FOREWORD

The contributions to this Volume were originally presented as papers at the two Seminars sponsored by the University of Mysore in its Golden Jubilee Year—the first on ‘How major is our Literature of the past fifty years?’ and the second on ‘Indian Writing in English’. In choosing the first theme we thought it appropriate to the occasion to look back on the past fifty years of Indian literary history—not to make surveys of what has been done in our various literatures, but attempt an evaluation of the work in strictly critical terms, so that the accomplishment or the lack of it may suggest a direction to the coming years. For one hears it frequently mentioned that what we lack in this land of tradition is a critical awareness of that vital tradition which alone can make for continuity in literature and literary criticism. But the fact is: our literary history of recent times is a series of beginnings. As a result the sum total of our achievement may have suffered seriously. It is good therefore to assess the nature of our achievement; and one mode of doing it is, it occurred to us, to try and indicate whether what we have before us during the past fifty years is of any significance—whether it can answer to the widely acknowledged critical concepts of major, minor, distinguished etc. And since the terms are defined agreements and disagreements are not merely possible but should be valid too.

It will be seen that quite a few of our languages go unrepresented not because no one from among them had been asked to participate but, in most cases, after invitations had been accepted, papers promised, and the dates confirmed, the organisers were let down either because the invitees had to be away from the country (so we gathered from second-hand sources), or the papers were not ready in time for presentation. And some—among them, a couple of reputed writers—who did attend the Seminar read no papers nor felt obliged to send the promised typescripts. Perhaps the channels of communication between the hosts and the invitees broke down; perhaps they never did exist. And the lesson of history came home anew: collective effort is the hardest to practise in this country of ours.

The foregoing pertains to the first Seminar, and we had better luck with our invitees to the next—they were mostly teachers, and in one language. It was a homogenous group.
The papers here cover a fairly wide range of Indian Writing in English which has today acquired an importance not as an exotic plant but as expression of a distinctive sensibility, which is Indian. An irate Indian scholar asked at a literary discussion 'What is Indian sensibility?' Well, one assumes knowledge of certain things in gatherings of learned men and whether such questions are asked for effect or out of ignorance no answer is likely to leave the questioner wiser. It is hoped that the papers printed here throw some new light on our well-known writers and problems of writing in English. And if that is true we should consider ourselves rewarded.

The papers have taken nearly three years to see the light while one year should have been a most reasonable period to print them. But perhaps this could not have been helped.

The volume has at last appeared and I should like to express my grateful thanks to those in charge of the Golden Jubilee Fund, the University Grants Commission for their financial help and Dr. K. L. Shrimali whose partiality for promoting intellectual life on the Campus has now been well-known. I thank Mr. D. Vijayadervraj Urs for his assistance in making the benefits of the Golden Jubilee Fund available to us in running the Seminars; and Dr. Prabhushankara, the Director of Prasaranga, who has helped us in securing the services of Manipal Power Press, known for its high standard of printing.

My colleagues in the Department, and the Research Fellows have helped in reading the proofs and lightened my task considerably. The book is the fourth to come out of the efforts of the members of the English Department in less than five years. This wouldn't have been possible without the active co-operation of the University administration for which we of the Department are very grateful

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