enormous anthers poised over their center. Limbs keeps emerging and Vishnu keeps expanding, until he is touching the sun above and Mr. Jalal couldn't tell where he starts and where he ends. A sweet fragrance, like that of incense, begins filling the air.

At each point of contact with the suns, heads now appear, wearing the suns as crowns and stretching down for many miles. Giant eyes open in the heads, and Mr. Jalal draws back, as they blink in unison and looks down at him. "The mouths flew open, and in them were visible teeth and fangs and long lines of spurting flame, some of which leapt out and scorched the ground at Mr. Jalal's feet. There were serpents in the mouths, and skulls too, and Mr. Jala saw human being crushed and popped between the teeth" (Suri 2001:155). When Mr. Jalal, in a state of bewilderment, asks who he is, Vishnu replies:

I am what you taste in water, I am what you are in air. I am the breath in every flower, I am the life in every creature. I

am all living things, I am creation itself. Look at me and see in my body the whole universe.

I encompass the sun gods and the moon gods, the wind gods and the fire-eating gods of the world. I am the aging of time, the beginning and the end of the universe. As each day ends, all creatures are destroyed and renewed in me .

Forever have I been here, and forever shall I remain—I am everywhere and everything all at once. In every living cell of every living thing shall you find me. Lucky are those to whom I show myself, for it is not through penance or rituals you will see me (Suri 2001:156).

Fortunate are those who recognize my presence. Blessed are those who acknowledge me, worship me. Tell them down there to recognize me for who I am. For I have come to save and destroy the universe (Suri 2001:157).

Vishnu begins to expand even more, until he fills all of space and suffuses all of time. Mr. Jalal, whose literal meaning of the name is the brilliance of God, feels himself becoming one with Vishnu, not only in this, but “in all his previous existence as well.” *The Death of Vishnu* breathes the Hindu philosophy and the Gita embodying trans-temporalizing cultural experiences, meditation, mysticism, anthropomorphism, the concept of Jeeva, the cycle of birth and death, immortality of soul etc. Suri's purpose of introducing the characters of Vishnu and Mr. Jalal is to establish a unity of religions and explore a mystical approach towards life.

The Death of Vishnu teeming with the references of songs, music, actors and actresses of Bollywood discloses Suri's fascination for Hindi movies. Like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the novel behaves like a metatext and heightens the intensity of the feelings and thoughts of the characters. Suri applies this method to provide a pattern, a way of controlling, ordering and giving shape to the plot of

the novel. Through the analogies of their life, he lends a universal significance to the different strands of the plot, showing human aspiration, frustration, and joy as ever-recurring phenomena. It is one of the modernist techniques introduced by Suri to give comprehensiveness in communicating his meaning.

In the novel, the naming of characters in the apartment building and of those people with whom the principals interact with on a daily basis has a hierarchy. Vishnu and his lover Padmini have single first names. The apartment dwellers, i.e., the Asranis, the Pathaks, the Jalals, are usually referred to and distanced throughout the novel by last name although the readers know their first names. The top floor owner, a man of means respected by all is referred to by full name, Vinod Taneja. At the servant level are the outside help, Tall Ganga and Short Ganga, who convey goods, service, and gossip. At street level is the commercial class, the equally nameless Cigarette walla, Paan walla, Radiowalla, Electrician, and Tailor, an otherwise neutral group who quickly form a dangerous mob on short notice and slim basis. Suri's wonderfully drawn characters cover a wide range of human emotions and possibilities. "Like Narayan, Suri enjoys depicting the foolishness, selfishness, heedlessness, and other failings to common ordinary human beings' (Brians, 2003:209).

The Death of Vishnu is written in flash-back; the action takes place in the mind of the protagonist; the present is described in the past. Suri flouts the conventional narrative techniques, character portrayal, and linearity. He penetrates into the mind of Vishnu to present a plethora of thoughts, memories, desires, fantasy, fleeting impressions, erratic behaviour, and varying motives.

Suri also infuses his story with the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes, so distinct of India. Whether it is the Cigarette walla with his radio playing desi music, eating ripe mangoes, *gulabjamuns*, delicious *bhujias*, *chutney*, *pakodas*, dried *chapattis* or *bhuljadis* or the *cacophonous* sound track to an Indian film, Suri creates sensory

snapshots that stay and linger in the mind throughout the story and beyond. In this way, we witness a fascinating picture of a revival of Indian popular cultures, religions, philosophy, mythology, folklore etc.

THE AGE OF SHIVA

In his second novel also, *The Age of Shiva* (2008), Suri paints a panoramic view of Indian society, richly layered with themes from Hindu mythology. It delves deep into Indian culture, customs, practices, the concept of birth, death and rebirth, karma, and the salvation of soul. He offers very honestly the Hindu code of conduct, institutions, various *sanskaras* (rituals) and the offerings to Lakshmi at Diwali, wedding and mundan ceremonies, funeral rites, tilaks, singing and chanting at the temple, and the sacred origin of the fast—Karva Chauth for women to worship the mother goddess Parvati, and the touching of husband's feet before breaking fast; shaking vermilion out into the pooja platter, hibiscus from the bush outside, waving incense sticks around Devi Ma, devotion to husband just like a god, faith in Sai Baba, and offering of flowers over the idols of Hanuman, Ganesh, Parvati, Lakshmi, Rama, Krishna, Sita etc. Suri explains the significance of Karva Chauth, which is referred to “the fourth day of their husband from the first sign of dawn to when they sighted the moon. It was longest and most arduous of all fasts” (*The Age of Shiva* 88) The novelist refers to numerous mythological tales as to how Kali crushed her husband Shiva under her feet, Ravana appeared as a deer to tempt Sita, Krishna slew his uncle with a flying discus once more, Brahman blew out the universe in a single breath, and Ganesh got his elephant head. Suri also exposes very beautifully as to how his characters believe in astrology, astronomy, and so called superstitions and orthodoxies.

The Age of Shiva dealing with the many facets of the mother-son relationship is based on the myth of Ganesh's creation. Parvati

fashions him from the sandalwood paste on her body because she wants a sentinel who will be answerable to her, not to Shiva—with its subtext of father being excluded from the private world occupied by mother and son. The son even is assuming at least one of the father's responsibilities (that of protector). The themes and the contradictions in Hindu mythology, Shiva functions as a destroyer, alongside Brahman the creator and Vishnu the preserver. Shiva's destructive and transformative power mirrors the adult life of Meera, the protagonist with a stubborn desire to follow her own path through the male-dominated landscape of post-colonial India. In this light Meera herself becomes Shiva. The novel steeped in Hinduism reveal human emotions, nature, circumstantial passions, the obsessions that confine us, determination, portrayal of mundane human interactions, respect for elders, and the psychological states of a mother, a son, a husband, a father, which unite all the members of the family leading to a happy, peaceful, and spiritual social life, quite different from a life based on purely physical and rational plane.

ELEMENTS OF A NEW GENRE

In view of the above discussions, the paper tries to evince that there is a revival of popular cultures, folklores, religions, philosophies, myths and customs of South Asian. These novelists have included some of the native ingredients in their novels such as popular culture elements, low life entertainments, tribal rituals and ceremonies and so on and so forth. It has been possible due to their location in America where postmodernist mindset has created an inclusive culture, which prompted the Indian-American novelists to write in this mode. There has also been a sharp development with regard to religious revivalism as a broad conceptual framework which can answer multiple problems of distress, dehumanization, and human failure to come to terms with life. Religion has been a regulating and controlling factor directing human life. Freud also

recognized the essential role of religion in human life and commented in his book *Civilization and its Discontent* that man will reach the stage of uncivilization, if there is no bond of morality provided by religion in the society. The writers are mainly searching for belief to unfold the higher self focusing on religious concepts, which have become the main framework of a fictional mode as only a panacea to solve the multidimensional variations of human agony, pain, and sufferings. Even Pope Benedict XVI addressing an audience in Sept. 10, 2006 said the Western societies have surrendered their soul to the rationalism and this has baffled the god-loving and god-fearing believers in the Third World Countries where science has not grown to the extent of establishing total supremacy over the minds of the people. In his sermon he lays emphasis on religion, faith, and culture.

The new South-Asian American writers disregarding the epistemological foundations of the Western traditions want to create a transnational space, instead of talking about this country and that country. They believe in complete integration carrying the cosmic burden within tiny cells human beings form. It seems to me that the new Indian American genre is moving towards an integral consciousness that would interlink one thing into another and another into still another. In *The Death of Vishnu*, the cosmic form of Krishna in X Chapter of the Gita which is the high watermark of Vishnu exemplifies this level and mode of consciousness where godly and human energy meet, co-fabulate, and become one. The fragmented notions of nature vs. culture that has largely been the course of Western civilization, as T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats conceive in their writings, are no more acceptable to Manil Suri. He asserts that Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all developed centuries prior to the modern era; their classical works reveal an appreciation of the natural world. Under urgencies of a quest theme, nature and culture must meet so that the animal, the human, and the godly kingdoms can be equally shared and fruitfully habited. In whole of his life, Albert Einstein also always

thinks of Nature-Man-Society in an integral way, never in isolation. It has a capacity to align itself with both science and spiritualism. This is the ultimate fulfillment of *The Death of Vishnu* as an aesthetic form that sustains and contains the highest form of spiritual experience available to mankind. The novel also encourages that the interfaith dialogue may help put to an end fanaticism, conflict between religions, intolerance, militant fundamentalism, communalism, and finally terrorism. It also intends to expose how ethnic and multicultural identity politics supplant aesthetic criticism stifling the opening of the American literary canon.

CONCLUSION

It is still a virgin field— an area which has not exhaustively been done. It offers a potential scope to understand the multi-layered cultural practices and heritage adopted by the people of India transferring to a wider audience. The writings have brought the Indian traditions, mythologies, social history on the centre stage. The literary nuances, local slang and colloquial languages of the Indian regions through these writers have enlarged the idiom and vocabulary of English literature. The mainstream culture and values also are shaped and moulded, unavoidably and ongoingly by the presence of these new immigrants. They believe in a two-way process of cultural interchange and interaction. Bharti Mukherjee also implies that America transforms all those who make their home in it, America itself is being transformed: “I’m saying we haven’t to accommodate or to mimic; we have changed ourselves, but we have also come to change you” (Jaggi 1990: 9).

This study will also serve as an opportunity for the hegemonic structures to understand and come closer to them in the world of globalization and multiculturalism. It encapsulates vital information and essential critical discussion of a new growing body of South

Asian fiction writers in America for a target audience of interested readers, beginning scholars and educators of literature holding promise for the future of mankind.

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