

INDIAN LITERATURE

CLASSICAL BOOKS

TITLE	REVIEW
<p>Gitanjali: Song Offerings (1913) The Gardener (1913) The Home and the World (1923) <i>by Rabindranath Tagore</i></p>	<p>Rabindranath Tagore is a poet, writer, and humanitarian, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetic work, <i>Gitanjali: Song Offerings</i> in 1913. He was the first Indian to be awarded this Prize.</p> <p>Tagore is most widely known for his poetry, however, he was also an accomplished author of novels, short stories, plays, and articles. Moreover, Tagore was a prolific composer of music. He has been described as one of the first twentieth-century global men, which made his writings internationally known. This gave Tagore the opportunity to travel extensively, giving lectures and recitals in many different countries. He met many of the leading cultural contemporaries of the day, including W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Robert Frost, and Albert Einstein.</p> <p>Tagore had a great love for nature, and many of his poems invoke the simple beauties of the natural world. For Tagore, his religion could be found in the wonders and mysteries of nature – as much as in temples and sacred books.</p> <p>As a musician, Tagore composed over 2,000 songs. Like his literature, he broke away from classical constraints to offer a great emotive and spiritual appeal. Tagore is unique for being the official composer for the national anthem of two countries – India’s Jana Gana Mana and Bangladesh’s Amar Shonar Bangla.</p> <p>Towards the end of his life, Tagore took up art and also pursued an interest in science. He was very much an internationalist, criticizing nationalism through his songs and articles in support of the general principle of the Indian independence movement.</p> <p>Resources: For free digital copies of Tagore’s writings, visit Project Gutenberg. Type in “Tagore” in the search box.</p>
<p>Letters from a Father to His Daughter (1929)</p>	<p><i>Letters from a Father to His Daughter</i> is a collection of 30 letters written over 3 years by Jawaharlal Nehru, also known as Pandit Nehru for his association with the Kashmiri Pandit community.</p>

by Jawaharlal Nehru

Nehru was the first Prime Minister of India and an important figure in Indian politics before and after independence. Nehru was known as The Father of India and served as prime minister from 1947 to 1964. The letters were dedicated to his 10-year old daughter Indira Priyadarshini Nehru, later Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi served as prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984.

In the summer of 1928, Nehru was in Allahabad and Indira was in Mussoorie. To make up for his absence, he wrote these letters to make his daughter aware of her circumstances and her environment. Nehru's intention was to nurture Indira's young and impressionable mind about the current state of affairs with an unprejudiced view of history. He wanted Indira to have an empathetic view of the world, its conflicts, and woes.

In these letters, Nehru takes up a variety of topics. He discusses natural history, the beginning of life on Earth, and evolution. He talks about the varied races of the world, how these races were formed, and why people look different. Nehru also touches upon the topic of civilizations. He discusses ancient civilizations, the great cities of ancient times, the origin of language and religion, the growth of mankind, and the changes in religion and their manifestations.

Nehru also discusses the history of India, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the great kings of the past, and their kingdoms. Other topics include economics, trade, travel, the division of labor, problems of the peasants, and poverty. The letters are a testament to Nehru's love for nature, people, history, and to his overwhelming desire to cultivate these same values in his daughter.

As Indira Gandhi later commented, the letters were instrumental in arousing her interest in the people of India and her concern for them. They contain priceless guidance, advice, and information given by a loving father to his daughter.

**The Dark Room
(1938)**

by R.K. Narayan

The Dark Room is a bittersweet tale of Savitri, an intelligent, yet submissive woman, and her difficult marriage. It is a beautiful and accurate description of conservative, Indian society, and acts as a mirror, encouraging self-reflection. The novel explores themes such as traditional versus modern women, love, and power.

Savitri, who is married to Ramani, an employee of the Engladia Insurance Company, has three children: Kamala, Sumati, and Babu. Savitri is a typical housewife of the India of those times, who is dominated and neglected by her husband. There is a dark room in their house where Savitri goes whenever she is maltreated by her oppressive husband.

Savitri's husband, Ramini, cheats on her with an employee at his company and when Savitri learns about it, she threatens to leave him. Ramani, in his arrogance, ignores his wife's threat. But Savitri remains steadfast in her decision to leave him, which she does after a bitter quarrel. After some twists in the novel, and an unsuccessful attempt by Savitri to commit suicide by drowning in a river, Savitri decides to return home to be with her children.

Source: The Dark Room (Narayan novel). (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

Man-Eaters of Kumaon (1944)
by Jim Corbett

James Edward "Jim" Corbett was a British-Indian hunter and tracker-turned-conservationist, author, and naturalist, famous for hunting a large number of man-eating tigers and leopards in India.

Corbett was an avid photographer who, after his retirement as a colonel in the British Indian Army, wrote books recounting his hunts and experiences. Later in life, Corbett spoke out for the need to protect India's wildlife from extermination, and played a key role in creating a national reserve for the endangered Bengal tiger.

The book, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, details the experiences that Corbett had in the Kumaon region of India from the 1900s to the 1930s, while hunting man-eating tigers and leopards. One tiger, for example, was responsible for over 400 human deaths.

Man-Eaters of Kumaon is the best known of Corbett's books and contains 10 stories about tracking and shooting man-eaters in the Indian Himalayas during the early years of the twentieth century. The book also contains incidental information on flora, fauna, and village life in India.

CONTEMPORARY BOOKS

TITLE	REVIEW
A Bend in the River (1979) <i>by V.S. Naipaul</i>	<p>"In the 'brilliant novel' (<i>The New York Times</i>), V.S. Naipaul takes us deep into the life of one man—an Indian, uprooted by the bloody tides of Third World history, who has come to live in an isolated town at the bend of a great river in a newly independent African nation. Naipaul gives us the most convincing and disturbing vision of what happens in a place caught between the dangerously alluring modern world and its own tenacious past and traditions."</p> <p>Combining Indian myths, epic history, and the story of three college kids in search of America, the narrative includes a</p>

monkey's story of an Indian poet and warrior, and an American road novel of college students driving cross-country.

Source: A Bend in the River. (n.d.). Reviewed by Amazon. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

**Midnight's Children
(1981)**
by Salman Rushdie

This novel is at once a fascinating family saga and an astonishing evocation of a vast land and its people; a brilliant incarnation of the universal human comedy. Years after its first publication, *Midnight's Children* still stands apart as both an epochal work of fiction and brilliant writing by one of the great literary voices of our time.

Saleem Sinai is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, at the very moment of India's independence. Greeted by firework displays, cheering crowds, and Prime Minister Nehru himself, Saleem grows up to learn the ominous consequences of this coincidence. His every act is mirrored and magnified in events that sway the course of national affairs; his health and wellbeing are inextricably bound to those of his nation, and his life is inseparable, at times indistinguishable, from the history of his country. Perhaps most remarkable are the telepathic powers linking him with India's 1,000 other "midnight's children," all born in that initial hour and endowed with magical gifts.

A Suitable Boy (1993)
by Vikram Seth

Vikram Seth is an award-winning Indian novelist and poet. At 1,349 pages (1,488 pages softcover) and 591,552 words, *A Suitable Boy* is one of the longest novels in English that has ever been published in a single volume.

A Suitable Boy is set in a newly post-independence, post-partition India. The novel covers the story of four families over a period of 18 months, and focuses on Mrs. Rupa Mehra's efforts to arrange the marriage of her younger daughter, Lata, to a "suitable boy." Lata is a 19-year-old university student who refuses to be influenced by her domineering mother or opinionated brother, Arun. Lata's story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors Kabir, Haresh, and Amit.

The novel offers both a satirical and serious examination of national political issues in the period leading up to the first post-Independence national election of 1952. Other issues explored include the Hindu-Muslim strife, the status of lower caste people, land reforms, and the decline of the feudal princes and landlords, as well as a range of other issues of importance to the characters.

Source: A Suitable Boy. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

The Calcutta Chromosome (1995)
by Amitav Ghosh

A Ghosh novel is at its very core a spiritual, mystery, thriller and post-colonial, all wrapped up in one. This book takes the reader on a journey of a computer programmer who finds a battered identification card of an old acquaintance that sends him spiraling into an adventure around the globe. Beginning in the future, and going back to the nineteenth century, into the life the enigmatic Murugahn, the novel is about the search of the elusive “Calcutta Chromosome.” Introducing a wide range of characters, advanced computer science, religious cults, and interesting portraits of Victorian and contemporary India, *The Calcutta Chromosome* expands the scope of the novel, through a science thriller writer.

The Glass Palace (2000)
by Amitav Ghosh

Set in Burma during the British invasion of 1885, this novel tells the story of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who goes on to create an empire in the Burmese teak forest. When soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, a young woman in the court of the Burmese Queen, whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her. The struggles that have made Burma, India, and Malaya the places they are today are illuminated in this wonderful novel.

The Inheritance of Loss (2006)
by Kiran Desai

Desai is the recipient of a number of awards, including the 2006 Man Booker Prize, the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award, and the 2006 Vodafone Crossword Book Award.

“Among the main themes in *The Inheritance of Loss* are migration, living between two worlds, and the past and present.

The story is centered on two main characters: Biju and Sai. Biju is an illegal Indian immigrant living in the United States, and the son of a cook who works for Sai’s grandfather. Sai is a girl living in mountainous Kalimpong with her maternal grandfather Jemubhai, the cook, and a dog, named Mutt. Desai switches the narration between both points of view. The action of the novel takes place in 1986.

The novel follows the journey of Biju, an illegal immigrant in the US who is trying to make a new life, and Sai, an Anglicized Indian girl living with her grandfather in India. The novel shows the internal conflicts in India between groups, while showing a conflict between past and present. There is the rejection and yet awe of the English way of life, the opportunities for money in the US, and the squalor of living in India. Many leading Indians were considered to becoming too English, and having forgotten the

traditional ways of Indian life, shown through the character of the grandfather, the retired Judge.

The major theme running throughout is one closely related to colonialism and the effects of post-colonialism; the loss of identity and the way it travels through generations as a sense of loss. Individuals within the text show snobbery to those who embody the Indian way of life, and vice versa, with characters displaying anger at English Indians who have lost their traditions.”

Source: The Inheritance of Loss. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

**The White Tiger
(2008)**

by Aravind Adiga

The White Tiger was the debut novel of Aravind Adiga, and won the 40th Man Booker award in 2008.

“The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India’s class struggle in a globalized world, as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing Balram’s journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption, and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, ‘tomorrow’.”

Adiga says his novel “attempt[s] to catch the voice of the men you meet as you travel through India — the voice of the colossal underclass.”

Source: The White Tiger. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.

**The Lives of Others
(2014)**

by Neel Mukherjee

The Lives of Others, short-listed for the Man Booker Award in 2014, is set in 1960s Calcutta and follows the life of a family fractured by extremist, political activism. “The book deals with the chasm between generations, and is set against a backdrop in which the gulf between those who have and those who have not, has never been wider.”

Source: The Lives of Others. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved April 23, 2017.