

PASSAGE TO MORE THAN INDIA

PASSAGE TO MORE THAN INDIA

INSIDE INDIA and OVERLAPPING WORLDS
by the Author in One Volume

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ISBN-13: 978-1535315739

ISBN-10: 1535315733

In memory of my sisters

Laxmi

and

Saraswati

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PREFACE

I had sufficient number of short stories for a third collection, but I didn't have a title for the collection. The stories were a wild mix of reality, fiction, and fantasy. They were related to India, but they freely wandered around the world. A few of them even travelled to planets in outer space. As to time, they mainly dealt with contemporary themes, but a few journeyed into the past and also into the future. From my experience of finding titles for my individual short stories, I knew it was not going to be an easy task to find one which covered the wide range of topics and themes in three or four words. The more I thought about it, strangely enough, the more difficult the task became. Finally, I decided to leave the matter in the hands of Serendipity and go attend my backyard vegetable garden, which I had neglected for months while I was busy writing stories.

I found serpentine tomato vines sagging with the weight of fruit and lying on the ground covered by leaves of grass. I started gently lifting them up and giving them support to stand. In the process, I mistook a rope for the vine. No harm done. Another time, I touched a snake hiding to catch flies flitting around, mistaking it for the stalk of the plant. The snake slithered through the plants and vanished. The word "Swamy Ram!" came to my lips. I thanked my luck. Plucking the red, ripe tomatoes and putting them in a basket, I became conscious of the folly people make of mistaking illusion for reality and *vice versa* and got into the Indian world of *Maya*. I uttered "Ramaswamy," switching the position of the words of the earlier utterance. First, the name of Raja Rao's famous protagonist crossed my subconscious mind, and, then, his novel *The Serpent and the Rope*.

The bees buzzing around and the birds on the wings and amaranths on the banks of a stream nearby brought to my mind the lines of Coleridge--

*Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrighten'd, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?*

*Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.*

I wondered where I stood with a basket of tomatoes in my hand, a man drawing nectar in a sieve, working without hope or hoping without an object relative to the search of a title for my collection of short stories. Certainly, I was hopeful of finding a title, and I was hoping with a clear object. Kamala Markandya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* slid through my mind without drawing my conscious attention.

A train of thoughts followed. Wherever I stood, I travelled back and forth between the continents across the seas mostly in mind- space, like Anita Desai and her fictional characters. I recalled Desai's words, "I suppose I feel more sure of myself when I'm writing an Indian scene. I lived there, I know it, I know I'm getting it right."

Didn't all the expatriate writers, including those who preferred to be considered American writers or British writers and so on, I asked myself, make a substantial use of the country of their origins in their writings?

In a flash, I saw that writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and others travelled to make in India their stories long before the country's call to entrepreneurs, start-ups, and well-established companies world-wide to make in India products in the fields of telecom, defence manufacturing, automobile, Internet of Things (IoT), financial technology modules, and mobile internet. I wished the government added a subtitle to the call "Make in India"—*Follow Indian Writers Abroad*.

While picking up tomatoes hidden away amidst leaves of grass and putting them in my basket, I was suddenly invaded by an array of titles like a swarm of bees vying for attention, among them *Passage to India*. I shared E. M. Forster double vision of India—a muddle and/or a mystery—and Walt Whitman's vision of it being more than India—"O secret of the earth and sky! ...O sun and moon, and you stars! Sirius and Jupiter!"

We have a poem with the title *Passage to India*, then a novel with the same title, and it was inviting to have a collection of short stories with this wonderful title.

Passage to India! What a wonderful discovery, a discovery of the hoped for object at the very spot on which I was standing!

All hail serendipity!

At this very celebratory moment, the wise saying came to my mind—two's company, three's a crowd. I paused, lost. Did the literary world want a third *Passage to India*? I decided on the title *Passage to More than India* following Walt Whitman's own extension of the idea.

Following the idea, I published my short stories in two separate volumes--*Inside India* and *Overlapping Worlds*. The two now appear here in a single volume *A Passage to More than India*.

