
C.D. Narasimhaiah: Teacher and Critic

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Shyamala A. Narayan's Ph.D. on "Raja Rao and the Indian Novel in English" (1974) was one of the earliest in this area of research. Publications include Indian English Literature 1980- 2000: A Critical Survey (2001, co-authored with M.K.Naik) and its sequel, Indian English Literature 2000-2015: A Critical Survey (2020), Raja Rao: The Man and His Work (1988) and Sudhin N. Ghose (1973). She has edited an anthology for the Sahitya Akademi, Non- Fictional Indian Prose in English 1960-1990 (1998). More than seventy research papers have been published in books and literary journals in India and abroad. Since 1972, she has been compiling the Indian section of the "Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature" for The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (Sage, U.K.). She retired in 2012 as Head of the Department of English at Jamia Millia Islamia, and now lives in Bengaluru.

ABSTRACT

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Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah was my teacher at the University of Mysore, for my M.A. (1966-68); he was also the supervisor for my Ph.D. (1968-71), so a personal perspective in this article is inevitable. The first part discusses his unique qualities as a teacher. He endeavoured to teach us to evaluate a piece of writing by examining the words on the page, never by the author's life or reputation. He had the capacity to convey his enthusiasm for the books and authors he loved. He took a personal interest in his students, and continued to mentor me even after I had obtained my Ph. D. The second half of the essay examines CDN's critiques of Indian English literature, ranging from his book review of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* (1962) to his *Samvatsar Lecture* (2003).

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah's first lecture for the fresh M.A. students* was on practical criticism. He gave us these four lines, and asked us to comment on them. I was one of the few students (perhaps the only one) to interpret the lines to suggest that the poet is refuting the idea that East and West can never meet. When equally brave men face each other, there are no considerations of East and West, political borders etc. Most of the students felt that the lines are an expression of Kipling's imperialist views, that East and West can never meet. Unlike me, they had all done B.A. (Hons) in English, and were familiar with Kipling's reputation. I had three subjects of equal weightage -- English, Mathematics and Sanskrit -- for my B.A. (what many universities called a "Pass Course"). I remembered a Sanskrit saying,

ययोरैवसमं विलं ययोरैवसमं कुलम् । तयोरैवैत्रीविवाहश्च न तु पुष्टविपुष्टयोः ॥

Friendship and marriage are successful between those who are equal in wealth and lineage, not between the strong and the weak. (Translation mine)

Professor Narasimhaiah approved of my comments. He said that he had asked us to respond to these four lines, not to express pre-conceived notions of what the poet (identified as Kipling by all the students) was saying. He warned us against stock----- * Professor C.D.

Narasimhaiah was my teacher at Manasagangothri, the post-graduate campus of the University of Mysore, where I had enrolled for an M.A. in English (1966-68); he was also the supervisor for my Ph. D. (1968-71). He shaped my career and influenced my life, so a personal perspective in this article is inevitable. responses, and proceeded to read the lines, bringing out the mockery by his enunciation of “Oh”, to show that it was meant sarcastically. He endeavoured to teach us to evaluate a piece of writing by examining the words on the page, never by what we might have heard about the author's life or his reputation. He was primarily a Leavisite, and proud of it; at the same time, he was very conscious of the Sanskrit literary tradition. When he set up a study centre, “The Literary Criterion Centre for English Studies and Indigenous Arts” at Mysore in 1979, he named it “Dhvanyaloka” after the ninth century scholar Anandavardhana's great work of poetics.

I was happy that I had done well in class, because my admission to the course was controversial. Till I applied, enrolment in M.A. English at the University of Mysore was open only to those who had done B. A. Honours in English. Applying for admission at the University of Mysore was a very new experience for me, as I came across admission lists, cut offs and entrance examinations for the first time. Shimla in the 1960s had a low population; an eligible student could simply walk in for college admission. For admission, Mysore had an interview after the written examination. I explained that my college did not offer honours in any subject, and the 62% I had scored in English were the highest marks in Panjab University. I was admitted after I submitted a letter from Panjab University certifying that I was eligible for enrolment for an MA in English there.

We were a very small batch of students in the M.A. class in Mysore University — just 13, including some senior school teachers who had been deputed to obtain their master's degree. Almost all the classes were in the nature of discussions, rather than lectures. The greatness of C.D. Narasimhaiah as a teacher lay in his capacity to make the student think and articulate his/ her views. He took personal interest in his students. I still remember him visiting my home to meet my mother, who was bedridden. The heart specialist had said that she had hardly one year more to live, and I wanted to discontinue my studies so that I could spend more time at her bedside. The doctors had not told her that her heart was gradually failing; CDN pointed out that if I stopped my studies, it would be a signal that her case was hopeless, and this would impact the quality of her life. My father wanted me to join the civil service. CDN was passionately devoted to English studies, and did not like this. He declared, “Joining the Civil Services would be an utter waste of your talents.” I suspect that he might have influenced my personal life, too. When I got married, and moved to Ranchi, I came across a couple of articles based on research studies of young children in nuclear families in the USA — they found that when both the parents are working academics with Ph.D.s, their children tend to have a lower I.Q. because of lack of suitable stimulation at home. My husband had a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering. So I decided to take a break from teaching; perhaps I remembered CDN's casual comment, “Working mothers' children sometimes grow up as weeds.”

He had the capacity to convey his enthusiasm for the books and authors he loved; he taught Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, with the result that I decided that I would like to research on Raja Rao. I took up my research fellowship two weeks after my mother's death, the day after the 13-day funeral ceremonies got over. I could not have asked for a better guide. My thesis was on “Raja Rao and the Indian Novel in English”; there was very little secondary material, and CDN would not permit me to quote from his writings. He asked me to read

novelists like M. Anantanarayanan and Sudhin N. Ghose, unknown at that time. Ghose never got his due because his tetralogy of novels — *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953) and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955) were not easily available in India. Bibliographies, such as the one brought out by the Sahitya Akademi, listed them under autobiography, just because they have an autobiographical narrative. At the time, the only piece of useful literary criticism was an article by Meenakshi Mukherjee; the first edition of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* dismisses the work as fantasy (though the 1984 edition, updated by Prema Nandakumar, presents a fairer estimate). In 1970 (or late 1969) CDN let me read a doctoral thesis he had evaluated; this was by S.C. Harrex (Dr. Syd Harrex, 1939-2015, who founded CRNLE, the Centre for Research in New Literatures in English at Flinders University in 1977). When Arnold-Heinemann India launched a series of monographs on Indian English writers, with CDN as the General Editor, I got the opportunity to write on Sudhin N. Ghose, and my book was published in 1973. Another assignment was the annotation for the abridged Student Edition of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* published by Oxford University Press (Madras, 1978).

CDN continued to mentor me even after I submitted my thesis in August 1972. He was going to teach in American universities for a year, and suggested that I should apply for a guest teacher's position, so that I could handle the Indian Writing in English paper in his absence; my application was accepted. When I went to the English Department of the University of Mysore in September to start teaching, I was shocked to find that Professor Anniah Gowda's research student had been appointed. Anyway, I went off to Bombay, to have a well deserved rest at my sister's home. My father was busy trying to arrange my marriage, consulting an astrologer to match horoscopes etc. In April 1972, I got an airletter from CDN from the U.S., with a terse comment, "If Arthur asks, please say yes." My sister had a good laugh teasing me, though we were quite sure that he was not fixing my match with someone called Arthur. After a week, I received a formal letter from Dr. Arthur Ravenscroft, editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, inviting me to compile the Indian section of the "Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature". The inaugural issue of the journal, in 1966, had John Ferguson and Nissim Ezekiel compiling and introducing the India bibliography; later, C.N.Srinath (CDN's son) had taken over. It was obvious that CDN had suggested my name for the task. Thus began my career as a bibliographer. I have been compiling and introducing the India bibliography from 1972.

In any discussion, CDN would treat me, a twenty-one-year-old fresh M.A., as if I were his intellectual equal, though he was quite firm in rejecting work which was not up to the mark, "Shyamala, surely you can write better than this." He was always encouraging; after joining for M.A., I asked him whether there were any scholarships I could apply for. My father had retired, and we moved to Mysore, as my father's ancestral village in Kerala had no post-graduate college nearby. CDN told me that the only scholarship I was eligible for was the "Subject Scholarship"; other scholarships were for economically weaker students and those from backward castes. He told me that I could try for it next year, because it was awarded to the student with the first rank in the M.A. Previous examination. Another incident stands out in my memory. He had delivered a series of lectures at the Indian Institute for Advanced Study at Shimla, and was getting them ready for publication under the title *The Swan and the Eagle*. He asked me to help trace some references — he wanted me to go to his home and look through the books there to put in the correct page numbers. Even though his book was closely linked to my research work, I refused, because I wanted to devote all my time to completing my doctoral

thesis. He did not hold my refusal against me— how many research supervisors would be so generous? I have come across many supervisors who expect their research students to help them with their own intellectual work, even if the student's thesis is totally unrelated to it – innocuous tasks like helping out with the supervisor's correspondence, typing and formatting, proofreading etc. As a teacher and as research supervisor, CDN became my model.

The *Swan and the Eagle* (1969), subtitled “Essays on Indian English Literature”, is typical of CDN's literary criticism, involving close reading of the text, with extensive quotation to support his analysis. He also institutes comparisons with other works and takes note of the views of other critics (his tutor at Cambridge, F.R. Leavis, described practice of literary criticism as “the common pursuit of true judgement”). At the time, it was only the second book on Indian Writing in English. The first full length study of Indian English literature, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* (1962), was a pioneering literary history of the genre. The *Swan and the Eagle* presented detailed studies of individual writers, with a chapter on poetry (“Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo and After”), two prose writers, Vivekananda and Jawaharlal Nehru, and the “Trinity” of novelists – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao.

CDN was a pioneer in extending the frontiers of English studies in India. He was instrumental in introducing Indian Writing in English, American Literature and Commonwealth Literature as areas of study in many Indian Universities. The University of Mysore included Indian English literature in its syllabus in the 1950s; American Literature and Commonwealth Literature followed in the next decade. His autobiography, *'N' for Nobody: Autobiography of an English Teacher* (1991) tells us about the opposition he faced. He has written widely on American Literature and Commonwealth Literature; however, his greatest contribution is to Indian English literature, winning attention for it with his own publications as well as by organizing seminars bringing together critics and educators. The *Literary Criterion*, the scholarly journal he founded in 1952, also played a role. He popularized the term “Indian English literature” (in place of Iyengar's “Indo-Anglian literature”), using it in the lectures published in *The Swan and the Eagle*; the Sahitya Akademi put its stamp of approval on the term by commissioning M.K. Naik's *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982). As Krishna Rayan put it, “Professor CDN's standing in Indian criticism in English is compatible to that of Doctor Johnson's in Augustan criticism. Both speak with an authority and self assurance which can often rise to combativeness. But it is a combativeness balanced by delicacy of perception” (qtd. in Aikath, 18). The Australian critic S.C. Harrex observed, “C.D. Narasimhaiah has provided contemporary criticism of Indian writing in English with some of its primary foundations, particularly in his appreciation of many of the best literary achievements and in his advocacy of canons of Indian critical response based on sturdy values and catholic standards” (7).

The *Swan and the Eagle* has a long chapter on Jawaharlal Nehru. CDN was the first to draw attention to **Jawaharlal Nehru** as a writer, in *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study of His Writings and Speeches* (1960); his other books on Nehru include *The Human Idiom: Three Lectures on Jawaharlal Nehru* (1967) and *Jawaharlal Nehru: The Statesman as Writer* (2001), and two abridgements of Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946) and *An Autobiography* (1936). Most of CDN's criticism originated as a paper written for a special occasion or as an introduction to a collection of essays: he has edited eighteen collection of essays, including *Indian Literature of the Past Fifty Years 1917-1967* (1970), *Awakened Conscience: Essays in Commonwealth*

Literature (1976), *A Common Poetic for Indian Literatures* (1985), *Drama as Form of Art and Theatre* (1993) and *Makers of Indian English Literature* (2000). The papers in *The Function of Criticism in India* (1986) were given as lectures and talks at seminars when he was a Senior Fellow at the Central Institute of Indian Languages at Mysore. The monographs on Nehru and Raja Rao are probably the only publications conceived as books; this reveals his fascination with these two authors. He considered Raja Rao the greatest Indian novelist, and Nehru appealed to him because he understood so well “the predicament of the modern Indian” who is “a queer mixture of the East and the West” (qtd. in *The Function of Criticism*, 8). Many of his lectures, seminar presentations, journal articles etc. have been published in anthologies like *Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India* (1977), *The Function of Criticism in India: Essays in Indian Response to Literature* (1986), *Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays* (1990), *Commonwealth Literature: Heirloom of Multiple Heritage* (1995) and *English Studies in India: Widening Horizons* (2002).

CDN's first long piece on Indian English literature was his book review of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English*, published in *The Literary Criterion*. It is the earliest of the papers reprinted in *Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays* (1990). It demonstrates his practice of evaluating the book independently of its author. The second paragraph of the ten-page-long article declares, “Let me say at the outset that my respect and admiration for the author are great. Which does not mean I have no knowledge of his limitations and of them some mention will certainly be made” (128). CDN clearly states his dissatisfaction with Iyengar's work, “he speaks of the best and the next best if not of the average performance in the same breath, generally; that he doesn't make sharp and relevant discriminations; that he doesn't teach us that healthy disrespect which is a sign of trained sensibility: elucidation of works of art and correction of taste -- which is an important function of criticism” (*Controversial Essays*, 137).

He was never apologetic about Indian English writing. He declared categorically. “Indian Writing in English is to me primarily part of the literature of India, in the same way as literatures written in various regional languages are or ought to be. It can present the life of a village like Bulashah or Kanthapura, a small town like Malgudi or Kedaram, or sweep through continents and eternity itself; and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian, it will be Indian literature” (*The Swan and the Eagle*, xi). His “General Introduction” in the monographs in Arnold-Heineman India's series on Indian English writers begins with the same assertion (Narayan, 3).

This engagement with “Indian sensibility”, with Indian tradition, is the cornerstone of his criticism, but not at the cost of engagement with the West. He believed in Mahatma Gandhi's stand, “I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” He laid emphasis on integrating thought and action, on praxis, not theory, repeating Nehru's words on more than one occasion, “Thought without action is abortion. Action without thought is folly.” He worked “Towards the Formulation of a Common Poetic for Indian Literature”, the title of the second paper in his collection *The Function of Criticism in India* (1986), which he wants to be read along with the first essay, “The function of criticism in India at the present time.” He bemoans the lack of independent critical thinking in India, most critics are content with repeating western valuations. He respects T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis, but wants to bring Indian writers back to their own traditions and resources. A working party was set up after the seminar in January 1984

at Dhvanyaloka; their task was “to make use of an existing framework of poetic, which will suit the genius of India and (i) preserve our link with tradition and foster a sense of continuity; (ii) assimilate the best elements in Western criticism and (iii) be capable of facilitating a completeness of response to current works of literature” (Essays in Indian Response, 44).

For him, criticism “is to analyse and evaluate a poem, a novel, a play so as to win attention to it, and in doing so create a current of fresh and vigorous ideas” (Commonwealth Literature, 7-8). He berated a critic of Tagore's poetry for “paraphrasing the poems under conventional categories of 'love', 'death', or 'social' and 'spiritual' themes. Nowhere is poetry treated as poetry, but as message, prophecy and philosophy while what the reader expected of the critic was help in understanding the way a Tagore poem organizes its material, the mode by which it evokes the reader's responses by means of word, phrase, rhythm, image, symbol, association, undertones, overtones, etc.” (Commonwealth Literature, 83). He rejected theories like Structuralism because they did not help to analyse a work of literature. K.C. Belliappa observes, “CDN is not happy with terms such as Modernism, Postmodernism, Post-colonialism, and with most recent literary theories. One can clearly sense here the Leavisean distaste for theorising” (Indian Literary Criticism, 128).

CDN's “Preface” to *The Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays* gives us an insight into his critical practice. He points out, “The papers collected in this volume were written for specific occasions spread over three decades. . . like a seminar, workshop, celebration and, as often, in reaction to a challenge or provocation which posed what I thought was a threat to the values we live by. In all cases, I confess a wish to win attention or seek corroboration from those who I thought had or ought to have, a concern for the issue in question at the time. Agreements and disagreements were seen as something inherent to the very nature of the life of the mind, though I cannot pretend I did not -- not being a saint -- over-react at times” (Indian Critical Scene, iii). He admits to over-reacting, and adds, “There are occasions when one fears one can't share one's values or disapproves without making passion evident.” Passion is the dominant note of his criticism, he makes no secret of his likes or dislikes. His criticism is very readable, never abstruse, and always supported by quotations from the text.

Many of his essays express his reaction against popular critical opinion. In the anthology *The Indian Critical Scene*, aptly titled *Controversial Essays*, the first piece, “Thomas Babington Macaulay: A Centenary Tribute” (1959) disputes the popular view that Macaulay's only aim was to create a class of Indians who would mimic the British. CDN points out that reformist Indians like Raja Rammohun Roy advocated English education. Without glossing over Macaulay's ignorance and prejudice in some matters, CDN lauds Macaulay's work in India, such as formulating a common penal code which would apply to everyone in India, whether Hindus, Muslims or Europeans. He discusses Macaulay's attitude towards empire; he said on the floor of the House of Commons that the empire “is itself the strangest of political anomalies. That a handful of adventurers from an island in the Atlantic should have subjugated a vast country”. Macaulay advocated a nobler goal: “There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws” (qtd. in *Controversial Essays*, 11).

In “Kipling's India” (1987) CDN argues that Kipling's depiction of India is far superior to that of E.M. Forster. He was against borrowing Western judgements, and particularly wary of Indian literary works which won high praise in the West. “The more popular on Indian writer is in the West, the more likely he is to fall under Narasimhaiah's axe. This forms the basis

of the iconoclastic flavour of his criticism” (L. R. Sharma, 78). CDN takes issue with the western critics' high opinion of Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Through analysis and comparison with Nehru's autobiography, he highlights the flaws in Chaudhuri's. He shows that V. S. Naipaul is another writer who does not deserve his high reputation. CDN's critiques are often enlivened by wit and imaginative similes. In “V.S.Naipaul: A Split Sensibility” (1965), a review of *Area of Darkness*, CDN admits that there are a brief flashes of sensitivity in the book, but “they have no meaning in the light of the dominant mood of the book. By the time the reader rubs his eyes to take a good look at a flash and say to his neighbour, “Behold!”, the jaws of darkness do devour it” (*Controversial Essays*, 108). A reading of later works of Naipaul, like *A Bend in the River* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*, have not made CDN change his opinion. He is always willing to give credit wherever it is due, as in the case of Nirad C. Chaudhuri. At the end of a lecture comparing Nehru's and Chaudhuri's autobiographies, CDN has this note: “It is a pleasure to remark here that Mr. Chaudhuri has made ample amends for his poor and irresponsible writing by contributing an excellent work of scholarship in his recent book on Max Muller, *Scholar Extraordinary*” (*Essays in Commonwealth Literature*, 70).

The Sahitya Akademi honoured him by inviting him to deliver a Samvatsar Lecture. *An Inquiry into the Indianness of Indian English Literature* (2003), his last publication, provides a summary of his critical views. He examines the work of many writers who figured in *The Swan and the Eagle* to illustrate the Indianness of Indian English literature. He then proceeds to demonstrate “how an Indian critic can function today by going back to his own tradition” and familiarises the reader with concepts like *rasa*, *dhvani* and *purushartha*. His comments on Tagore reveal a fresh approach; the harsh condemnation of the *Gitanjali* of his 1971 lecture (“The Reputation of the English *Gitanjali*”) is replaced by “He is perhaps the only poet of high standing in India who shows a profound inwardness with the Indian tradition” (40). However, he has not changed his stand on newer novelists, repeating what he said in 1993. “Spurious Reputations: Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor” was the introduction to a seminar on four novelists held at Dhvanyaloka in November 1993. He added in a footnote, “The fourth Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh is far too serious to be dealt with in this treatment, and deserves a separate essay to himself. He was included in the theme of the seminar to serve as a corrective to the other three writers” (*Essays in Commonwealth Literature*, 118). It is unfortunate that (to the best of my knowledge) CDN never wrote that “separate essay”. In his Preface to the second edition of *The Swan and the Eagle*, he stated that he “intended to add a chapter each on Poetry and Drama and a couple of chapters on the novelists who did not figure in my lectures but important enough to receive attention” (ix). Indian English literature is the poorer because this did not happen. Arguing that the language other than the mother tongue can be a fit vehicle for literary production, he observed, “Right around us are living many thousands of Anglo-Indians whose mother tongue is English but not one of whom is a notable writer in English” (*The Swan and the Eagle*, 17). This was in 1968. Subsequent decades saw the advent of Ruskin Bond and Irwin Allan Sealy, two Anglo-Indians who went on to win Sahitya Akademi awards. It is a pity that we do not have CDN's views about them.

Rushdie is condemned for his “jejune wordplay”. “Is his 'magical realism' a value to be cherished because his contribution to English consists of words like 'Chamcha' and 'Chutnification'? . . . He is a juggler of words like Shashi Tharoor, a juggler of myths.” Vikram

Seth is “a phenomenon in subliminal advertising. As someone said, Vikram became a 'Seth' receiving or reported as receiving, as no author before, a fabulous advance of two crores of rupees from the publishers” (37). Of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, CDN comments, “We are told 60,000 copies of the book sold in far-off Norway like Seth's four lakhs of *A Suitable Boy*. How incredible! Quantification is all” (38).

CDN's poor opinion of Rushdie is understandable because he is not likely to possess the “Indian sensibility” that CDN values. As K.C. Belliappa observes, “one suspects that CDN's certainty about what constitutes Indianness comes in the way of his responding to these and other similar writers” (128). CDN's concept of “Indianness” is not as inclusive as he assumed it to be, it is Brahminical, with no place for Dravidian or Adivasi traditions and culture. In poetics too, he conflates Sanskrit poetics with Indian poetics. I do not recollect any reference to *Tolkappiyum* and ancient Tamil poetics, leave alone the Persian-Urdu contribution to poetics by writers like Amir Khusrau. CDN's survey of Indian English poets in *The Swan and the Eagle* admits that Nissim Ezekiel “has a distinct voice in poetry, but one is not sure that the poet shows any profound awareness of the entire Indian tradition from the Vedas and Upanishads to the present day in all its complexity” (38). CDN attempts to defend using “Indianness” to evaluate Ezekiel's poetry: “No one can pretend that this poet has inherited the great past of India in a significant way, which is to say that he does not command all the resources available to him --it is thus that the 'Indianness' employed as a criterion of judgement is intended not to 'amputate' but to evaluate poetry” (40). With due respect to my teacher, I feel that Indianness cannot be the main criterion for evaluating literature.

One cannot understand CDN's antipathy to Shashi Tharoor, who shares CDN's concern with the idea of India, and has published two non-fiction books -- *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997) and *Nehru: The Invention of India* (2003) --in CDN's lifetime. CDN finds that Tharoor “uses the Mahabharata recklessly to mediate contemporary political experience. He is clearly unqualified for the task because of his own prejudices—his penchant for the politics of violence; non-alignment for him is non-involvement and an idle chatter” (Commonwealth Literature, 125). CDN does not respond to the tentativeness of the conclusion of the novel, with Tharoor humbly suggesting a fresh perspective on events. “And finally he confesses unforgiveably, 'I have told my story from a completely mistaken perspective.' . . . He must 'retell it' he vows. One only hopes he will not. Enough of the liberties he has taken with the epic which he reduces to a caricature” (126). Perhaps CDN's animus is due to Tharoor presenting Jawaharlal Nehru as Dhritarashtra in *The Great Indian Novel*. CDN is offended by Tharoor making fun of Mahabharata characters, a surprising reaction from one who admired the thinkers who would “invite the Charvakas (materialists) to preach godlessness from the precincts of our temples”, and commended the “dialectical form of the Upanishads whose sages went so far as to denounce the Vedic gods” (Controversial Essays, iv). Being best-sellers is also held against the works. “Quantification is all!” he says sarcastically, but why does he pay attention to sales figures and a huge advance when evaluating a literary work? Perhaps CDN no longer paid much attention to new novels after 1997 (*The God of Small Things*). His Samvatsar lecture repeats what he said in 1993, and does not even mention Amitav Ghosh.

These somewhat harsh comments are themselves a tribute to CDN's teaching --to evaluate a piece of writing by examining the words on the page, not by the author's life or reputation. As he demonstrated in his review of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English*, regard for the writer should not stand in the way of evaluating the text.

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