The Village as a Social / Lived Space

CHAPTER IV
The Village as a Social/Lived Space


Anand, Narayan, Rao, and Markandaya have depicted the Indian society in slightly different ways. The Indian society with its myths and rituals, beliefs and superstitions, is almost the same in the novels of these writers. However, while Narayan's is the faithful presentation of the life of the middle class people he is intimately familiar with, Anand has in his heart genuine concern for the people crippled under the weight of social taboos and inhibitions. While Narayan holds his characters up to mild ridicule for their eccentric ways, Anand has mounted a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of the upper castes, exploiting the gullible masses in the name of God and religion. While Narayan, held in high esteem as a detached observer of life, looks at his characters from his 'ivory tower' without involving himself in their day-to-day affairs, Anand has a sense of commitment to the eradication of social evils. He has observed keenly the life and the people around him; and the cruelty, injustice and exploitation he has seen in the society prompts him to take up the cause of the underdogs who have suffered for centuries.

The world of Narayan is relatively free from the terrible privations and agonies, political conflicts and economic depression of Anand's India. Though some writers of Indian languages had written about untouchables and outcastes, no Indian English writer
had stepped into that territory. Anand was the first writer to venture into the territory hitherto untrodden—the world of the untouchables, sweepers, coolies, the debt-ridden farmers and the like, who were not allowed to enter the precincts of Indian English literature. Anand had a first hand knowledge of the people, for he writes in the preface to Two Leaves and a Bud: “All these heroes as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth” (Forster, 1951:v).

The age-old division of the society, be it rural or urban, into two classes—the pleasure-seeking affluent class and the toiling masses—is evidently unjust and the masses deserve a better deal. Anand believed that man is responsible for superstition, bigotry, class, caste, capitalism, exploitation, overpopulation and tyranny. Hence man can fight and undo them too, if he has the vision doubled with requisite will. Anand who discarded fatalism believed that man’s destiny is controlled by man himself. Anand presents the correct picture of the Indian society with all its religious hypocrisy and injustice thriving on anachronistic practices such as untouchability, feudalism, and economic exploitation of the have-nots by the haves. Anand, as a novelist, exposes decayed Indian traditions, and champions the cause of modernism as a cure for the ills of Indian society.

Anand portrays a day in the life of an untouchable in his first novel, Untouchable. Bakha recognises his social position with a shock. It illuminates the inner walls of his mind. He realises that though like any human being he possesses, head and heart, and flesh and blood, he is in the eyes of the world an untouchable. Then, conscious of his position, he shouts aloud without fail the warning words, “posh, posh, sweeper coming” (57) to announce his approach.

The Assam plantation is a micro-society of the kind one finds all over the world. There the poor are exploited and harassed by the planters. The novel has a haunting nature. The characters like Gangu, De La Have, Reggie Hunt, Croft-Cooke, Leila and Sajani haunt the readers as the representatives of contemporary society. Kamala Das said as a reaction to the reading of Two Leaves and A bud and Coolie, that the two novels:
... had done their job as neatly as an assassin’s knife, killing in me the desire to remain safely ensconced in the feudalistic society of my home town and just as the knife lies abandoned after the deed is done, the books lay forgotten. Only the message flowed in my veins, causing me to rise whenever a labourer was flogged by an irate relative or when a pregnant maid servant lay floating in the well where her rich lover had thrown her at dead of night. (Narasimhan, 1987: 12)

The villagers always very adamantly stick to social customs and manners. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandrans’s mother cannot deviate even an inch from the social customs. “If you want us to be there, everything must be done in the proper manner” (91). We find that the social manners count much for her. In connection with Chandran’s marriage she says: “Be patient, Chandran, You must allow things to be done in the proper order”(92). Till the last, she takes the opposite view and she cannot go beyond the prescribed formulae of the society. Chandran has to bear the social pressures and he comes to terms with the situations of practical life. He never leaves the orbit of social norms and does not become a true sanyasi. In preference to the life of a sanyasi he prefers other alternatives. The social stigma attached to suicide compels him to come back to his house in Malgudi after wandering for eight months.

Narayan’s depiction of the Indian society is remarkable in its breadth and scope. Like Chaucer, Narayan presents a cross section of the Indian rural society. In fact, neither Rao, nor Markandaya could give a panoramic view of the Indian society like that which Narayan gave. There is ‘God’s plenty’ in his novels. To have a good glimpse of the Indian rural society one need go through the novels of Narayan. Narayan skillfully portrays the subtle and complex relationships that hold a family together. In *The Financial Expert* he introduces a villager crazy for wealth. Margayya, the financial expert, is tempted to amass wealth with a view to providing a bright future to his son, Balu. His financial acumen and the dubious methods he adopts amply demonstrate that he never cares for the society. He goes on endlessly exploiting the poor masses and extracts high interest in the money-lending business. His religious devotion is artificial. He is a hard-hearted financial expert. His love for his son is unreciprocated. On the other hand,
the son spends his father's earning unscrupulously. Dr. Pal, the sociologist cum financial adviser, brings about Maragayya's ruin. His greed for money compels him to think again about the only prospect of returning to the banyan tree opposite the Land Mortgage Bank in Malgudi.

Narayan has great regard for family ties and the pieties of home. Therefore, domestic relationships occupy the central place in his novels. Father-son relationship is very important is all his novels. Most of his major characters are devoted fathers e.g. Chandran's father in *The Bachelor of Arts*, Maragayya in *The Financial Expert* and Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*. The relationship between Chandran and his father is very healthy and may even be called ideal. There is proper co-ordination between the two. Chandran can very frankly open his heart to his father. The father is always ready to solve his problems and is always concerned about his happiness. In *The Financial Expert* and in *The Vendor of Sweets* the picture is different. The bond of love is one-sided. "In Maragayya, the financial expert and Jagan, the sweet vendor, we see paternal love carried to the point of imprudence" (Parameswaran, 1998:76). Maragayya's yearning for shaping the future of his sweetly spoilt son who grows into a silent, wayward and frustrated man is very pitiable:

He wanted Balu to grow up into an educated man, graduating out of a college and probably going for higher studies to Europe or Australia. He could undertake any plan with ease; ... His son might become a great government official. (87)

Maragayya cuts a sorry figure when his ridiculous effort to boost up Balu for one more attempt to take examination fails: "The boy made a dash for the book, snatched it from his father's hand before he knew what was happening, tore its entire bulk into four pieces, and ran out into the street and threw the pieces into the gutter" (118).

The relationship between the father and the son is strained and Balu even demands his share of the property: "I want a share of the property" (167). Such sons who want to break away from the control of their parents and who demand their share of the ancestral property are not uncommon in the Indian society. Even in *The Vendor of Sweets*
the father gets disillusioned by his son's ingratitude, the motherless son whom he has
given love even at the cost of personal happiness. He always tries to reconcile himself
with the new situation but the last blow of Mali's arrest is unbearable for him. Then he
passes beyond all attachment and learns the fact of life. He apprehends that his lenient
nature is the cause of his ruin. Krishna in *The English Teacher* is a unique example of a
father who, for the sake of his motherless little daughter, turns his back on all the
happiness of the world. The rarity of Krishnan's double role can be seen in his mother's
appalled amazement, "That I should be destined to see these things in our life-I have
never known such things in our family"(117). The sense of kinship is always strong in the
villages. For example, Magayya and his brother are next-door neighbours and they are
not on talking terms. But they are always ready to share each other's joys and sorrows.
When the family suspects Balu's death, Margayya's brother and his family come to
console Margayya and his wife.

The family is not a set of disjoined individuals but a set of interlinked members
acting and reacting on one another. Every one of them exists in his/her own individual
capacity. As they live together, their life currents cut across, merge with and change one
another. Their emotions, thoughts and actions strengthen one another when they take the
same path, but collide against each other when they cannot bridge the intermittent gap.
The generation gap is often revealed through the difference between beliefs, attitudes,
thoughts, activities, customs and traditions. The study of this generation gap is an
inevitable part of the study of human relationships. In Narayan's fictional world this
generation gap, at times, plays a crucial role. In *The Bachelor of Arts* this gap moulds
Chandran's life. As long as Chandran is a college student everything goes on smoothly,
but when enters adult life, this gap becomes quite clear. This rift is more perceptible
between mother and son than between father and son. The father is more liberal in his
opinions and outlook, whereas, the mother is more dominated by old customs and
traditions. "A head clerk's daughter was not what she had hoped to get for her son"(69).
Man always craves for a high social position because that is the recognised value-scale in
society. It is a social custom that a marriage should take place between two families
having equal status. Again from the words of the mother, it becomes clear that she is also much attached to the old belief of superiority of the boy’s side:

Whatever happened they would not take the initiative in the matter; for they belonged to the bridegroom’s side, and according to time-honoured practice it was the bride’s people who proposed first. Anything done contrary to this would make them the laughing-stock of the community. (70)

The society as presented by Narayan in the novel is traditional and superstitious. The people are illiterate and poor. And they are always on the look out for some divine help to solve their problems. As result, even the ex-convict Raju in *The Guide* is mistaken for a holy man. He has been pulled into so-called holiness by the gullible country folk including Velan. The situation is taken full advantage of by the hypocrite Raju. It is a frontal attack made against the fake pretenders, made much of, by the ignorant masses like Velan. “Narayan grabs the Indian mind fully with all its superstitious comprehension of life, gullibility, an appreciation of pseudo-scientific things and that simplicity which is the warp and woof of our life” (Dev, 1982:159). Ramteke says: “even after a candid confession by Raju of his illegitimate love affair with Rosie and his subsequent conviction for forgery, society compels him to undertake a total fast to the bitter end” (1998:139).

Dowry is another social evil that Narayan touches upon in his novels. Not only the village society, but also the whole Indian society is obsessed with the dowry system. The parents of the bridegroom demand big dowries, which very often the bride’s parents are not able to give. It is the elders who are bent upon perpetuating this evil despite the hue and cry being made from time to time by social reformers. Chandran’s parents too have a craving for dowry and wants Chandran to get a handsome amount as dowry. Their greed is exposed through the character of Chandran’s mother who says:

My father gave seven thousand in cash to your father, and over two thousand in silver vessels, and spent nearly five thousand on wedding celebrations. What was
wrong in it? How are we any worse for it? It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law. We can’t disregard customs. (84-85)

Margayya has been portrayed as an astute businessman of Malgudi now changed into a semi-agricultural town wherein the rigidity of castes seem to have disappeared from the social scene; and in place of the feeling of inferiority that had haunted Margayya’s ancestors for about three generations for their originally belonging to the caste of corpse bearers, now comes the sense of superiority which Margayya possesses with a longing to have his son’s marriage alliance with the daughter of a rich tea-estate owner of the Mempi Hills. Dowry system comes down to the present times through the generations. It is the parents who are bent on perpetuating the social evil, which has caused a number of deaths of young and beautiful brides. The adjournment lawyer in The Financial Expert reveals the reality when he says: “It’s only after a marriage that one discovers how vicious one’s new relatives can be. How many things they demand and keep demanding!” (158). And the old evil continues to eat into the vitals of Indian society even today. Narayan in his novels ridicules the dowry system. In The Vendor of Sweets before Jagan’s marriage was celebrated, the bride’s parents had to give five thousand rupees in cash, and some presents in gold; and silver vessels. And when the bride’s father failed to present a gold belt, Jagan’s mother was heard taunting:

 Ambika took the rice and served, leaving her mother-in-law to continue: “One doesn’t ask for extra ordinary things; they are not for us, we are not destined to enjoy the spectacle of a gold waist-band, like hundreds of others, but one wants at least a sensible...”. (177)

Markandaya also speaks about the big dowry, the gifts and the feast accompanying the marriages. She also shows how a rich man becomes a pauper by marrying off his daughters. Rukmani is a child of the transition between the insular, autonomous village of old and the new village that is dependent upon urban civilisation and in constant contact with it. Rukmani’s wedding was not half as colourful as her three sisters’ had been. “Four dowries are too much for a man to bear”(1), Rukmani’s mother
says; but it goes further. The changes in agrarian politics and economics were responsible for the diminishing dowries given to each. Rukmani says:

Shanta first, a big wedding that lasted for many days, plenty of gifts and feasts, diamond earrings, a gold necklace, as befitted the daughter of the village headman. Padmini next, and she too made a good match and was married fittingly, taking jewellery and dowry with her; but when it came to Thangam, only relations from our own village came to the wedding and not from surrounding districts as they had done before, and the only jewel she had was a diamond nose-screw. (1-2)

The society Narayan presents in the novel is largely superstitious and full of blind beliefs. They have absolute faith in what the priest prescribes. Moreover, they are so gullible that they go by the so-called sacred shastras, which they believe to have emanated from the Gods themselves. The scriptures were philosophical, idealistic and noble. But their later employment by men to further their selfish interests made the scriptures exploitative and cynical. The reasoning faculty is hardly used in drawing reasonable inference at the time of any crisis that occurs in their life, with the result that if anything happens, they simply attribute it to gods and goddesses, and leave no stone unturned to appease them at the behest of the priests who are always bent on extracting huge amounts from the gullible folk.

The conflict between the old and new generations appears in Narayan’s novels. In Swami and Friends, unable to face his father, Swami runs away from his home. There is a difference of opinion between Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts) and his parents. He too runs away when he finds that he cannot marry the girl he loves owing to the impediment of the horoscopes. Contrary to the wishes of his mother, Raju (The Guide) accepts Rosie in his house. Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets) has to leave his house owing to the differences with his son Mali who has brought in Grace from America. Margayya and his son, Balu (The Financial Expert) also have contempt for each other. Ironically it is Balu who becomes an instrument for the ruin of Margayya’s financial edifice in the end. Raman’s aunt (The Painter of Signs) goes on a pilgrimage when she learns that he
proposes to marry Daisy, a Christian girl. One thing that appears common in all these cases is that the people of the old generation have stuck to the old social values which, the younger ones feel, have choked them resulting in frustration in life. Sometimes it is the old ones who leave their homes, unable to bear the pangs in their heart. On some other occasions, we find the younger ones, leaving their homes in protest against the traditional values their forefathers have held so dear in their lives.

The Hindu society in the villages being traditional and fatalistic, the social values they cherish cannot be otherwise. They are a God-fearing lot. For whatever they do, they throw themselves at the mercy of God. Their success and failure, happiness and sufferings are all considered as God’s benediction. The society by and large is God-fearing and deeply religious. They have absolute faith in the ‘Almighty’ and pray to Him day and night for their salvation. Not only that, every care is taken to see that their children and grandchildren should also imitate them in their worship of God. Raju the protagonist of The Guide, narrates his routine. His father used to wake him up very early in the morning when an eccentric cockerel made a shattering cry. Raju says: “I washed myself at the well, smeared holy ash on my forehead, stood before the framed pictures of God hanging high up on the wall, and recited all kinds of sacred verse in a loud, ringing tone!” (11).

The country folk with all their abiding poverty, innocence and gullibility are well represented by Velan and others of the village of Mangla. They depend on the rains for their crops and for everything. When the drought hits the countryside, they quarrel at the waterhole for priorities, with fear, desperation, and lamentation in their voice. In utter helplessness, they turn to the Swami.

In the villages, though the temple priest is held in high esteem, the class of temple dancers as a whole is looked down upon with contempt. In The Guide Raju’s mother never likes a temple dancer at home. She tells Rosie: “After all you are dancing girl; we do not admit them in our families” (69). But it is the high caste people in the society, who nurture the profession for selfish ends: “One should not at all be surprised when Rangi, a
temple dancer exposes the reality. She says, ‘Sir, I am only a public woman, following what some of the so-called family women are doing….’” (Walsh, 1983:77-78).

Generally the middle class people of the conservative Hindu society that Narayan presents in his novels are hardly ever ready to bring about any reformative change; nor do they seem to receive with interest any alien influence. They are just complacent with what they possess and are absorbed in glorifying the culture to which they belong. And yet, under zealously guarded norms, mores and values, there appears a simmering discontent amongst the people of the new generation, who when awakened to their rights and liberties, try their utmost to rise above the so-called pre-ordained roles they have been playing for generations together.

Rao is a novelist who has successfully imbibed and incorporated Gandhi’s programmes of social reforms, his fight against untouchability, drinking, dowry, racial discrimination etc. In Kanthapura, he speaks about the fate of an Indian widow. A caste Hindu woman’s worst fate is the state of widowhood. A widow is inauspicious and luckless in herself, and is a harbinger of bad luck to whoever sees her the first thing in the morning, or while venturing forth on a mission, or while initiating a sacred ceremony. Ratna the child widow in Kanthapura offends the village folk by openly defying the accepted codes of behaviour. She takes great care in dressing, wears expensive jewellery, lashes out at her critics, and displays her fiercely independent spirit by going about her preoccupations alone.

The status of the widow is so degrading that it is frequently employed in swear words when there is “a battle of oaths” in the village between the police, and the villagers. Venkamma feels such esteem that she says to herself, “Ah, widow, you would not even lick the remnant leaves in the dustbin, you polluted widows….” (67). Likewise, when the police raid at night to arrest Moorthy and there is great furore in Rangamma’s house, Venkamma’s reaction is foreseeable. “Ah, you will eat blood and mud I said, you widow, and here you are!”(88). In the village, much more than in the city, a childless woman — even one with a daughter but without a son — is considered an ill-fated one. The life of woman, who has no children at all, is worse. Ira’s husband deserts her because
she is barren. The husband in the rural area had a social sanction to discard his barren or son-less wife.

Markandaya is another writer who portrays the Indian village society very successfully. Her novel *A Handful of Rice* “fictionalises the sociology of India by awakening the polite society to the plight of the rural people” (Reddy, 1984: 154). *Nectar in a Sieve* presents the panoramic picture of a society, which is in flux. In the novel Markandaya subtly portrays the lives of two generations of rural people, those who survive the economic and psychological crisis in a period of transition. The older generation thinks that their survival depends squarely on the land and they continue to feel attached to it while privileging the life of the village community. The younger generation breaks the traditional ties and become individualistic. The villagers’ lack of awareness about family planning in the villages also forces the rural families into poverty as in the case of Nathan’s family. Poverty and unemployment lead to many other social problems like prostitution, beggary and crime etc. *Nectar in a Sieve* that has the sub title *A Novel of Rural India* portrays poverty, hunger, industrialisation and urbanisation that destroyed the very basis of rural life.

In every society, one finds a division based on various factors such as religion, language, economic conditions, different interests and ideology. In many societies, especially in the patriarchal ones, men are considered superior to women. This is evident not only in the novels of Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya but also in the novels of other writers. Even in the small village of Aymenam in Kerala, in the southern part of India it is so. In *The God of Small Things*, the Booker Prize winner Arundhiti Roy gives ample instances of the superiority of men. When Chacko visited Pillai’s house, Kallyani referred to her husband as ‘addeham’ (a respectful form of ‘he’) whereas he called her ‘edi’ (which is almost ‘hey you’). Another great divide in the society is the gulf between the rich and the poor, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’.

In the villages there are entertainment programmes connected with festivals. All the villagers take an active interest in it like the villagers of Kanthapura who actively take part in the *Harikathas*. The festivals begin at the beginning of the harvest year with
‘Akshya Tritiya’, the third day of the moonlit fortnight of the month of ‘Baisakh’. The day is observed by all farmers as the beginning of sowing of rice seeds. The goddess ‘Dharitri’, the earth, is worshipped and each farmer at least symbolically does sowing in one piece of land. Opera dramas are enacted in the adjoining villages for a number of nights. Four or five such opera parties existed in different villages. Dramas were staged in open-air pandals in the earlier days with oil burned torches, then carbide gaslights and ultimately with petrolmax lights. There were no women actors in the past and males performed the roles of women. Entertainment programmes in the villages were limited but due to frequent contact of the people with urban areas the style of the functions changed. Light music, use of records, mikes, lights and dresses used by artists changed the style of the function. The plays now staged in the villages are more social in themes written by modern writers and not based on stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata or puranic themes. The dialogues are mostly in prose and not in poetry as in the past. Decades back, there were no cinema houses near about. Malgudi with its ancient cinema house, “The Select Picture House”, which Chandran and his friend visit in The Bachelor of Arts, is an exception. Even in district towns, there were only one or two very poor cinema houses with straw thatched roof. At present there are cinema houses at close distances in the villages and a large number of villagers often visits them.

There are some other novels also which show much variety of subject matter and a deeper understanding of social problems. The importance of the inner conflict also seems to be well realised by the authors of this period. Athawar House is S. Nagarajan’s full-length novel of South India based on the conditions between 1919 and 1935. The Gong of Shiva (1935) by Dewan Sharar tells us about the social reform especially widow remarriage, and the orthodox Hindu custom of children marrying under the order of parents. English education brought about many changes and joint homes were broken up. A Daughter’s Shadow (1941) is also written on the same line. Tomorrow Is Ours (1943) by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas is a story of life and trends in Indian society.
Economy and Service Class

Indian villages were self-sufficient economic units in the past. The villages produced sugar cane, cotton, spices, oil seeds, etc. Indian handloom cloth and potteries were famous in ancient days. But with the advent of the foreign powers, especially the British, the scenario changed. The British took the Indian produce to their country, processed it and sent it back to India as manufactured goods with a high price tag. This broke the backbone of the Indian economy. The village economy, which was independent, became highly dependent. It was mainly to save the village economy that Gandhi advised the Indians to boycott foreign goods, especially foreign cloth. Boycott of foreign goods soon became a great movement.

In the Indian villages, in addition to the British, there were also the zamindars and the moneylenders to exploit the village folk and increase their misery. Anand, Narayan, Rao and Markandaya have dealt with this dilemma of the villagers in their novels to varying extents. In *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* Anand focuses his attention on the economic exploitation of the Indian peasant and worker by the oppressive forces of capitalism and colonialism. Anand makes it clear that the so-called civilising mission of the colonisers is a myth and that the economic self-interest of the empire has been a major motivating factor for colonisation. In this novel, Anand shows how the policy of industrial capitalism promoted by the colonial power spread its tentacles over the poor and helpless, often claiming their lives.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand turns to the theme of economic exploitation, against the background of the tea plantations in Assam. The novel draws upon the real life accounts of plantation labourers in British-owned tea estates in Assam. Gangu, who is hired for work in the Assam tea estates and is taken from his own village in Hoshiarpur, finds his dreams shattered when he reaches the estate, for he is deceived by the British as well as by the Indians. He finds himself in a prison with the *chowkidars* ever like watchdogs.
To consider another village, Nandpur, in *The Village*, is symbolic of any Indian village in the early decades of the twentieth century. The peasants in the village submit themselves to all kinds of exploitation. In the novel, Anand shows how the native rural economy has begun to collapse with the introduction of British land reforms. The colonial rulers, totally ignorant of the efficacy of existing social structures, introduces changes that strengthens the position of feudal landlords.

As described in the novel, *The Sword and the Sickle*, the First World War had disastrous effects on the entire peasantry and the govt “took away crores of rupees as free gifts and loans from the country to support their war” (63). As a consequence, the village economy was left in ruins. Several villagers were rendered landless and homeless. Some of them turned into refugees and migrated to towns while the others lived in abject poverty. Harnam Singh, a poor peasant who has lived through the various stages of British rule in India, cries out in rage: “Oh, Hindustan! Hindustan! This country is like a lean bullock that has been reduced to the bone by the Angrezi lion…”(64). In the novel we get a complete picture of colonial exploitation. Harnam Singh, who has mortgaged his six acres of land to the moneylender, analyses the situation correctly when he shouts out in fury and agony:

They took our grain, our timber, our tea, why, even the skins of our buffaloes and the oil from the poor man’s saucer lamp! And there are some people in the villages around here today who hide their nakedness in the clothes discarded by those who have died of plague while their children go naked. (63)

In Rao’s *Kanthapura*, the Gandhian Moorthy refers to the economic exploitation of the poor Indians and peasants by the ‘Red-man’ who purchased rice and sold their finished foods at higher rates after finishing them in their own big mills, thus taking the money away to their own country. The Indian cloth market was virtually controlled by the British textile industry and the prosperous handloom industry of the old days had already been destroyed. From the first decade of the twentieth century the Swadeshi movement in the handloom industry declined due to the growth of Indian cotton mills and the weavers maintained their families by weaving and agriculture. When Nanjamma is
unable to understand Moorthy's views about the economic exploitation of the Indians, he expounds his views to her:

But they buy foreign yarn, and foreign yarn is bought with our money, and all this money goes across the oceans. Our gold should be in our country and our cotton should be in our country ... you grow rice in the fields. Then you have mill agents that come from Sholapur and Bombay and offer you tempting rates ... then they take it away and put it into huge mills brought from their own country and run by their own men — and when the rice is husked and washed and is nothing but pulp, they sell it to Banya Ramanlal or Chotalal ... Now, sister, calculate and you will see. You get six seers to the rupee, not to speak of the fodder-husk, instead of seven, and your rice does not go to the stomach of Rangi or Modi, but goes to fatten some dissipated Red-man in his own country. (25)

India had been conquered formerly many a time, but those conquests resulted only in a change of political regime and did not affect the basic economic structure of the country. This stubborn survival of the economic structure of the pre-British society was due to the fact that none of the invaders introduced a new mode of production higher than the feudal mode, on which the Indian economy was based. But Britain had already overcome feudal economy and integrated itself into a modern nation. The self-sufficient nature of the Indian villages was destroyed by the British. Industrialisation and large scale production of goods sounded the death knell of the Indian cottage industries and the millions of trained artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners, smelters and smiths, crowded themselves into agriculture. In The Big Heart we find the thathiars or the coppersmiths of Amristar losing their job due to the coming of the factory, which produced goods cheap. In this way India was transformed from being a country of combined agriculture and manufacture into an agricultural colony of the British. India was further impoverished.

In the village there were groups of carpenters, potters, blacksmiths, cobblers, washermen, barbers etc. There were also families of confectioners in the village. They sold parched rice and sweetmeats in the village in the past. Their position also declined
but some of the families opened sweet stalls in the village and others became either tenant cultivators or agricultural labourers. In Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets*, we see Jagan who keeps a sweet stall in Malgudi and has a thriving business. There was no revolutionary change in the village production structure. From decade to decade in the working of the village production structure, some old things fell into disuse and some new things from the cities were introduced. But the old system moved on assimilating the new things from time to time. The decline of cottage industries and the resultant poverty of the masses are pointed out by Abbas in his *Inqilab*:

Village industries, such as hand spinning have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, ruining their talents and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the talents thus destroyed...British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufactures, and revenue from them is not used to lessen the burden on the masses but for sustaining a highly extravagant administration. (239)

Gandhi tried his best to protect and preserve the village industries and the artisans. He was against any kind of exploitation and strongly opposed the exploitation of the Indian villages by the British. Gandhi believed that India lived in her villages and made every attempt to save the village economy. Iyengar remarks:

Gandhi’s essential insight was that the Indian village has a high power of recuperation; his programme was to help that process and not to hinder it. The constructive side of his thought is mainly sound. The critical side is weak, but even this rests on an assessment of the impact of industrialisation on India that is largely correct. (1984:259-60)

Gandhi was against the economic monopolisation by any country, nation or group of persons. He believed that socially produced wealth should be equally divided amongst those who have produced it. He remarks:
The economic constitution of India, and for that matter of the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing. In other words, every body should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realised only if the means of production of the elementary necessaries of life remain in the control of the masses. (Kripalani, 1961:368)

Rao could not leave out the influence of Gandhi in the history of India’s independence. In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy who is a follower of Gandhi organises the villagers according to the Congress principles. He distributes spinning wheels and cotton obtained free from the Congress and exhorts them to wear only home-sun Khaddar. He tells the villagers:

Millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your god-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy...our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our Mother. (29)

Thus we find the villagers in the novels of all these writers—Anand, Narayan, Rao believing that the British rule is responsible for the economic crisis of the villages and trying their best to overcome it. Hence the boycott of foreign goods was a common phenomenon in the villages during the pre-independence days. Obeying Gandhi’s behest, all the villagers rose to the occasion in the boycott of foreign goods and in the attempt to save the villages from an economic crisis.

In *Coolie*, we find the emphasis being given to the economic status of the poor people. Here, caste is not given the primary focus as in *Untouchable*. It is their poor economic status that compels the poor people belonging to the higher castes to do the menial work of servants. Munoo, a Kshatriya and Verma, a Brahmin, are forced to work as servants, due to their poor economic status. It is money that matters for them. Here their poor economic status becomes their caste as Munoo says:
Whether there were more rich or more poor people, however, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter, “I am a Kshatriya and I am poor, and Verma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the Sahib-logs and all servants look alike: there must only be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor”.

Hence the subjugation of the village people is not only because they are born into the lowest class, but also because they are poor. In Coolie Munoo does different jobs to make a living. He works as a domestic servant in Sham Nagar, as a worker in a pickle factory, as a coolie in Daulatpur, as a labourer in a cotton mill in Bombay and finally as a rickshaw-puller in Simla. In Anand’s novels the economic factor becomes more crucial than social status, as Cowasjee states:

Money is the great God, and in the novels after novels Anand repeats that there are two types or people—the rich and the poor. In the final analysis, money decides both caste and class. It also decides one’s political affiliations. (1977: 137)

As Munoo realised, there were two kinds of people in the world—the rich and the poor—and money was more important than the air one breathed. Money was sometimes dearer to the villagers than their kins. It sometimes distorted the life of the poor villagers. Anand criticises man’s greed for money. In Gauri, Dr. Mahindra sees through the situation more clearly and tells Laxmi how man’s madness for money has brought falsity and wretchedness into the life of the village:

We tie as many oxen and cows and buffaloes to the halter as we can, and when we have no money we sell our daughters ... I am not blaming you ... I am just saying those Banias who buy and sell, have brought falsity into the life of the village. (224-225)

Narayan has drawn the picture of a rustic who sees poverty as the cause of all his miseries and wishes to become wealthy in The Financial Expert. Here, Margayya
discovers the importance of money. He tells the priest that he wants to acquire wealth. He will do whatever the priest suggests. The priest tells him: “Wealth does not come the way of people who adopt half-hearted measures. It comes only to those who pray for it single-mindedly with no other thought” (29).

To Margayya money is the main criterion for being respected and honoured in the society. “Nothing is impossible in this world ... if I have money, I need not dodge that spectacle dealer; need not cringe before that stores man. I could give those medicines to my wife” (23). If he had money he would send his son to the convent school. He would buy his son a car when he went to college. He would send him to America for studies. Thus go Margayya’s dreams of acquiring wealth. In Nectar in a Sieve, Markandaya also is fully aware of the importance the villagers attach to money. Nathan and his wife do not have a pie with them and this results in the miseries they have to suffer.

The zamindars and landlords

The village leadership was in the hands of high caste moneyed people who were mainly big landowners and moneylenders. Misra speaks about the power structure in the villages (1998:128-134). The leaders were mostly elderly people. They settled disputes, which people did not like to take to courts, and managed village social affairs. Caste and other irregularities committed by individual families were decided in meetings of the elders where the above class of leaders dominated. Village leadership was mostly effective in the arrangement of religious and social festivals, entertainment programmes and in the control of village temple property. As the village leaders were mostly big landholders and moneylenders, they had knowledge of the court procedures, access to courts and public offices. Public officials like the police, revenue and settlement officers, the agents and Tahsildars took assistance of the village leaders in the discharge of their functions. Very few of the leaders were honest or virtuous. In the twenties and thirties, when the impact of the national movement was felt in the villages, the elderly village leaders did not support it. They had full faith in the British power and considered the regime advantageous to them. But the movement greatly influenced the young people.
The police, who are supposed to preserve and protect the law, are often seen siding with the rich and the powerful in their oppression of the poor and the helpless. This is obvious in the arrest and torture of Prabha in *Coolie* for non-payment of debt. The police arrest him without a warrant. The person responsible for the arrest was sub inspector Ramnath, whose father, Sir Todar Mal had a quarrel with Prabha. Though he pleaded that he had become bankrupt, the police continuously beat him so that he might 'confess the truth'. The inspector “struck him blow after blow in wild orgy of excitement, his face set, his lips stiff and his body towering over the poor man’s frame” (132).

The sufferings of the villagers were to a large extent caused by the zamindari system that existed at that time. The zamindars were often absentee landlords. They did not stay in the villages, but lived in the cities and never came to the villages. People paid the revenue annually, preserved the receipts and felt secure over the right of ownership of the land. The *Tahsildar* camped in the village for about a week every year and collected the revenue through several clerks. He also travelled in a palanquin, but the common people could not approach him. They had to meet his clerks. Only important people of the village met him and paid respects to him. He seldom did anything benevolent for the villagers. In some places the agents of the zamindar were oppressive, and harassed the people in several ways. But some were very helpful and built temples, and schools, dug tanks and gave employment to people. They also arranged festivals and various entertainments. During social functions like marriage, or naming of babies, the common people were sumptuously fed and given presents of cash or cloth. The zamindars received the highest social prestige and occupied a position of power and influence.

Anand tells the story of the exploitation of the zamindars and the landlords in *Coolie*. It is the tale of a fourteen-year-old orphaned boy from the Kangra hills. He is forced to earn his livelihood at an early age of fourteen as his father's land and property had been attached away by the village landlord:

He had heard of how the landlord seized his father's five acres of land because the interest on the mortgage covering the unpaid rent had not been forthcoming when the rains had been scanty and harvest bad. And he knew how his father had died a
slow death of bitterness and disappointment and left his mother a penniless beggar to support a young brother-in-law and a child in arms. (2)

Similarly, Markandaya has very elaborately portrayed the cruelties of the zamindars and landlords in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Nathan, a landless farmer, has to live at the mercy of the zamindar. He suffers a lot under the Zamindari system. Nathan works for thirty years under the illusion of owning the land and of his sons working on it with him, but he is cruelly dispossessed of it on the eve of his life. Whether the harvests are good or not, he has to pay the revenue of the land. He sells the utensils, two brass vessels, the tin-trunk, two shirts of his eldest son, whatever gains that were left and even his bullocks and seeds so as to retain the land, to clear the dues with the hope that today or tomorrow he will own the land:

“Rather these should go”, said Nathan, “than that the land should be taken from us; we can do without these, but if the land is gone our livelihood is gone, and we must thenceforth wander like jackals. The bullocks must go. Otherwise we shall not have enough”. (74)

This was not the end of it all. The blow came when he heard from Sivaji, the rent collector, that the landlord was going to sell his land. He was told that the landlord had completed the deal and the papers had been signed. They were given two weeks’ time to leave. He was fully aware that it was not just and also not right. But it was a cruel reality. "There is no law against it. We may grieve, but there is no redress," (136) he told his son Selvam. At the same time he knew that he could not live except by the land, for he had no other knowledge or skill. As Rao remarks: “Rukmani and Nathan, the peasant couple in South Indian village are victims of two evils; Zamindari system and the industrial economy” (1972:64). Thus we find Nathan and many more like him becoming landless due to the greed of the landlords and the coming of industrialisation.

Other novelists too have depicted the exploitation of the zamindars and the landlords. *Tamarind Tree* (1975) by Romen Basu is a fine sympathetic portrayal of Indian reality in terms of the lives of the dispossessed. In the novel, the former zamindar,
Paramesh Ganguli, symbolizes the social and economic exploitation of the low-caste people in the village, Basuli. He is the embodiment of social bigotry and resentment towards the low-caste people. Their children are not allowed in school. They could not use tube wells. Medicine is denied to them in the dispensary. He instigates the high-caste people to assault Sambal’s father physically because as an ‘untouchable’ he has entered the Kali temple. Further, the low-caste people are subjected to economic exploitation. The zamindar pays the lowest daily rate and anyone who demands better wages is beaten ruthlessly. He has forcibly occupied hundreds of acres of land, which belongs to poor peasants. Labourers are squeezed to starvation. Thus we see that the exploitation of the villagers by the zamindars and the landlords was universal in the villages of India.

Moneylenders and Exploitation

The moneylenders were still another group in the villages that exploited the common people. By lending money, they were able to seize the property of the villagers when the latter could not repay the loan taken. Money lending was done on the basis of mostly unregistered hand notes with thumb impressions or signatures of the borrowers, which were enforceable by courts in case of default. There were some mortgage loans, which were registered, as in case of land mortgage; but mortgages such as gold or silver ornaments or brass or bell metal utensils were not registered.

In *The Village*, Sham Singh, a victim of Seth Chamanlal, tells Lalu about his ruin: “Nothing son...only I am ruined. I have mortgaged the whole of my land to Chamanlal. But I am not the only one; the whole village is ruined” (109). In the Lalu trilogy, Anand has frequently referred to the nexus between the British government and the Indian landlords and moneylenders. Fazlu in *The Sword and the Sickle* mentions the cruelty and ferocity of Harbans Singh, a landlord:

I was bought up in turn by Harbans Singh, who has left no small farmer in these parts alive. The breath of famine is in his mouth. The spirit of the storm is in his behind. His feet create an earthquake wherever they tread. Thieves! Carrions! Traitors! Hounds! Miscreants! (63)
Lalu sees from his own experience how the village landlord and the village moneylender, created and sheltered by the British system of administration, have exploited them, too, like others, to their total ruin. It is a tragic story of the ruin of a family under the exploitation of the landlords and moneylenders let loose by the British Government. Lalu can become only a helpless spectator as his family is shattered with the hanging of his brother because of the landlord's conspiracy; and the death of his father in futile complaints and protests against the agents of the British Raj. In The Sword and the Sickle, when Lalu comes to India after being freed by the Germans, he hopes to get a grant from the government and redeem his lost land and property from the landlord and the moneylender and open a farm like those he had seen in Europe. But he sees everything topsy-turvy. His mother is dead and his property is auctioned away by his enemies, and he does not have a house to live in. Lalu tells Maya: "Hundreds and thousands of men in our land should be mortgaged up to their loincloths. That almost every mud hut, every fruit tree, every bedstead, and every bullock should be mortgaged" (358).

Thus Naik rightly observes:

Lalu finds the rustic a victim of all-round exploitation by numerous agencies—the landlord, the money lender, the trader, the lawyer, the religious leader, the government officials, and also unjust laws and policies of the British government. (1973:58)

The loans, which the villagers took, were in cash or in terms of paddy. The court recognised the register and gave decrees of recovery in case of defaults. Some moneylenders combined other business with money lending. The Seth in Two Leaves and a Bud to whom Gangu goes to get a loan for the funeral rites of his wife does the grocery business along with money lending.

When we come to the novels of Rao we find him very eloquent on the subjects of exploitation and moneylending. In Kanthapura the moneylender is a Brahmin. Young Bhatta, who began his life with a loincloth on his waist and a copper pot in his hand, is
transformed to a rich landowner who has no scruples about buying up the fields of freedom-fighters, when they are auctioned after the “no tax” campaign. The Brahmin, whose duty it is to lead the people along the right path, has slipped into being an avaricious moneylender. More and more land is mortgaged to him:

But Bhatta will have the last word. That field is not worth more than two hundred and fifty rupees. Let us say two hundred and seventy five. Two hundred and seventy five it shall be. Stamp charges three rupees; registration bribes two eight, and eight annas for the head peon and four annas for the doorkeeper. (33)

The rate of interest was 37% per year. The smaller moneylenders and more exacting bigger moneylenders charged higher rates, 50% or 75%. Margayya in *The Financial Expert* collects deposits from the people at a high rate of interest--twenty percent. The moneylenders often liked to collect only the interest on loans every year, leaving the principle intact. But usually the debtors were in such a poor and weak position that they could neither pay the interest regularly nor the principle, and they were in perpetual indebtedness to the moneylenders, and in the final settlement parted with the little asset they had, mainly agricultural land. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Gangu’s peasant home in Hoshiarpur is seized by the government saying that as the brothers hold joint property, Gangu should incur his brothers’ debt. “Strange,” Gangu thought, “how the interest on my younger brother’s mortgage piled up, so that all my three acres and my hut as well went just as a free gift to Seth Badri Dass” (3). In many cases, the moneylenders arranged auctions of the household movable assets through the assistance of the courts and also attached homestead land. In cases where the moneylenders took the land of the debtor in settlement of debt, the debtor was allowed to cultivate his own land as a sharecropper. In cases where the relations were strained, he was completely dispossessed. The evil moneylenders are also found in novels such as Kushwunt Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, Bhattacharya’s *A Goddess Named Gold* and Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* to name just three novels.

The debtors in general were afraid of the moneylenders and once they incurred the loans, they were never able to clear up the loans and finally lost their movable and
immovable properties. The debtors could not avoid going to the moneylenders at the time of dire necessity due to death, disease, marriage and many other social and economic needs. Gangu, in Two Leaves and a Bud approaches the moneylenders at the time of the untimely death of his wife Sajani. Paddy loans were needed to save the family from sheer starvation. The moneylenders maintained a pious external appearance, but the people in general hated them.

The Moneylenders Act, which was passed in 1954, required the moneylenders to be licensed. Unlicensed moneylenders could not get the facility of recovery of loans through courts, which reduced the rates of interest to 12.5% in case of secured loans, and the maximum amount that could be realised from a debtor by the moneylender to not more than double the principal. They also lost the patronage of the courts, which was their greatest support. As a result, the total money lending transactions dwindled. Till about 1955, the moneylenders were the main source of credit.

Cooperative banks and commercial banks entered the field of rural credit along with the Government and started anti poverty programmes. In The Financial Expert we find the villagers taking loans from The Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank in Malgudi and the protagonist Margayya sitting under the shade of a banyan tree near the bank. These banks reduced the role of the moneylenders. The successors of the old moneylenders had turned to other fields. It is also seen that the moneylender families remain rich in the still poverty ridden villages. The bases of their wealth are their landed property and accumulated family capital. According to Darling: “Nowhere has money lending been brought to a finer and more diabolical art then in India” (1947: 21). The money is lent at an unimaginably high rate of interest and from the very start there is little hope of it being repaid. Then the landlord comes in and he increases his territory by buying the mortgaged land. If the poor peasant ventures to approach a lawyer, he too jumps upon the penniless peasant to suck his remaining blood. Anand’s The Village holds a mirror to these realities of the Indian society. The opening chapters of The Sword and the Sickle present the post-world war effect on the villages. Apart from the world war, famine and drought kills the people in thousands. As George finds:
Those who have money, mainly the moneylenders and landlords, rejoice at the swelling situation, as it is a boon for them to expand their territory. The labourers become street beggars; the small landholders lose their land to the landlords and moneylenders end up as tenants, and many tenants are forced to become bonded labourers. (1994:110)

Exploited by the government, landlord, moneylender and the priest, the condition of the labourers and coolies in India was very pathetic during the pre-independence days. They were almost slaves. Though slavery was long time back abolished in India, it was practised in the country in different forms. It was the coolies in the plantations that suffered most. Though the system had no legal support, slavery to different extents was seen in many places in India: “Though slavery as an institution was unknown to the laws in the British India, it came into this country through the back door under the name of contract labour or indentured labour system”. (1994:124)

The poor villagers were often lured from the villages to the estates, which were inescapable prisons. Special recruiting agents of the owners of the tea estates used all sorts of bait to lure the landless peasants from the remote villages into working on these estates. The most important of all was the promise of a piece of land. Once the workers were recruited and transported to these uphill estates, they found themselves practically prisoners, left to the mercy of ruthless planters and greedy middlemen. They were constantly ill treated and flogged at work, their women were often insulted and molested, and these families were condemned to live in tin sheds with no basic amenities.

Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud has to leave his village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab because he and his brother cannot repay a loan, which he has taken. Gangu who is taken to the tea plantation in Assam finds that he is deceived. After a week of hard labour in the estate, the amount given to Gangu’s whole family is less than 8 annas. It reminds him that in his village he alone used to earn 8 annas a day by working on the landlord’s land. It makes him sad to think what a liar Buta has been in all his talk about high wages, about the free land and so on. Within a week of their employment in the tea estate, Gangu becomes a victim of malaria. When Gangu needs money for the cremation of his wife, he...
goes to Croft Cooke but is kicked out. Buta, the barber-turned-sardar also does not give him a loan. He makes excuses. So, desperately he goes to the Bania breaking his vow that he would never approach him for a loan. He borrows twenty rupees from him for Sajani’s cremation.

Anand presents an authentic picture of the coolies in *Two Leaves and a Bud*:

These docile, gutless, spineless coolies, who never raised their voices except on the day of the holi, who went about the plantation with masks of crass stupidity on their faces, whose habitual submission was never disturbed by an outrage of man or beast, by hunger, pestilence or slow disease. ...(198)

The British allowed the Indian feudal lords to exploit the poor Indian farmers by realising exorbitant rents and taxes from them. If it is the British planters who exploit the workers in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, we find the workers being exploited by the British industrial capitalism in *Coolie*. Sir Reginald White, president of Sir George White Cotton Mills, Mr. Little, the manager, and Jimmy Thomas, the foreman are the British exploiters who exploit the coolies by instructing the mills to go on short time and by “cutting short the labourers’ already meager wages to what is less than even starvation allowance” (Sharma, 1978: 66). Naik aptly comments on the working of the factories: “The factory is a huge octopus with its numerous tentacles clutching the labourer in its deadly grasp, slowly paralysing and poisoning him”(1973:41). In the same novel Anand has referred to the exploitation of the poor peasants by Seth Chamanlal, the landlord, who, “at the connivance of the government, hoards up food grains and fleece the poor peasants by purchasing it at the lowest rates and selling it at the highest” (Sharma, 1978:72). The coolies of the Sir George White Cotton Mills are exploited beyond redressal; they are often under-paid and even forced to sub-human existence, condemned perpetually to live in unhygienic slums, where they are huddled up like animals. In *Two Leaves and a Bud* too Anand, the crusader against exploitation, gives touching instances. Dr. Havre who sides with the Indians sees the chance of a revolution. He observes:
The black coolies clear the forests, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money-grubbing, slave-driving soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies. Therein lies the necessity of revolution in this country. (123)

Individual workers like Munoo also have to suffer ill treatment. The ill treatment that Munoo in Coolie has to suffer is shocking. Bibiji, a “shrewish and vindictive housewife” (6) ill treats and exploits Munoo by exacting more and more work from him and not allowing him to take rest from his irksome task. She not only takes the undue advantage of his helplessness and poor economic status but also, by using abusive and derogatory words like ‘brute’, ‘savage’, ‘swine’, ‘dead one’, ‘dog’, compels him “to escape from the atmosphere charged with sharp abuse, unending complaints and incessant bullying” (59). Even the merchant in Coolie uses the expressions like ‘ohe, lover of your mother,’ ‘ohe illegal begotten’, ‘little rascal’, and ‘little wretch’. The poor waif is not only abused and ill treated, but also beaten mercilessly by Babu Nath Ram when he plays with his children and tries to mix with them. The Babu “slapped Munoo on the cheek with his thin, bony hand and kicked him with his shiny black boots, the boots which had been dream of Munoo’s life” (73). In the same novel the goat-faced Ganpat cruelly trashes Munoo for a trivial matter:

Ganpat’s second slap fell on the hard, conic bone at the corner of the joint. His hand was hurt. He was infuriated beyond control. He struck the boy in the ribs with his first toe, three blows, till Munoo fell stumbling on to the mud in the passage, sobbing and shrieking hoarsely. (116)

In Apology for Heroism, Anand says:

It never seems to have entered the heads of our masters to give the coolies the slightest chance of bettering themselves. They worked from dawn to dusk, old and young, male and female for their masters, they were treated like dogs. (1967:74)
S.M Akhtar's doctoral thesis "Emigrant Labour of Assam Tea Garden" and P.H Daniel's novel *Red Tea* present horrendous descriptions of sex exploitation and cruelty inflicted on the plantation workers. The inhuman treatment Daniel's coolie Karuppan and his wife Valli received from the General Manager Mr. White is much more terrifying than anything inflicted on Gangu and his family. According to Cowasjee what is narrated in the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud*, is nothing but the truth:

At night the coolies are locked like cattle. Any one trying to escape are caught by the chowkidars and thrashed. Taking these facts into consideration there can be no doubt that the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* is absolutely based of facts. (1977:85-86)

In *The Big Heart*, Ananta refers to the exploitation of the labourers at the hands of the capitalistic forces in India and the British government: "Our people have been living a life of terrible, awful suffering, and poverty, under the relentless oppression of the sarkar and the rich of our own country" (200). To John de la Havre, in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, "the contents of a cup of tea" are nothing but, "the hunger, the sweat and the despair of a million Indians" (22). He angrily asks: "Why do these swarming, under-nourished, bleary, worm-eaten millions of India suffer so?" (122). He finds their condition worse than that of the slaves in North America:

The position of the plantation coolies in India is, in many respects, similar to that of the cotton plantation slaves of the southern states of North America, of whom Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in Uncle Tom's Cabin. If there is any difference, I think that actual inquiry would prove that the present economic condition of the Indian coolies is worse that was that of the Negro slaves in America. (124)

Anand portrays the hypocrisy of the holy Brahmin priest who maintains that the mere presence of Bakha polluted the temple but invites his sister Sohini inside the temple and molests her in the face of the prevalent belief that a temple can be polluted by the presence of a low caste man within sixty-nine yards of it. While Kalinath of *Untouchable* forgets all about his Brahminical religion when he attempts to molest Sohini, the Mahant
of Anand's trilogy is presented as eternal exploiter who does not want any progress of the village or any education of the people. He dislikes his authority being questioned by others. Nandgir, the village Mahatma who is the custodian of the Sikh religion smokes charas, drinks ground hemp (bhang) and leads a life of lechery and fornication and yet he is a religious guru. In yet another novel by Anand, Seven Summers, Pundit Jairam exploits the poor innocent people by extracting money and delicious food items from them. In The Road, Pundit Suraj Mani is the religious exploiter who demands money and different food items even from the untouchables; but never allows them to enter the temple for worship. He asserts: “The temple teaches the Dharma, they cannot enter the house of God. I will never allow them there. But they can make dry offerings for the preservation of the Dharma, which may emancipate them” (41). The village thus is the stronghold of the powerful trinity of exploiters: the landlord, the village Shaukar, and the village Mahanta. They help one another in keeping their vested interest firmly entrenched in the village. To quote Iyenger:

The typical ingredients of village life---landlord and the shaukar, Sarkar and mumbo jumbo convention and superstition, mass conformity and mass hysteria, the cupidity and cruelty of some and the apathy and helplessness of the many--inevitably conspire to daunt and all but crush the free and ardent spirit of Lalu Singh. (1984:347)

The exploitation in Kanthapura can be compared with that in the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone's Fontamara. It is the tragedy of a village destroyed by the force of tyranny and oppression. Although there is similarity between the economic exploitation of the poor under Mussolini in the thirties and that of the Indians under the British rule, there is difference in the spirit of the novels. As against the final despair of the people of Fontamara, the people of Kanthapura become conscious of something that has eventually entered their hearts: “an abundance like the Himavathy on Gauri’s night, when lights come floating down” (255).

In Markandaya’s Nectar in a Sieve too we find evidences of exploitation. The social and economic exploitation evident in the system of tenant farming finds an echo in
Rukmain’s rumination. Rukmani believes: “Tannery or not, the land might have been taken from us. It had never belonged to us, we had never prospered to the extent where we could buy, and Nathan, himself the son of a landless man, had inherited nothing” (134).

The economic exploitation of the villagers has been the subject of many Indian English novels. In an earlier novel, Murugan the Tiller by Venkataramani, we find echoes of economic exploitation. In the novel, Ramu sells his cultivable land to the village moneylender to whom he had been in debt, and his coconut-garden to Murugan. Ramu observes in the novel:

We are powerless in our own land. Just see what happens in a village. By direct taxation, Government takes one third of the gross produce, and yet another third goes in the wake of civilised needs, cloth, kerosene, coffee and sugar, and but one third is left in the village. The rest we have to export. We need shelter both from the howling trade winds of civilisation and enormous cost of Government. No wonder we are ill fed. And the lands don’t yield well. (75)

Anand and Bhattacharya have exposed the unprincipled Indians who exploit the situation for their own benefit and who are no better than vultures and jackals waiting for the flesh. In He Who Rides a Tiger it is such people that drive Kalo, a blacksmith, and a sincere and honest person in his life, to become a cheat, and start deceiving both people and gods. The poor peasants are crushed under the debt. They fall into steep debts thereby enriching the village moneylenders who cash money even on the ashes of the poor. The interests accumulate like sins and the borrower has only to entrust his debt to the care of his children. The heartlessness and the cruelty of the moneylenders are pointed out with vehemence. In the novel: “The Seth’s milch cow died and he would not replace it; the jug of milk needed could come from milk woman by way of interest on the loan she had taken after her husband’s sudden death by snakebite” (Rao, 1997:129).
Industrialisation and its effects

The coming of industrialisation paved the way for a sea change in the village set up. It changed the face of the villages. Though many new amenities and facilities were obtained, the villages lost their peace, calm and innocence. It is Markandaya who voices the evils of the change in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*:

> When an Indian village is on the threshold of industrialisation, the peasant community suffers both physically and mentally. Nathan and Rukmani are representatives of millions of tenant farmers in India and their life is an example of the havoc caused by industrialisation. The whole novel thus reveals the story of an Indian village shaken to its roots by the onslaught of modernisation. (Bhatnagar, 1995:69)

Markandaya has not given the description of the village at the height of its glory but at its transitional period, when it was affected by the setting up of the tannery. "Life has apparently not changed for a thousand years" but now with the invasion of industry and modern technology, "sinister consequences issue" (Iyengar, 1984: 43). The quiet life and the village economics are both affected—values have lost their roots and money is what everybody is interested in. Industrialisation affects family, the very basic institution of a society. The sweet harmony of the peasant’s life is disrupted mercilessly by the intrusion of industrialisation and the consequent urbanisation. The tannery’s imperceptible and lasting consequences filter down to all the layers of the village, geographical, economic, social and moral. The calm serene and peaceful atmosphere of the village is destroyed. As Rao remarks: "Industrialisation with its main emphasis on the urban development and the mechanisation of the means of production and distribution necessarily result in the social dislocation of the family"(1972:64).

Due to industrialisation Nathan and Rukmani lose their land and are left with no means to eke out a living. Nathan loses the soil, which he cultivated for more than three decades, as the land is sold to the factory owners. Nathan and Rukmani move to the town to try their luck. Their sons leave them. Two of their sons go to far away Ceylon. One son
gets killed and their only daughter turns to prostitution. Nathan dies and Rukmani, finding no moorings in the town, returns to the village. This is the balance sheet of Nathan's family, which was destroyed due to the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. Migration is one of the consequences of industrialisation.

When we go through the novels of Narayan we do not find such disastrous effects. The change caused by industrialisation is evident in The Guide. The coming of the railway in Malgudi is the impact of an industrial and urban society on a predominantly simple, agricultural community with its new problems, which means the undoing of the old ways of living and of the cherished values of life. The shade of the tamarind tree which was the seat of Raju’s boyhood days and of the village cart men who unyoked their bullocks for the night is now full of lorries packed under it—for there is brisk activity because of the laying of the railway track. Raju, who grew up in a decent home, has now picked up terms of abuse from the railway men, and his father’s words, “Just my misfortune” sound ominous in the light of the impending disaster. The railway also meant the undoing of Raju.

The industrialisation of the villages naturally led to urbanism. The rural entities started slowly changing into small urban areas and then into large urban centers or towns and cities. A perceptible effect of the growing westernisation and urbanisation, according to Srivasthava, “has been the gradual collapse of warm and sincere love and the birth of commercialised love” (1984:128). Markandaya clearly shows the evil effects of urbanisation in her novels Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice. Nathan and Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve continue to remain models of loving husband and wife, but their daughter Ira and son, Murugan—the products of an industrialised nation—have no qualms in forsaking their spouses. “Ira’s son Sacrabani and Murugan’s wife’s child are concrete examples of the commercial love and sex” (21). Because of the encroachment of the urban people, price rise, disease and corruption have all been established in the village. Nectar in a Sieve is based on the results of industrialisation on the villages.
Urbanisation induces people from the villages to migrate to the towns. When life in the villages becomes cumbersome, they try to flock into the towns, which they think is their ‘promised land’. But greater tragedy awaits them there as in the case of Ravishankar in *A Handful of Rice*. Ravi, the main character, forces his entry into a tailor’s house crying desperately for food, “I am hungry, I want a meal” (6). It is the economic conditions that compel Ravi to flee from his native village to seek his fortune in the city. Contrary to his expectation, the city offers no scope. It is full of social evils. It is the seat of black marketers, hoarders, bootleggers and cheats. “Grab or go under” (117) are the watchwords of the city dwellers. Life in the city is a grim struggle for existence or survival. This lawless, subterranean city is a jungle. “It held out before them like an incandescent carrot the hope that one day, some day, there would be something” (25). Here the civilization is based on perversion, distortion of values, corruption, nepotism, exploitation, sycophancy, murder, incest, robbery and all forms of social evils. Ravi cannot become part of such a civilisation. There is no escape for him. He has to face it.

With Appu’s death, the entire burden of the family falls on Ravi. He loses his job in the hospital and his first born dies. Nalini is ill. The price of rice goes up day by day. *A Handful of Rice* shows how a villager withstands the temptation of the city, its corruptions and temptations, and comes out whole, indeed better. In *Nectar in a Sieve* we see how city culture invades village culture, which succumbs to the economic and moral depredation of the city. *A Handful of Rice* takes us to the other side of the issue—why villagers leave the village and what happens to them when they come to the city. Because of the encroachment of the urban people, prices rise, disease and corruption have destabilised the village. An innocent village woman like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* cannot accept the changes. She speaks about the men who have come from far away: “They may live in our midst but I can never accept them, for they lay their hands upon us” (28).

Industrialisation paves way for Modernisation, which helps the village and its people in some ways. In *Untouchable* there is the mention of modernisation which is in the form of a “machine which clears dung” (173) and which may enable a sweeper to
change his profession so that he may no longer be thought of as an untouchable. This attracts Bakha’s attention. He realises that it can also replace the label pasted on some sections of society as scavengers.

The main obstacle to the progress of a society is its unwillingness to accept modernisation. The enemies of modernisation are the people themselves who are unwilling to give up their old ways of life and who protest against anything new and more advantageous. In The Village Nihal Singh’s comment about the train, “This machine is like the Devil. How it made my heart jump! Wah Guru! Wah Guru! And the smoke it emits is so bad for the fields...” (2), makes Lalu protest, which in turn creates an amusing clash of opinion between the father and the son, the conservative and the progressive. Lalu retaliates that when bullock carts take more than two days to reach town, the goods sent by train take only one hour to reach town.

Lalu, like Bakha in Untouchable and Munoo in Coolie, is an admirer of the machine. Lalu’s observes how progressive farming in France by the use of tractors and fertilisers has made the farmer and the country rich; and the facility of the French farmers for borrowing money from the Cooperative Bank at a very low interest is new to India. The poor wages and deplorable working conditions, which came along with the industrialisation gradually, led to the establishment of trade unions and the idea of a revolution. In Narayan, the arrival of the train and the building of the bridge in Malgudi are examples of modernisation.

Trade Union and Revolution

Industrialisation also the paved the way for many other changes and activites. For example, it gave an impetus to organised activites of the working class, which led to trade union movements and later on to an attempt for a revolution. The villagers who formed the working class had heard of the Russian Revolution and this set fire to their blood. They wanted something to happen in India too. They thought that it would break all their shackles and liberate them from bondage. Hence they were very eager for a revolution.
To facilitate this they attempted to organise trade unions, which were the first step for an organised revolution.

Anand’s characters are among the foremost who express this sentiment. Like all proletarian leaders, Ananta in *The Big Heart* believes in ‘unity in diversity’, and endeavors to bring labourers and skilled artisans under Trade Union as a first step towards collective revolution. He pleads with the coppersmiths to forge a union to bargain collectively with the capitalists and the factory-owners; and gets the unstinted support of the poet Puran Bhagat Singh. Ananta feels the imperative necessity of “Revolution” (89), as it is the only binding force, in establishing “brotherhood” (138) and unity. Ananta has already learnt to “master his destiny with only a big heart” (138) and fraternity of the like-minded people, which alone he feels, can spearhead a ‘Revolution’ (175). Ananta in his long harangue with his mistress Janki, point out:

A ‘Revolution’ after which men would find a new way of living, in which they would discover a new brotherhood, away from the pettiness created by the miseries of the present, by the greed of profit makers and the lust of powers of the *sarkar*. … (176)

Anantha explains how at present the caste-brotherhood of the old days has gone out of fashion and people should form class-brotherhood for their own welfare. He supports his point by the example of Murli Dhar not inviting his own caste-brothers to the ceremony in his house, they being of a different class now from his. He pleads for the formation of the union of all the jobless coppersmiths who are of the same class. Most of the unemployed coppersmiths are convinced about the need of such a union. Though Mahasha Hans stands in the way and foils the attempt, Ananta does not abandon hope of forming the union.

The poet Puran Singh speaks about the need for bringing about a proletarian revolution for the betterment of the working class. It is imperative, he feels, to destroy the illegitimate owners of the workers, the capitalists, who use the machine and the workers for amassing wealth. He promises the creation of a classless society, based on equality
and fraternity: “Only a Revolution will complete the reformation and renaissance that is going on among us and produce the new community with new morality in which, and through which men can live creatively” (143).

As the hero of the novel, Ananta, tells his friends:

The workingmen of Vilayat themselves took their destiny in their own hands and banded themselves into the new brotherhood of unions. At first they were persecuted and penalised by the employers, and the Sarkar, which was behind the employers. The men stuck together, and struggled and struggled, until today there are few workingmen and women in factories who are not members of the union. They bargain together for higher wages, shorter hours, against bad condition, for holidays with pay, and defend their rights by strike action . . . . (200)

In Coolie, Sauda the leader of the Red Flag Union of workers attempts to organise the masses into a collective revolt, which is also, the seminal thrust of Anand’s thesis in the novel. He exhorts them:

Standup then, stand up for your rights, you roofless wretches, stand up for Justice, stand up, you frightened fools. Stand up and fight. Stand up and be the men that you were meant to be and don’t crawl back to the factories like the worms that you are! Stand up for life, or they will crush you and destroy you altogether. Stand up and follow me! From tomorrow you go on strike and we will pay you to fight your battle with the employers. Now stand up and recite with me the charter of your demands. (88)

In The Sword and the Sickle, Lalu too feels the necessity of a revolution. He addresses the peasants thus:

Come worthy little people, we will now make a real Revolution! Come, we shall work day and night and learn now to make Revolution . . . . For Revolution is the need of togetherness, Comrade, the need to curb malice among the men, the need
for men to stand together as brothers ...Now it is the time to change the world, to fight for life and happiness comrade, sing brave songs of struggle .... (384-85)

The same need for a revolution, which the villagers express in the novels of Anand, is seen to a certain extent in the novels of Narayan also. But the novels of Rao and Markandaya are silent on this topic of revolution. In the novels of Narayan we find people becoming revolutionaries and organising revolts and subversive activities.

Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma comes under the spell of Jagdish, the photographer, and becomes a terrorist. He transmits messages and receives messages verbatim. Jgadish gives Sriram cyclostyled copies of messages and asks him to drop the pamphlets in army camps. It is risky and so Sriram merely throws the pamphlets beyond the fence of the camp. Then he is busy with Jagdish in wrecking trains and burning railway stations.

**Labour**

It is no wonder that the workers tried to organise themselves into trade unions and stage a revolution as a natural reaction to the atrocities caused by the landlords, moneylenders and other exploiters. The factory owners were still another type of oppressors who clung to the workers like leeches and drew their lifeblood. The working conditions of the labourers had hit the bottom level. The workers were subjected to all kinds of torture in inhuman surroundings. In the households there were three kinds of agricultural labourers. Some were domestic servants, some others were attached agricultural labourers by annual contract and others free unattached agricultural labourers.

When the villagers found it difficult to continue life in the villages, they migrated to different places — near and far away — to keep their body and soul together. They worked in mosquito-ridden estates and congested factories. They hoped to earn good wages. But a few days’ life in the factories and estates disillusioned them. They became aware of the inescapable trap they had fallen into. We get a picture of their state in the
novels of Anand, Rao and Markandaya. In *Coolie*, Munoo who went away from his native village to the city finds that he has fallen from the frying pan into the roaring fire. Munoo’s life in the dark chambers of the pickle factory at Daulatpur was really a hell:

It was a dark and evil life. He [Munoo] rose early at dawn before he had his full sleep out, having gone to bed long after midnight. He descended to work, in the factory, tired, heavily, heavy-lidded, hot and limp, as if all the strength had gone out of his body and left him a spineless ghost of his former self. (188)

The crowded dwellings, dirty latrines, regular cuttings made from the low pay given to them on one pretext or another made the life of the workers really miserable: They worked from day to day in the dark under world, full of intense heat of blazing furnaces and the dense malodorous smells of brewing essences, spices and treacle, of dust and ashes and mud (110). Same was the experience of many a villager who left his village seeking pastures new. The plight of the other coolies of the Sir George White Factory was no better. They crept like ghosts:

That little spark of life with which made them move about willingly had died, and left them a queer race of men, dried up, shrivelled, hollow-chested, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed. Their wretchedness had passed beyond the confines of suffering and left them careless, resigned. (115)

The coolies were exploited beyond redressal; they were often under-paid and even forced to live the life of sub-humans condemned perpetually to live in unhygienic slums, where they are huddled up like animals:

The bodies of numberless coolies lay strewn in tattered garbs. Some were curled up in knots, others lay face downwards on folded arms, others were flat on their chests, pillowing their heads on their bundles or boxes, other crouched into the corners talking, others still huddled together at the door steps of closed shops or lay on boards, in a sleep which looked like death, but that it was broken by deep sighs. (177)
The factory is an insufferable inferno with unbearable heat radiating from the tin sheets, the continuous wild hum of the machine, the monotony of the work, the threat of impending danger and above all, the inhuman attitude of the employer. The coolies working under such conditions degenerate into moving corpses with fear fixed on their brows. The experiences of Prabha, Parvathi and other workers in the pickle factory, Hari, Lakshmi and several industrial workers in Bombay, Mohan and many rickshaw pullers in Shimla were also really pathetic.

Rao and Anand describe the supervisors luring the poor landless labourers to the estates through false promises. They come there with high hopes of earning a lot of money and going back to their native village, but both novelists show that once on the estate, only death can release them. In Anand’s *Two Leaves and a Bud*, they are held there by force and as Gangu’s friend says: “This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The *chowkidars* keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go” (38). In *Kanthapura*, it is not physical force but economic necessity that keeps the coolies from returning home. When the new arrivals talk of saving three hundred rupees and going home, an old coolie, Siddayya remarks, “we all said that”(78). “He knew that when one came to the Blue Mountain one never left it”(78).

The workers waste their money on *toddy*. What is left is spend on marriages, deaths and religious festivals. Rao presents the anonymous planter and the nameless coolie. This has the effect of showing how widespread the evil is. The British planters ill-treated coolies of not only Skeffington Coffee Estate but also of other plantations as well.

*Nectar in a Sieve* presents the younger generation as losing interest in the soil and turning to other professions. But there too they are not successful. Some even leave the village and go to alien lands. Nathan’s children try to help their father. But unexpectedly there is a strike and they became jobless. When the tannery stops work Arjun and Thambi go to Ceylon to work as labourers. The other sons are not able to provide for their family. Once again Nathan has to bear the burden of looking after the whole family. Selvam, like his brothers, was very hard working and conscientious. Though he had been reared on the land and had the earth in his blood, he did not take to farming. He had no love for it and
in return it did not yield its fruits to him. He had knowledge of crops and seasons, but where crops thrived under Nathan's hand, under his they only wilted. One day he declared that he was giving up cultivation. "The land has no liking for me, and I have no time for it" (111). Dr. Kenny had offered him a job in his hospital and he would take up that. The development of industry and the job opportunities, which came along with it, induced the villagers to migrate to urban centers in search of suitable jobs.

Migration

Migration of the village folk to the cities is a common phenomenon seen in the Indian English novels. Migration to cities is very common in the novels of Anand, Rao and Markandaya. In Anand's Coolie, the hero Munoo, a frail boy in a hostile world abandons his village and migrates to the town and from the towns to the city and ultimately to the mountains. Life for the migrant is a test of his vitality and impetuosity. His fundamental right to happiness is denied to him in the hostile climate. Munoo leaves the village in the hope of finding a better place to make his living. But the towns, to which he goes, offer no consolation. In the cotton mills in Bombay where he finds work to eke out a living, Munoo is exposed to the full force of the callous capitalistic order. There the boy experiences the savage struggle for survival. He has to suffer "the foul smells and stink, damp and sticky sweat, dust and heat and dung" (Mishra, 1983: 85). In such a climate he finds life a despair and death a delight.

Nectar in A Sieve and A Handful of Rice illustrate the effects of industrialisation of the villages. A Handful of Rice reveals the novelist's great concern for the simple villagers who migrate from their native villages to the cities in search of green pastures but who actually find themselves being shifted from bad to worse. In Nectar in a Sieve Markandaya brings the despair of the farmers to the limelight. They are desperate because of the rampant hunger, natural calamities, ruthless machines and heartless men. The tannery contributes to the disintegration of Nathan's family. Rukmani out of her affection for her sons and anxiety opposes the idea of migration of her sons. She asks them: "What is it that calls you? Is it gold? Although we have no money, remember that money is not everything" (68). The new assertiveness of Arjun and Thambi stand in
complete contrast to Rukmani's nostalgia for the land. Her sons represent the aspiration of the new generation for economic success and social mobility, which is quite evident in the reply:

It is [money] an important part of living. There is nothing for us here, for we have neither the means to buy land or to rent it would you have us wasting our youth chafing against things we cannot change? ... she says in agony “If you go you will never come back...the journey costs hundreds of rupees, you will never have so much” (68).

When her sons desert the soil and leave for distant lands, a sorrowful Rukmani bids them farewell with a heavy heart and a deep sigh. Rukmani sorrowfully recollects: “My sons had left because it [life] frowned on them; one of them had been destroyed by its ruthlessness” (136). Exodus to alien lands and urban areas is the consequence of industrialisation of the villages. Though Nathan has great emotional attachment for the soil in which he has sweated for about three decades, he is evicted from his familiar abode because his land is sold to the owners of the tannery for a high price. The news of the sale effaces all his hopes. He suffers and cannot contemplate a life away from his beloved land. In this moment of crisis Nathan takes the decision to migrate to the town in the hope of finding subsistence there.

But when they reach the city, Nathan finds that they are misfits in the city. Even their meagre belongings are stolen and they are reduced to near beggary. The search for their son yields no result. Nathan is totally disillusioned and says, “it is better that we should go now, while it is still light” (164). The city has nothing to offer to the farmer couple. Soon Nathan dies and Rukmani finds herself alone in this world. Her frustration is transmitted by her renewed hope in the village life and she decides to return to her native village. Rukmani comes to her native village to live with her son Selvam and her daughter Ira. Ultimately she finds that it is “better to starve where we are bred than live here” (167). Thus a counter-migration too takes place. In A Handful of Rice economic conditions compel Ravi to turn his back to his peasant past and he flees form his native village to seek his fortune in the city. But he does not belong to the city. The city disowns
him. It dispels and discards him. Venkataramani’s *Murugan the Tiller* presents South Indian village life both in its traditional and dynamic aspects. Ramu is tempted by his friend Kedari, in Madras and migrates to the city leaving behind his fertile soil in the care of Murugan.

In Anand’s *Two Leaves and a Bud* the migration of the poor workers takes place from the plains to the hills of Assam. Gangu, and his family are tempted by the promises of Sardar Buta and leave the village near Hoshiarpur in Punjab and come to the promised land of the Mac Pherson Tea Estate in Assam. Again the migration is from bad to worse, for they find that they are trapped in a prison. In *The Road*, Bhikku, who is humiliated, insulted and hurt by the high caste boys, decides to quit the village and takes the road he has helped to build, and starts his journey to Delhi “where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste” (110). The reason for Bhikku’s migration to the city is untouchability. While in *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* migration takes place from the village to the city, in Anand’s *The Big Heart* a counter migration takes place. Here Ananta, a coppersmith returns to his hometown of Amristar having worked in the industrial townships of Bombay and Ahmedabad, to resume his hereditary trade.

One of the reasons that promoted migration was extreme poverty as seen in the migration of the coolies in Rao’s *Kanthapura*. The coolies come from far and wide southern states to work in the estates. Rao describes the long line of coolies moving towards the estates. Coolies come in search of work because they are almost on the verge of starvation:

...And still more and more coolies came--coolies from below the ghats that talked Tamil or Telgu and who brought with them their old men and their children and their widowed women--armies of coolies marched past the Kenchamma Temple, half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning coolies--coolies after coolies passed by the Kenchamma temple. (67-68)
Rural Poverty

In the Indian village society, the village folk lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Their main occupation was agriculture, which always depended on the monsoons, which were often erratic. Severe droughts and floods destroyed their crops. So the village peasants always harvested poverty. The condition of the industrial workers was worse. Living in slums, they were no better than animals.

In Anand’s *The Village*, most of the farmers in Nandpur are poverty-stricken and miserable. Lalu’s uncle Haranam Singh has to mortgage the whole of his six acres to the moneylender Chaman Lal to pay the land rent to the Sarkar and to have a little money on hand for the seed. Most of what they grow goes to the moneylender as interest and there is no hope of paying back the capital for years. Yet poverty never teaches the villagers to be frugal. Instead, the empty illusion of prestige induces them to spend money on marriages and other functions and the ‘holy men’ who are embodiments of hypocrisy. Lalu disliked men like Nandgir who led a luxurious and immoral life and took grain and clothes from the poor villagers.

In *Coolie* the condition of the coolies of St. George White Cotton Mill is very pathetic. These coolies have come from villages in search of work to make a living, meagre though it might be. The writer faithfully depicts the plight of the coolies, the harrowing condition in which they are surviving. Munnoo’s arrival in the darkness of night when the coolies are sleeping on the pavement on the wooden boards attains symbolic significance. It is a dark ocean where teeming and seething millions are struggling for existence, fluttering and falling like fading leaves of autumn. Munoo while working in the mill lives in a slum:

The mud floor was at a level lower than the pathway outside; overgrown with grass, which was nourished by the inflow of rainwater. The cottage boasted neither a window nor a chimney to let in the air and light and to eject the smoke. But then, had it not the advantage of a sound sackcloth curtain at its door, when most of the huts in the neighbourhood had torn and tattered jute bags, or broken
cane chicks old rags, bent tins and washing and what not, to guard them against the world? (176)

In Anand’s *Coolie* Sauda tries to open the eyes of the workers to reality: “Stand up for your rights, you roofless wretches, standup for justice…stand up and fight—stand up for life, or they will crush you and destroy you altogether” (233). Indeed, it has been the fate of the poor peasants of India to toil day and night and cultivate the lands, and it is a pity that they live in perpetual poverty and hunger only to enable the landlords to flourish. The producer has ultimately nothing to consume. The fate of the Indian farmer whose life is crushed under the wheel of grinding poverty is drawn with a breath of vision by Anand and Markandaya. A peasant is caught up in a vicious circle—from his meagre returns he has to satiate the landlord through payment of rent, propitiate the gods and their earthly representatives—the priests, through periodical offerings, feed his family and maintain a false status in order to impress his caste-brotherhood. Invariably the peasant fails to meet all these requirements and raises debts at an exorbitant rate of interest from the moneylenders who eventually acquire the mortgage of his lands.

In Anand’s *Gauri*, the heroine soon realises that she is an unwanted burden on the family’s meagre resources. Once again poverty and hunger subsume all personal and familial relationships and Gauri is sold against her will to a rich banker in Hoshiarpur. Vijayasree comments: “Ironically, when Laxmi, Gauri’s mother had to choose between her cow that feeds the family and her daughter whom the family has to feed, she chooses the former!” (1998:44).

Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* has drawn the tragic picture of hunger seen in the villages. Rukmani divides the little rice she has into twenty-four small parts to feed the entire family for as many days. Such starvation leads to human degradation. Ira, seeing her family starve during the famine turns to prostitution. Hunger leads to the suspected theft of calfskin by Raja and his subsequent death. Starvation forces Kuti’s death. As Mehta rightly points out, it is “the struggle between man and the overpowering hunger, before which honour, mortality and even God do not count” (1979: 255). The adverse physical conditions like drought make Nathan unable to pay his land revenue.
Puli has to face poverty and go on begging because he has none to support him. Puli has “no mother—there is no one to worry about me—and none to worry me either, which is a good thing” (230). Hunger and disease cause Nathan’s death and Rukmani comes back to her native village to live with her son Selvan and her daughter Ira. Ultimately she expresses her consent with her husband’s view, “Better to starve where we are bred than live here” (167).

Like O-Lan of Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* Rukmani becomes an embodiment of tolerance. Even poverty, hunger coupled with misfortunes, does not divert her piety. Rather, these strengthen her spirit of struggle. In her husband’s home she experiences poverty and starvation. She suffers for the sake of her family but she does not succumb. She fights against the heaviest odds and never accepts defeat. Actually, she hails from a family, which has become poverty-stricken due to the wedding of three daughters. She has been offered to Nathan, a helpless and hapless tenant lost in all walks of his life. Very soon she has to feed her husband and six children. Her daughter Ira who wants to save her younger brother and cannot tolerate hunger anymore is compelled to turn to prostitution. Again, it is hunger that induces Kunti to take to prostitution. In this novel, we see Rukmani’s patience to suffer miseries. Nathan is good to her and even in his misery he consoles Rukmani: “It is a thing that might happen to anybody... do not fret. Come, dry your eyes and sit up here beside me” (3). In the novels of Markandaya, awe, starvation and frustration are the characteristic feelings, which dominate the villages. It is “fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death” (79). Rukmani remarks that ‘hope and fear’ are the twin forces in the villages that drag the people first in one direction and then in another. “Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever at hand to jog his elbow should he relax. Despair, ready to engulf him should he falter” (79). Rukmani and her family bear the physical and spiritual pangs of indigence and degradation poignantly.

Nature is often unkind to the villagers. Cultivation is highly dependent on the vagaries of nature. Nature very often turns hostile and this hostility of nature is best seen in *Nectar in A Sieve*. In the novel the peasant couple suffers due to both drought and
floods. The net result for them is poverty and starvation. Heavy rain creates untold miseries for the people of the village. When the water subsides the villagers venture out again. Nathan goes to Hanuman, the dealer of rice and tells him that the gruel he and his family had been taking has been almost plain water for the past few days. But Hanuman is not kind enough to part with any rice. What he parts with is an excuse, which says that whatever he had was enough only for his wife and children. He then directs him to Biswas another merchant who also only disappoints Nathan. The choice now left before him is to break the dam. His wife and children, who are sunken-eyed, accompany him, carrying nets and buckets. The evil force of nature plays a significant role in destroying the crops of Rukmani and Nathan. They recall how their paddy crop was ruined by the heavy rains:

It rained so hard, so long and so incessantly that the thought of a period of no rain provoked a mild wonder. It was as if nothing had ever been but rain...but Nathan and I watched with heavy hearts while the water rose and rose and the tender green of the paddy field sank under and was lost...the rains have destroyed much of our work. There will be little eating this year. (43-44)

But the next year rain failed and each day the level of the water dropped and heads of the paddy hung lower. There was nothing to reap when the harvesting time came. They were caught in the clutches of drought:

Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down scorching whatever still struggled to grow and baking the earth hard until at last it split and great irregular fissures gaped in the land. Plants died and the grasses rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water, lizards and squirrels lay prone and gasping in the blistering sunlight. (81)

Those who live upon the mercy of the land always experience tragedy in their lives. “The fruit of the peasant’s labour goes either to the landlord or is destroyed by the ravages of nature” (Jain, 1985:79). It became inevitable for Ira to earn some money to keep the family going. The family got used to it, and with her earnings Ira was able to
buy rice and salt, and milk for her mother’s youngest child who was too weak for anything else. The tragic death of the Old Granny is an indicator of the intensity of poverty that existed in the village. Old Granny lived in the village on what she made by selling peanuts and guavas. She lived on the street and died there. She had no relatives left—no person on whom she had any claim. There was no one to enquire whether she made a living or how much longer she could continue to do so. Certainly she was one who struggled hard to survive but failed rather miserably. “One day she quietly disappeared. They found her body on the path that led to the well, an empty mud-pot beside her and the gunny sacking tied around her waist. She had died of starvation”(122).

Ammu, Murugan’s wife was another woman who made every effort to make both ends meet. When Rukmani reached her house with her husband what she saw around was abject poverty. It was evident that the child and his mother were starving:

Except for a small bowlful of rice there seemed to be no other food in the place. The little boy was thin and hollow-cheeked; his mother looked worn and haggard and was obviously hardly able to feed the baby who kept whimpering fitfully; the cry of hunger, which is different to the other cries of infants. (162).

Puli, a nine-year-old boy had no mother or anyone to worry about him. It was this boy who took Rukmani to the quarry to do some odd job. He always returned with them to the temple. Whatever they earned they entrusted to Puli to make them safe. The disease, which was rotting his body, had eaten away nail and flesh to the first knuckle. It was the very same boy who gave company to Rukmani when she returned to her native place after the death of her husband. Thus we find the boy fighting all odds to survive without fingers and only stumps.

Like the British doctor John de la Havre in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Dr. Kenny in *Nectar in a Sieve* ridicules the submissive nature of the villagers. Dr. Kenny has no patience with their submissiveness, their calm resignation to miseries and misfortunes. He also laments the lack of planning, orthodox sexual morality, wasteful use of cow dung etc. resulting in overall poverty and misery of the people. The “eternal, shameful
poverty" (71) of the villagers is awfully disgusting to him. Once again Markandaya gives a picture of the Indian village where people:

... lived between bouts of gentle and acute poverty, the kind in which the weakest went to the walls the old ones and the babies dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the falling fever, recurrent fever and any other names for what was basically simply nothing but starvation. (Williams, 1976: 168)

Due to poverty, the old people and the children are liable to be infected with diseases. Their constitution is weak due to malnutrition. The majority of the Indian poor are unable to afford even medical treatment. In *A Handful of Rice*, like many other urban poor middle class people, Ravi who has come from the village, brought Nalini and the newborn baby back to his home within thirty-six hours of birth to avoid medical bills. Ravi’s son is infected by meningitis. When his wife asks him to call a doctor, he in an agony of helplessness cries out: “A doctor, what! Are we memsahibs or something to send for a doctor for every ache and pain? Will you pay his bill?” (228).

In *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi goes to the extent of stealing, due to poverty and starvation. He struggles but fails to get even a handful of rice:

He struggled to reach the grain, this time at least, and he clenched his empty hands and watching with frantic eyes as the rice heap dwindled and the empty sacks flopped and sagged and were snatched up and filled or jump away full on shoulders that could bear them. (235)

Finally with Apu’s death, the entire burden of the family falls on Ravi. He loses his job in the hospital. His first-born dies. Nalini falls ill. On top of all, the price of rice goes up day by day. With the upward spiralling prices, Ravi’s family fortune “slips down with increasing momentum”(196). His dog-eat-dog condition compels him to sell Apu’s bed for eight rupees—the bed on which he had slept with Nalini for only ten days after their marriage. They had to devour rice full of black stones. Bad harvest followed by the drought worsens the condition. “Week by week the price crept up. Then one month it
shot skyward” (226). What Ravi gets is not enough for him and his children. Hence, the reason why the people leave their villages is clear—to escape the endless cycle of poverty and hand-to-mouth existence, buffeted between nature's storms and the landlord's extortions. In Markandaya's novels there are deaths due to sheer starvation, whatever the medical term for it be. Kutty and Nathan in *Nectar In A Sieve*, Val's mother in *Possession*, Ravi's mother in *A Handful of Rice* and The tribal people in *Coffer Dams*.

**Corruption and Crime**

Corruption is a universal phenomenon. The villages are also prone to it. The extreme poverty in the villages prompts the villagers to do petty crimes like thefts. It is the extreme poverty of Kunthi that makes her to steal the rice from the house of Nathan and Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Narayan describes some aspects of village corruption in his novels. In the society as revealed in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, corruption is rampant in every walk of life. The bus conductor is seen pocketing a lot of cash collected from passengers:

As he explained to me, “These poor fellows will get stranded on the highway if we are not considerate. After all they are also human creatures”. He was a compassionate conductor who filled his pockets with the wayside fare, never issuing a ticket. At this rate he could buy a Rolls Royce rather than a Morris Minor, I thought. (55)

Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* keeps double account books and treats parts of sale produce as 'free cash'. He does not show this money in his income tax accounts and thus amasses a huge amount of black money. He rationalises the recycling of stale stuff by saying philosophically, “after all, everything consists of flour, sugar and flavour” (19). The villager who migrates to the city stands aghast at the corruption there. For example, in *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi encounters corruption in its myriad forms:

The callousness of the affluent, their insane craze for conspicuous consumption, their wooden hearts, the exploitation of the ‘have-nots’ by the ‘haves’, the infernal
prosperity of the bootlegger, the black marketer, the drug peddler at the cost of the innocent poor, the down-hearted and the desperate — these are the images of the modern city that prey upon individual conscience and social values. (78)

Bhattacharya makes a scathing attack on the inhuman and corrupt practices of the rich and apathy of the administrators. He writes in *So Many Hungers*:

Corruption had grown like an epidemic and money had become a man-made hunger. Never in the land’s history had the process that made the rich richer, the poor poorer, gained such ruthless intensity. The authority took little heed and set it aside as a passing phenomenon, but the poor suffered untold misery and the end of one tale was the beginning of another. (109)

The village was not a very safe place. Thieves were known and were living among the villagers. But, cases were very petty and the families of the persons committing the theft carried a social stigma for generations. Snatching ornaments from elderly people, regular cases of theft of coconuts and other fruits were the kind of crimes committed. If the criminals were Brahmins, the social stigma was greater, because a much better conduct was expected of the Brahmins. The thefts of vegetables and agricultural implements were also common. Very rarely a daring theft occurred. Most of the villagers were poor and did not possess much valuable household articles or jewellery. The scope for big thefts was extremely limited. The thieves were all local men who had no contact with thieves in rural areas. The thieves and their victims lived in the same village or neighbouring villages normally as neighbours.

Many of the local thieves came into contact with professional criminals of the towns. Local elements formed gangs, located moneyed people in different villages and committed dacoities in a planned manner. The unemployed youth of the villages were quite prone to criminal activities. Such frustrated and unemployed youth whiled away their time in the teashops and village market places. Illicit liquor brewing and consumption also started in the villages. Political leaders of different parties take
assistance of the youth and hence clashes and even murder became not uncommon. The police who maintain law and order in the villages are also usually corrupt.

Family and Marriage

The Indians attach greater importance to the institution of family than their counterparts in western countries. The evils that seeped into the urban family life did not have great impact on the village family life. Marriage was considered a holy sacrament and the sanctity of married life was inviolable. All the novelists under consideration speak of the importance of the family. Many joint families of the past have now changed into the nuclear families. In the past child marriages were very common. It is not known when the practice began but the usual ages of marriage for girls were seven or nine and for boys from twelve to sixteen. Such marriages were of course mere ceremonies. Consummation of marriages took place after the boys and girls attained puberty. In Narayan’s *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran’s mother was thunderstruck to hear that the girl proposed for her son was sixteen years old (69). It was already recognised that child marriage was an evil practice. It affected the health of young people. Maternity was cruelly imposed on young girls; and young boys were being encumbered with a family burden before they became adults and were capable of supporting a family by their own earnings. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* was married at an early age of twelve and soon became the mother of six children. The necessity of education for both boys and girls, the adverse effects of rapid population growth and the concept of family planning were not thought of then. An obvious bad effect of early marriage of girls was the large number of child widows in such families. Ratna in *Kanthapura* is a child widow.

In the Indian society particularly in the rural areas, the free mixing of grown up boys and girls is greatly restricted and so marriages are for the most part arranged. Love marriages are exceptions. Even in the novels of Narayan love marriages are very rare:

Generally, in an orthodox Hindu family free communication between a girl and a boy before marriage is not allowed. These two never meet or talk before marriage and their only contact is by way of optical communication. (Singh, 2002:22)
In the intermediate caste Hindu families and in the scheduled castes, widow remarriage was common and socially acceptable. There were many cases where the woman married two or three times after being widowed, as in the case of the widow in the *English Teacher* who got married four times. Divorce is also not common. Among the Brahmins and other high castes divorce is rare. Marriage is sacramental and sacred. Divorce though permitted under law is rarely done in village societies. Similarly society disapproves of bigamy or polygamy.

In the earlier days, very often the bride’s family was not in a position to pay dowry, and the groom’s family did not expect or claim such payment of dowry. The expenses of marriage were mainly due to purchase of articles required for the performance of the rites and the community feast. The bride took new clothes for the bridegroom’s family and sweets for the household. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani’s father had exhausted all his wealth after three consecutive marriages. However, the practice among richer Brahmin families was different. Such families having large quantities of landed property demanded payment of some cash from the bride’s families for meeting the expenses of marriage procession, journey etc. They also expected the bride to bring with her a considerable amount of gold and silver ornaments, brass and bell metal utensils, and good clothes for all the members of the bridegroom’s family, furniture and other household articles. In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran’s mother is described as demanding a substantial dowry. The groom’s families also arranged expensive marriage processions, fire works and feasts. Marriages were occasions of demonstration of the wealth and power by such families. Gradually the practice of giving big dowries and gifts spread to the other castes too, and the parents of the bridegrooms of even average families started demanding big dowries. Elaborate marriage functions were much beyond the capacity of the middle class parents belonging the other castes. The grooms of poor families also became educated, wanted to marry into rich families and get good dowries. Thus the evil spread its roots in the society.

The opening scene of Anand’s novel, *Gauri*, describing Gauri’s marriage ceremony, exposes the absurd and the ridiculous proceedings that have become part of an
Indian marriage: the loud music, the procession, the uncontrollable crowd of uninvited guests for the feast, children fighting for the showered copper coins, the quarrel over the dowry, the complaint over the quality of jewellery, the ceremony of the ‘showing’ conducted by the females with a chorus of lampoons and throwing of riddles at the bridegroom until he loss his patience and forcibly pulls aside the jhund of the bride’s dupatta to see her face and so on. The marriage here is a most rigid type of arranged marriage prevalent in some parts of India in which the bridegroom is not even allowed to have a glimpse of the bride before the ceremony is complete. Since the bride’s face remains hidden until the ceremony is over, the bridegroom has to depend on the rumours regarding the appearance of his wife-to-be. In Gauri:

He [Panchi] was anxious only for one thing: that when the four turns were finished and the whole embarrassing ritual of the marriage and the customary feast were over, he would be able to lift the red dupatta which enshrouded the girl’s face, to conform the rumour that she was not ugly but was as light-skinned as her mother. (21)

Such marriages were devoid of love, the main force behind the marriage and were often drowned in the long negotiations for dowry. In such marriages the parents simply impose a wife or husband upon their children unmindful of their likes and dislikes. Narayan and Anand have touched on marital fidelity, the basic tenant of the Indian family. Like Savitri in The Dark Room, Gauri also puts up with all sorts of insults and inhuman treatment at the hands of her husband in the village of Hoshiarpur. The moment Panchi is incensed against Gauri’s chastity; she is driven out of the house. But Gauri herself solves her problems, since there are no gods to intervene on her behalf. Her reaction is, in fact, symbolic of the modern woman, keenly conscious of her rights and potentialities. She hits back saying: “Acha, if I am a curse on you, I will go away…and if you strike me again, I will hit you back….” (283). Hence, we find Anand, a spokesman of the oppressed, has become conscious of the change that the Indian village women have undergone in the course of years. They are now able to stand on their own feet.
Narayan, in *The Dark Room*, speaks of the unhappy conjugal life of a woman whose husband neglects her and has been enamoured of a flirtatious woman, a subordinate employee in his office. When Savitri, who is very dutiful as a wife and mother, learns of this affair of her husband, she rashly quits the house in a bid to commit suicide and take revenge upon her husband that way. Her attempt is, however, foiled by a villager who, out of kindness, takes her to his house. She is given a job in the village temple since she refuses to go back home. But just after spending a night in the temple, she is repentant for choosing such a life and longs for her home and children and comes back home to be greeted by her children and husband.

The matching of the horoscopes is the first step in fixing a marriage. It is very important because no marriage will take place unless the horoscopes agree. But there are people like Margayya who cheat in this matter also. Narayan very elaborately discusses this in his different novels. Usually, the horoscopes of the boy and the girl are exchanged and an astrologer is consulted. If the horoscopes are auspicious, the bridegroom and his parents and relatives go to the girl’s house and the girl is paraded before the boy and his relatives. Chandran’s marriage to Malathi in *The Bachelor of Arts* does not materialise because their horoscopes do not match. Krishnan’s wife dies within a short period after marriage because of the evil influence of Mars, in his horoscope. The astrologer had suggested to him at the time of arranging his marriage, not to marry, and Krishnan had to bear with the consequences. Margayya impressed by the circumstances of Brinda, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy tea estate owner, calls an astrologer to examine the horoscope. But the pundit does not approve of the marriage because the horoscopes do not match. In spite of the offers made by Margayya, the pundit refuses to change his word. Later with the help of Dr. Pal he finds another astrologer who gives a report that the horoscopes perfectly match.

No marriage in Narayan’s novels takes place without both parties consulting the horoscopes. The marriages of Jagan, Nagaraj, Balu, and all others are performed only after consulting the astrologers. Even the captain’s wife in *A Tiger For Malgudi* tells her husband that his horoscope better matches with the tiger’s because he is always talking.
about the animal. Married life is considered very solemn. People like Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* are exceptions. But she has her own reasons. Daisy attaches no sentiments to married life. She rebels against her parents and domestic orthodoxies. Bhardwaj says:

> A girl’s running away from the family, her bringing up and education at a missionary organisation, her acceptance of social work and her living, all by herself without male supervision and support, are some of those phenomena which would not be tolerated in an orthodox Hindu family; nor a girl of such a family would have ventured thus. (2002:175)

Obviously she considers marriage an impediment in her way to self-fulfillment. According to her, there is nothing extraordinary for a man and a woman beginning to live under the same roof. A home in her view is only a retreat from sun and rain, and for sleeping, resting and depositing one’s trunk. She approves of the relationship between a man and woman on equal footing, but not the imperatives, liabilities and interdependence customarily attached to a Hindu marriage. In fact, Daisy is a peculiarly modern young woman for whom the concept of independent individuality is the supreme value in life. Moreover, her dedication to work is her solemn and profound, commitment to life. In this respect she is the replica of Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Raman’s experience with Daisy, that woman of strong conviction and indomitable will, has made him self-analytical and brought him to the conviction that, “man woman relationship was not inevitable and that there were other more important things to do in life than marrying” (45).

In *Kanthapura*, Rao has created Moorthy, a man of revolutionary ideas for that time. Moorthy is a true Gandhi-man who does not believe in caste, creed and early marriage and who is not against widow remarriage. The narrator in *Kanthapura* tells about Moorthy and his comrades. “Only they say, too, one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a Brahmin might marry a pariah and a pariah a Brahmin”(13). Marriages in Indian society is not an easy job, and the families have to face a lot of problems such as dowry, caste, creed, horoscope matching etc. In
Kanthapura at the time of the marriage of Purnayya’s twelve-year-old daughter the family encounters a similar problem. The proposal was deemed suitable because of the handsome amount of one thousand rupees in cash, five acres of the wetland beneath the Settur Canal and above all, marvellously matching horoscopes. The life after marriage is also not easy. Kamalamma’s minor widowed daughter Ratna is asked to behave like a widow and take off her earrings, nose rings, etc. But she refuses and says that merely seeing a man for a day at the age of ten years could not be called a marriage. As wealth and financial status play a dominant role in Indian marriages, Moorthy’s mother legitimately expects that Venkata Narayana would surely offer one of his daughters for marriage and that it would be a grand marriage.

At the same time a foreigner’s attitude to home and family comes in sharp contrast to the Indian cultural tradition. For example, in Nectar in a Sieve, Dr.Kenny has his own views on marriage, which are wholly unIndian. He considers wife, children and home as encumbrances and chains. Naturally he frees himself from these bonds and feels relieved without them, as he is free to pursue his wishes. On the other hand, Rukmani’s idea of home is quite different from Kenny’s. Home to her is an enclosure of kinship and family a bond of affection. Rukmani is exasperated to hear that Kenny’s wife has left him. She cannot believe that such broken homes are a common feature in the West.

The parents in the villages wanted as many sons as possible. The birth of a daughter was not welcome. A childless woman was even considered an ill omen. Irawaddy was born as an unwelcome child to her parents. The simple reason was that she was a girl child. Even Rukmani, her mother, expressed deep disappointment the moment she was born: “I turned away and despite myself, the tears came, tears of weakness and disappointment; for what woman wants a girl for her first-born?”(14). Nathan also paid little attention to her in the initial days of her birth. He had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not an infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind. For Ira’s marriage, a dowry of one hundred rupees was offered and at last a boy was found who rose up to their expectations. At last the wedding day came. Rukmani was in the forefront to dress and present the bride for the
ceremony: “We went with Ira to the river and when she was freshly bathed put on her the red saree I had worn at my own wedding” (36). But, a childless woman was an unwanted woman. So Ira’s husband brought her back to her parents five years after her wedding because she was barren. Though Nathan himself had waited seven years for a son, he does not blame the man.

Gender Relations

Woman always occupies a lower position in the family. She is often subordinate to the men in the family and her opinions do not find any place in family decisions. If she is a daughter-in-law, she is often harassed by the mother-in-law and even by the other female members. It is interesting to observe the gender relations seen in the novels of Anand, Narayan and Markandaya. In the Anand’s Gauri, Gauri’s travails begin soon after her marriage. She is constantly bullied and ill treated by her husband’s aunt Kesari and abused and beaten by her strong-limbed and weak-minded husband Panchi. Gauri soon realises that she is an unwanted burden on the family’s meagre resources. Once again poverty and hunger subsume all personal and familial relationships and Gauri is sold against her will to a rich banker in Hoshiarpur. When Laxmi, Gauri’s mother had to choose between her cow that feeds the family and her daughter whom the family has to feed, she chooses the cow!

People call women ‘Mata’, ‘Devi’, and ‘Laxmi’ and claim that society has always given due respect to them. Sita and Savitri are archetypes of the ideal wife and they are considered to be the role models for the Indian women. Sita was a very loving, chaste and devoted wife who was very faithful to her husband Sri Rama. Savitri too was a loving and faithful wife who, through her prayers, brought her husband Satyavan back to life after his death. Society hopes that Indian women would be like Sita and Savitri. The duty of the virtuous wife is to stand by her husband, even if he errs. It is she who is responsible for bringing him on to the right path and that too with devotion, tact, and diplomacy. She is always ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of her husband. She is so much devoted to her husband that she identifies herself with him. She is not a separate being; rather her personality melts with her husband’s.
But at the same time, they are beaten, set ablaze or turned out of the house. Anand’s *Gauri* eloquently exposes the hypocrisy of the society. It not only voices a strong protest against the ill treatment of women but also explores through the example of Gauri what the Indian woman should do for her emancipation. Men are more privileged than women. That is why Rukmani in *The Road* asks: “Oh why, oh, why were the men tribe so privileged?” (100). In *The Big Heart*, Janaki says, “No one knows what a woman suffers. How much she has to bear silently and without protest the abuse and the condemnation” (84). Often the ill treatment of women is organised by women themselves as in the case of Gauri. If Kesaro and the midwife Rakhi had not aroused suspicion in Panchi by questioning the purity of Gauri, she would not have been deserted by him. Hence the greatest enemy of woman is her own fellow women. Hence the first step towards the emancipation of women should be taken by women themselves.

Generally, women always obey their husbands and suffer their ill treatment without any complaint. In *The Dark Room*, Janamma acts according to the convention: “As for me, I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time...what he does is right. It is a wife’s duty to feel so”(45). But there are very strong willed women too, like Narayan’s Daisy and Bharati, who will not stoop to anyone. Bharati right from the beginning to the end, carries out Gandhi’s mission and becomes a real guide to Sriram in the freedom struggle. Savitri, a middle class woman in *The Dark Room* finds herself burdened by the immense weight of her past, her caste, her religion and her role as wife and mother. She leaves her husband to commit suicide by drowning in the river. But she is saved by the low caste Mari and Ponni who give her shelter for a couple days. Later she revolts against her husband to assert her individuality. She bursts out:

I am a human being ....You men will never grant that. For you we are playthings when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other times. Don’t think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose. (73)

Education improves the lot of women. It gives them confidence to stick to their post and not yield unnecessarily before men. Narayan shows us such educated women like Daisy, Bharati and Rosie. Even though Rosie belongs to a class, which has been
looked down upon as a low community, her education has enhanced in her the awareness of her individuality, and it pits her against a society, which is still very orthodox and has certain well-defined attitudes towards women. Daisy who is also educated refuses to pay obeisance to her future in-laws, and Raman too, under Daisy’s influence, considers it odd to fall at anybody’s feet. She has revolted against her father and made her future husband sign a marriage contract so that she would get ample time to fulfil her mission on family planning. She attaches no sentiments to married life. She considers marriage an obstacle to her work. Her attitude to marriage has already been discussed.

Like the untouchables, the womenfolk in Indian society have more or less had the same status of being slaves to their masters. That they are wholly dependent on the men folk for their daily bread has been revealed through Savitri who wails: “What despicable creations of god are we that we can’t exist without a support?” (123). But western influence and industrialisation in modern times have considerably changed their lot and brought about a change in outlook. The efforts made by social reformers have awakened them to their rights and liberties. They have learnt to stand on their own legs and occupy a position of high rank at par with men folk in every walk of life. Shantabai in The Dark Room who struggles herself free from her drunkard husband and comes all the way from Bangalore to Malgudi to work as trainee officer in the Insurance Bank, stands in complete contrast to the docile Savitri. Similarly, Shanti in Mr. Sampath who has lost her husband, whom she did not know, has taken to acting in the film company.

Janamma in The Dark Room quotes her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband who kept concubines at home and her aunt who was beaten everyday by her husband and never uttered a word of protest for fifty years. These instances sum up the picture of a Hindu housewife and her secondary role in society. On the other hand, the cook in The Dark Room has no moral hesitation when he says: “Only once has my wife tried to interfere and then I nearly broke her bones. Women must be taught their place” (37). Even the temple priest recommends the use of violence against Savitri. It is Manu and the later moralists who have made the woman what she is today — weak and utterly helpless. That a woman should have no freedom is so deeply embedded in the mind of
both Ramani and Savitri. In *My Days*, Narayan writes: "Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength"(119). Narayan moves with the passage of time. He candidly confesses:

I suppose, I have moved along with the times. This girl in my new novel, Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* is quite different; not only is she not dependent on men, she actually has no use for them as an integral part of her life. (Krishnan, 1975:9)

From the suffering helpless Savitri (*The Dark Room*) to Bharati (*Waiting for the Mahatma*) and then to Daisy (*The Painter of Signs*) Narayan has shown the rise of individuality in woman. Rosie obviously is a new age of woman who has the opportunity to be released from the conventional confinement to join colleges and universities to acquire a formal education, a right so far denied to women. Rosie is a master’s degree holder although she is a *devadasi*.

In *Kanthapura*, Ratna, the daughter of Kamalamma, the elder sister of Rangamma, is a widow. It is suggested in the novel that Ratna is in love with Moorthy and he with her, but both are still not too conscious of it. She has earned the ire of the orthodox people for not dressing or behaving like one. She:

...not only went about the streets alone like a boy, but even wore her hair to the left like a concubine, and she still kept her bangles and her nose-rings and earrings and when she was asked why she behaved as though she hadn't lost her husband, she said that was nobody's business, and that if these sniffing old country hens thought that seeing a man for a day, and this when one is ten years of age, could be called a marriage they had better eat mud. (48-49)

*Nectar in a Sieve* presents the marriage between Rukmani and Nathan as an ideal one. The marriages of Kali and Janaki are happy enough but Kunthi's is not. No matter what the form of marriage and age of the bride, some marriages turn out very well; some breakup, and most follow a mediocre monotony of compromise. Rukmani's marriage is
not without crisis. But it is something richer than the compromise that saves it. Kunthi’s husband leaves her and goes to live with another woman. “Kunthi is not a spiteful woman; she keeps Nathan’s secret until driven against the wall by her children’s hunger” (Parameswaran, 1998: 60). She distances herself from Rukmani. Her visits to their house grew less frequent and until at last they were meeting as strangers. She did not want Rukmani to be present when her first child was being born. Perhaps she feared that she would blurt out her relationship with Nathan in her pain. But the infidelity of Nathan does not destroy the marriage of Rukmani and Nathan. Rukmani is shocked to learn about the infidelity of Nathan. “Disbelief first, disillusionment, anger, reproach, pain. To find out, after so many years, in such a cruel way” (86). But Rukmani forgives him. She accepts her lot and cares for her husband and children. She is an epitome of the archetypal Indian wife who regards her husband as her god and her children as gifts from heaven. It should be remembered that Sita and Savitri were the role models for the Indian women.

Though not of the calibre of Rukmani or Ira, Nalini in A Handful of Rice survives the pressure of their deteriorating financial position and the brutality of her husband. Her gentleness and sensibility enable her to guide Ravi from the clutches of the underworld. In spite of his fury and fretfulness, her tender and loving approach restores peace in the family. “She was constant, a rock to which he could cling and keep his head level when his views and values began their mad dance” (118). Her first-born child’s death shatters her. But she knows “life has to be lived and other children have to be looked after”(43). She exhibits great power of endurance, patience and inexhaustible love.

The women of India reflect the society they live in. Surveying the history and vicissitudes of the status of Indian women one can observe that women once enjoyed considerable honour, freedom and privileges in both private and public fields. But with the centuries rolling by, the situation changed adversely for women. Medieval forms of victimisation like child marriage and sati were replaced by female infanticide and more recently by female foeticide. The average Indian woman has now begun to stir out of stoical acceptance of her tradition-bound roles, yet the air of freedom which touches the women is like the kite which though flying is yet, being stringed into the manipulative
and manoeuvring hands of their men. The traditional patriarchal Indian society confines woman to the taboo-ridden path. Rukmani exemplifies the large class of underprivileged rural women whose backs are bent with ill-rewarded labour.

That the life of an Indian woman runs an unpredictable course becomes evident when we witness the fate of Ira. The docile girl who accepts the man of her parents’ choice as her husband is soon sent back accused of being barren, “a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child”(54). There are other women also in the novels of these writers who stand apart due to their unique nature. There is Munoo’s mother (Coolie) who dies of exhaustion while doing a man’s work, Gangu’s wife (Two Leaves and a Bud) who shares the lot of her husband and belongs to the proletarian class. There is Sushila, Krishnas’s wife (The English Teacher), Savitri, Ramani’s wife (The Dark Room), wife of Natraj (The Man-eater of Malgudi) and the wife of Srinivas (Mr.Sampath) who are loving, simple, modest, gentle, and obedient. They are religious and traditional in their ways. In a true sense, they are the upholders of the ancient Indian way of life. Their only anxiety is the welfare of their husband and children. Parikh is right when he observes: “Indian womanhood has to be explored, experienced, and understood in all its vicissitudes, multiplicities, contradictions and complexities” (1989:41).

Religion, Gods and Priests

The villagers are very religious and are firm believers in gods and goddesses. In all Indian villages, the religious, social and economic lives are integrated. The priest’s role in the society is very important. He holds a place of respect. His job is generally religious and spiritual, though his services are necessary in many economic functions. Every important event in the life of a Hindu begins with a puja for which the priest’s services are absolutely necessary. When sowing, harvesting or threshing begins; puja (act of worship) is performed. Most of the pujas are done by the families themselves but for important ones, the priest’s services are necessary. In Brahmin households there is elaborate puja every day. But for sradhas, marriages, thread ceremonies, funeral functions or other important religious functions a priest is required. Every caste Hindu
household, Brahmin or non-Brahmin has a family priest who guides and assists in the performance of above functions. The Brahmins do not work as priests of Harijan castes.

The priests were not paid annually and they were not occupied full time nor did they earn a good income. Therefore most of the Brahmin families did not adopt the profession. They always sought the favour and patronage of the landlords, moneylenders and the rich people in the village. The number of priests’ families declined and it appears that in the near future, the priests will become scarce in the villages and people will have to run to distant villages to arrange a priest for a special function or cease to employ a priest in the religious functions. The priests who are in charge of the temples help them to offer worship to the deities. In the novels of Anand, Narayan and others, true to the real situation, there are genuine or good priests and also bad or fake priests. Very often the villagers fail to distinguish between the two. Anand, Narayan and Rao portray the fake priests and pundits who exploit the poor villagers.

In *Untouchable* Pundit Kali Nath, the licentious priest typifies gluttony, hypocrisy and falsehood. At the public well he cogitates on the rice he ate a day ago, which caused him constipation. He thinks of the *jilebis* and the tastes of the various kinds of foodstuffs he ate such as rice, pudding, and so on. Next we find him standing in front of the temple and shouting “Polluted! Polluted!” and accusing Sohini. In fact it was he who had invited Sohini for work and molested her. This again shows his hypocritical behavior. Pandit Kalinath’s cowardly, amorous attempt to molest Sohini appears all the more offensive because of his accusing her and her brother of defying him at the temple, when the attempt is foiled. This brings into sharp focus the hypocrisy, the double standards, and the perfidy underlying the façade of purity and spirituality.

Just as in *Untouchable*, in *The Road* too we find a lecherous and hypocritical priest. Pandit Suraj Mani in this novel reminds us of Pandit Kali Nath. Suraj Mani moves about carrying with him a little earth to avoid pollution by treading on what has been ‘soiled’ by the untouchables. At the same time he accepts the mangoes plucked by the untouchables saying, “Sweet is the fruit of Lambardar Dhooli Singh’s grove” (82). This
points to his cunning and hypocrisy. These priests are black-marketers of their religion for their own selfish ends.

Swami Vivekananda has said: "Priestcraft is the bane of India...Do you think our religion is worth the name? Ours is 'Don't touchism', only 'Touch me not" (1983:41). According to Hindu religious belief and scripture, God is everywhere, in the dead (stone idol) and the living, in animals, plants and trees but not in the untouchables! They could not see, worship or touch Hindu gods in Hindu temples, because if they entered the temple it would be 'polluted'. Bakha wished to see God and when he tried to enter the temple the caste Hindus fell upon him.

The priestly classes have attempted every thing possible to maintain their supremacy. They have gone to the extent of making the will of God almost irrelevant while performing sacrificial rituals to win him over. Making himself unchallenged and superior even to Gods, by virtue of his being a 'Brahmin', the priest has subjugated all others belonging to the lower strata of society, brainwashed them to accept the writings as divinely ordained and lulled them into eternal passivity, in the fond worship of God. The doctrine of karma has cast its deep imprint on the thoughts and behaviour of the people and their whole attitude to life. The Bhagavad Gita and the theory of karma propounded strongly in it have remained a prime inspiration for millions of Indians for long. Anand rejects the concept of karma as a pernicious belief among Indians. Actually, the caste system and karma theory are complementary doctrines, both in a sense equally satanic devices to subject a part of the community to eternal subjugation and humiliation. It is monstrous to think that men like Bakha suffer in the world inevitably because of their karma, that is, they must have done some bad deeds in their previous births.

Anand believes that man is the master of his destiny and he refuses to believe in fatalism. On the other hand, Anand is vehemently opposed to superstition, tyranny, bigotry class, caste, capitalism, exploitation, overpopulation and the worn-out customs and traditions. In The Village, Nandgir, the village Mahanta who is the custodian of the Sikh religion smokes charas, drinks ground hemp; and leads a life of lechery and fornication; and yet he is a religious guru. He takes advantage of the ignorance of the
people. While the religious pundits and sadhus in saffron cloth are welcome to the houses and are treated with utmost reverence with their food bowls filled to the brim, the low caste men are driven out with all kinds of abuses heaped upon them. Bakha, in Untouchable, has a bitter experience when a caste Hindu woman flings a loaf of bread from a distance as if he were not a human being at all. Such inhuman treatment to low caste men is not uncommon in the Hindu society.

In The Village it is religious intolerance which makes Gujri indignant about the Maulvi’s entrance into the barn through the kitchen and makes her lift the shoes, which the Maulvi has left at the door, by means of a stick and throw them into the courtyard. It is the same social attitude, which provokes a Hindu merchant who has a booth at the fair next to the Mohammedan stall in which Lalu enters, to shout at him: “Sardarji, have you left your senses that you are eating at a Mohammedan shop? But probably they have left you, since the hour of twelve o’clock has struck” (80).

Similarly, Narayan too has a gallery of priests and pundits in his novels. He also points out the Hindu way of worship and the different types of priests seen in the villages. Narayan’s is a realistic portrayal. Some elders of the village in the novel The Painter of Signs point out:

“God gives us children. How can we reject His gift? The chieftain argues: “There is an old shrine in a cave over there where barren women can go and pray, and bear children. How would you explain it?” Daisy simply answered, “You should ask the priest of that temple”. (68)

The coming of a new child in the family is still regarded as the gift of the Almighty, and not as man’s own doing. Barren women also seek the blessings of the priest by paying him lonely visits in the cave to get their sterility exorcised. At the same time there are good and pious priests also who are often advisors. In The Financial Expert the priest advises Margayya how to obtain wealth, and the ritual performed by Margayya seemingly bears the fruit promised. Many of Narayan’s characters, dependant as they are on God, appear to be mere puppets. To them everything on earth is pre-
ordained, and they are absolutely helpless. For the most part, they remain captives of circumstances in their lives. Narayan has faith in karma and rebirth. His characters accept their sufferings with a sense of rare resignation, much to the enjoyment of the high castes. In Malgudi we find such people who pray before the image of Natraj, or take a coconut and camphor to a temple. Many people call a priest for curing a man of his madness or to celebrate the completion of a religious poem by organising functions in the temple. People consult astrologers to study the conjunction of planets and to fix an auspicious date for an inauguration ceremony or a fast for appeasing the Rain-God.

As per the Hindu Shastras (scriptures), there are several ceremonies associated with each important event in life, from cradle to grave. The first ceremony performed isNamakaranam or the naming ceremony of the newborn child. In The Vendor of Sweets this is described elaborately. Next is the Aksharabhyasam or the school going ceremony. People regard Vijayadasami day as an auspicious day for sending children to school. In The Financial Expert Margayya performs this with great pomp and splendour. Another important custom mentioned in The Vendor of Sweets is the tonsure ceremony. Jagan's cousin says he went to the Tirupati Hills for a Tonsure Ceremony with the Judge's family. Even grownups and women offer their hair to lord Venkateswar. Tonsure is a symbolic act of total surrender to God. Many of the sadhus and miracle mongers cheat the gullible masses who, for their lack of scientific knowledge and rational approach to the problems fall an easy prey. It is not that only the illiterate and the gullible are the victims, even the literate and educated who have greater responsibility to mould the lives of their brethren, are reluctant to challenge the so-called god men. At the mention of the temple priest, the teacher in The Painters of Signs looks terribly afraid, and says, very much to the advantage of the priest:

We have learnt to leave him alone. It's not safe to make an enemy of him. He can be helpful. He has all sorts of powers. Lives on nothing, says he. Nourishes himself from air. It is not good to argue with him. He is a quarrelsome man and commands powers. (73)
As we find in *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the yogis were supposed to have many extraordinary powers. "One could become invisible, levitate, transmute metals, travel in space, control animals, live on air, and so on and so forth" (9). In *The Guide*, the villagers consider the ex-convict Raju to be a yogi with supernatural powers. The *Shastras*, 'scriptures' supposed to be God given, have been a powerful weapon in the hands of the priests who are bent upon crushing the ignorant village folk under the weight of social customs and traditions. They have, in a sense, looted and driven the gullible masses to their miserable lot. In *Waiting for the Mahatma* the priest places two coins on the chest of the dead person. He remarks that it is to pay for the passage to the other world. But actually as Kanni says: "It goes the way of the other coins, that is, into a priest’s money box" (121).

The village folk in times of difficulty turn to gods or goddesses who they believe will relieve them of their difficulties. When Swami (*Swami and Friends*) ran away from home to the outskirts of the Mempi forest he was terrified to see black shapes in the darkness. Helpless, he prayed to all the gods that he knew to take him out of that place. He promised them offerings: "Two coconuts every Saturday to the elephant-faced Ganapathi; a vow to roll bare bodied in dust, beg and take alms to the Lord of Tirupathi" (160). Similarly, when Natraj and his friends pray to Vishnu to save the elephant, it was miraculously saved. When Margayya did not have a child for twelve years, he was made to pray to God, and when the child was born, "...he carried the alms and the sovereigns equal to the weight of the child to the Tirupati Hills and deposited them all in the treasure box in the shrine" (132). Later on in life, Margayya carries out a forty-day ordeal of fasting and praying to goddess Laxmi in order to propitiate her to acquire wealth. Margayya makes preparations for the Laxmi Pooja with ashes from a red lotus and ghee made out of a gray cow. He knows that Laxmi the goddess of wealth showers her blessings in the shape of gold, silver and coins. He worships the goddess and gets rich soon with the purchase of the book *Domestic Harmony* from Dr. Pal.

Often, the Brahmin priests were gifted with a cow. In *The Painter of Signs*, Laxmi Raman’s widowed aunt, speaks about her past:
My father was a priest and officiated at birthdays, funerals and all kinds of religious functions and brought home his fee in the form of rice and vegetables and coconut and sugarcane. Occasionally, he also brought in a cow, which, as you know, when gifted to a Brahmin, helps a dead man’s soul to ford a difficult river in the next world. (19)

People were in awe of the priests. In The Bachelor of Arts Chandran’s mother allows the flower thief to go the moment she notices that he is a sanyasi, thinking that it would bring some calamity:

“Is he a sanyasi?” Mother asked, and noticed the colour of the thief’s loincloth.
“Ah, leave him alone, let him go”. She was seized with fear now. The curse of a holy man might fall on the family. “You can go, sir,” she said respectfully. (43)

Renunciation is not only a change of clothes, but also a transformation of the self. Narayan brings out the futility of Chandran’s stance. “His dress and appearance, his shaven pate and the ochre loincloth, declared him now and henceforth to be a Sanyasi”(107). As if by wearing ochre robe, any one can become a sanyasi. India abounds with such pseudo-sanyasis. The credulous village people follow Velan (The Guide) blindly and Raju finds himself in a new role, that of a sage. Though frightened at first, with his innate tact he adapts himself very quickly. “He must play the role that Velan had given him” (30). He feels he is attaining the stature of a saint (15). Raju is one of the countless frauds posing as sadhus and living on the credulous people as parasites. Sainthood is reduced to a matter merely of external appearance when Raju thinks of growing a beard to increase his spiritual status. “Raju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape” (47). It is again a swami, in A Tiger for Malgudi who, through his supernatural power, paralysed the hand of Alfonso while he was trying to shoot the tiger by putting in his mind the idea of drinking wine before shooting.

In The English Teacher the priestly man plays a vital role in helping Krishnan to communicate with his dead wife, but in The Financial Expert, the initiator is the
mysterious priest who guides Margayya in the quest for wealth but who remains in the background. The priest in *The Financial Expert* also performs a *puja* for the child who is crippled with a dreadful disease from his childhood who becomes much better after that. He has been performing the same *puja*, which had enabled young Markandeya to win over Yama. To Margayya the single-minded prayer creates a sense of awe. His mind is seized with fear because he thinks that the priest is perhaps a sorcerer or a black magician or an alchemist. He has, perhaps, hidden human bodies in his shack and extracts from the corpse black ointment with which he acquired extraordinary powers. He is also afraid that he may be asked to cut the throat of his son Balu. The Indian priest believes in rituals and in the *Shastras*. He tells Margayya: “Take the blackened lotus petal, mix it with ghee, and put a dot to fit on your forehead after the prayer, every day, exactly between your eyebrows” (48). This is the priest’s prescription for Margayya to propitiate Goddess Laxmi the goddess of wealth. Priests are seen to be very essential at every auspicious function. In *The Painter of Signs*, the lawyer gives a grand inauguration to his practice as a lawyer and invites a group of priests to perform rituals and chant mantras to secure success in this profession.

There are also Swamis, like the one summoned by Krishnan’s mother-in-law, in *The English Teacher*, to cure her daughter’s illness. This Swami believes in the power of mantras. When he comes, he utters some mantras with his eyes closed then takes a pinch of sacred ash and rubs it on her forehead, and ties to her arm a talisman strung in yellow thread. He takes money and other things given to him and mutters while leaving “May God help you to see the end of your anxieties” (93). In addition to the above-mentioned mysterious priests, there are also simple priests or *sanyasis* in Narayan’s novels. They are satisfied with worshipping idols of God and serving Him to their capacity. Simple-minded priests figure in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*. They work in the temple of Radha-Krishna. They are satisfied with keeping themselves engaged in decorating the gods and the goddesses, lighting oil lamps and placing offerings at their feet. In other words, they believe in the physical existence of gods and are accordingly trying to please them.
There are also pundits who are very learned. They are men of letters who pass most of their time in discussing the scriptures and other philosophical sources and hence serving others through knowledge. In the Hindu society, for everything a time is fixed with the help of an almanac so that it should bring the desired result. This system is also used to forecast the future of mankind. There is another class of god men who are victims of circumstances. Had the circumstances not victimised them, they would not have become god men. Raju, Jagan and Chandran are such god men. The circumstances have compelled Raju to assume the role of a god man. He has no way out. It is the pious and humble nature of Velan that converts Raju into a saint. Had he not come into contact with a saintly man like Velan, he would have become a different person. But Jagan and Chandran renounce the world and become sanyasis out of frustration. Chandran, after wandering for eight months as a sanyasi, returns home. The effect of his infatuation being over, he develops a new philosophy of love and marries a different girl of his parents’ choice and he likes her very much.

In The Dark Room is a priest who engages Savitri, after she makes an abortive attempt to commit suicide and is brought by Mari to his house, to clean and sweep the temple. This sharp-tongued priest aptly finds his equal in Ponni. “That woman may have the worst tongue in the village but I am equal to it” (46), he claims. But how can this hard-hearted priest be like Ponni and Mari who feel unhappy at the other’s unhappiness and who extend their help to them? This priest claims his right over the poor and innocent people and expects them to do his work without paying wages to them as he does with Mari. A priest like him is always ready to spend his entire fortune on lawyers and to drag a man to court to teach him a lesson but cannot part with even a single penny for the poor and needy. If the above priest lacks priestly qualities, the priest in Waiting for the Mahatma who performs rituals after the death of Sriram’s grand mother, wants to extort as much money as possible in the name of sending the dead soul to Heaven peacefully. Another class of fake priests deceives the faith of simple people by helping their barren wives to conceive within thirty days of their visit to the temple. About such a priest, in The Painter of Signs, the teacher says that it is not good to argue about him as he is a quarrelsome person and is very powerful. Even Daisy seems to be afraid of him.
Most of Narayan’s characters believe in many gods following the common practice in Hindu society. These gods are worshipped in their physical forms: human and non-human. The idol worship or worshipping of pictures of gods is very common in the Indian rural society. The people also believe in sacred things and sacred places. Raman’s aunt and Sriram’s grandmother go to Benares in their last days to end their life. Raman’s aunt says:

A visit to Kasi is the end. I may live for ten days or ten years or twenty, it is immaterial how long one lives after this stage. It is the ambition of everyone of my generation to conclude this existence at Kasi, to be finally dissolved in the Ganges. That is the most auspicious end to one’s life. (152)

When Jagan learns that his son, Mali, eats beef, he shudders with repulsion because the cow is a sacred animal for a Hindu. Similarly Sriram’s grandmother does not want to sit on a canvas chair presented to her by her grandson because she thinks that it is made of leather, probably of the cowhide, and hence she cannot pollute herself by sitting on it.

The village folk often go to the temple for worship or offer prayers and puja at home. In Swami and Friends, Swami offers prayer to god, when his paper boat and his cargo are wrecked in the gutter, either for saving the life of an ant, or if dead, for its smooth passage to heaven. He believes that through prayers, pebbles will be converted into coins. But Ponni’s desire in The Dark Room for getting a child was not fulfilled even after she prayed and promised offerings to gods. But the solution to her husband’s problem of getting a job for Savitri was solved through prayers. Margayya became rich within no time by propitiating the goddess of wealth and he also obtained a son when he prayed and gave offerings. Natraj’s deep prayer, which exhorted his whole being for saving the elephant, Kumar, was responded. Jagan offers coconuts to lord Ganesh when he receives a letter from his son Mali who had gone to America. All the lady characters, with a few exceptions, have staunch faith in the prayer to god. The sacred thread ceremony was very important to the Brahmins. But nowadays its importance is reduced and some use the thread to hang their bunch of keys, as does the old man, the landlord of
Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath*. The tuft of hair by which a priest or a pundit might be recognised has nowadays become outdated. Even Brahmins do not have tufts on their heads. This may be because the orthodox caste system is decaying. But in Narayan’s novels pundits and priests wear the tuft.

In the novels of Narayan one finds people giving the names of gods and goddesses to their children so that they should attain their qualities. When Chandran meets the beautiful Malathi he imagines her name to be Lakshmi because he cannot give a lesser name to such a paragon of beauty. In *The Painter of Signs*, Raman’s aunt’s name is Lakshmi. She tells Raman:

> We were a well-fed lot in our home. I was especially fortunate as I had the name of Goddess of Wealth, Laxmi, and no one dared say, “Go away Lakshmi” as it might be inauspicious. It was always good to say, “Oh, Lakshmi, welcome to our house,” and I was invited ungrudgingly into any of the hundred houses in our village. (20)

Lakshmi is the goddess propitiated in *The Financial Expert* as Lord Krishna is in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, Shiva and Parvati in *Mr. Sampath* and Narada in *The World of Nagaraj*. As there is a presiding deity in every Indian village, so there are presiding deities or saints in Narayan’s novels. Since Jagan is a rich businessman, he worships Goddess Lakshmi in the morning so that his business should further prosper. In every shop we can find the framed picture of goddess Lakshmi, hanging on the wall, with a garland round the frame. In the beginning of the novel, Narayan describes Jagan worshipping the Goddess of wealth:

> Jagan sat under the framed picture of the Goddess Lakshmi hanging on the wall, and offered prayer first thing in the day by reverently placing a string of jasmine on top of the frame. He also lit an incense stick and stuck in a crevice in the wall. (13)
In *The Man Eater of Malgudi* Natraj accepts that by the grace of Goddess Lakshmi whose framed picture is hanging on the wall of his press, he has been doing well in his business. He says: “I hung up a framed picture of Goddess Lakshmi, poised on her lotus, holding aloft the bounties of earth in her four hands and through her grace I did not do badly” (11). According to Hindu mythology, Saraswati is the spouse of Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe. She is worshipped chiefly as the Goddess of Learning and Enlightenment. It is the general belief that there is always a rivalry between the goddess of learning and the goddess of wealth. It is very rarely that these two goddesses bestow their boon in combination on men. Every Indian interested in learning and knowledge seeks the help of Saraswati. She is so associated with learning that even books and other reading materials are treated as the form of the goddess. When he hears that his son tore up his textbooks, a shocked Jagan says: “Could you not stop him? Did you not tell him that books must be treated respectfully, being a form of Goddess Saraswati? How could this boy ever pass his B.A.” (37).

There are also other goddesses who help mankind. Muthu, the owner of the teashop, who helps Natraj, says that there is not a single accident on the narrow and twisting roads because the goddess of the nearby shrine protects them. Protection is generally associated with the goddesses Durga and Kali because they kill demons and protect the Gods. In *Mr. Sampath*, Srinivas recalls as a part of Malgudi history, that Ram had crossed Malgudi on his way to Sri Lanka in search of his wife Sita. In *Mr. Sampath* the old man whom Srinivas approaches for a rented house says: “I have never seen a single house in our country without a picture of Krishna, Laxmi and Saraswati in it” (15). In *The Man Eater of Malgudi* the poet’s book is launched on the occasion of the spring festival at the Lord Krishna Temple. In *The Painter of Signs*, Raman’s aunt prays to Lord Krishna to save Raman from the siren (Daisy). Shiva represents disintegration. He is a destroyer who is easy to please. In *Mr. Sampath* Shiva has been represented as a destroyer. The image and the linga of Shiva are worshipped. In *Kanthapura* Moorthy unearths a linga and starts worship.
In *The Painter of Signs* the teacher in the village tells Daisy how the people spend their time in the monsoon season by going to the main hall of the temple: “When it rains the main hall of the temple is filled with people. A pundit comes and reads the *Ramayana* for forty days” (66). There is no undertaking in the Hindu society to be started without first honouring and worshipping Lord Ganapati. He is called ‘Vighneshwar’ or ‘the remover of impediments’. Raman’s aunt in *The Painter of Signs* visits the shrine of Ganesha every evening and listens to the Pundit’s discourse on the epic. The other Gods we come across in Narayan’s novels are Vishnu, Radha, Sita, Hanuman, Yama, Kamadeva, Brahma, Kubera, and Venkatesha etc. Although people’s life-style is changing fast in the villages they still gather in the temple and listen to the discourses of the pundit.

The priest has also been portrayed as a hypocrite and as a greedy man extracting huge amounts of money from the gullible masses. Ganapaty Sastrigal in *The Bachelor of Arts*, after retiring from government service settles down as a general adviser, an officiating priest for rituals and a match maker. It is interesting to note that he confined his activities only to a few rich families in the town. They know that they are cheating the masses and yet they do it in the name of god and religion.

Rao does not speak of such a variety of gods and goddesses, as does Narayan. In *Kanthapura* Rao speaks of the presiding deity of the village—Kenchamma who is a powerful goddess who came from the Heavens:

She [Kenchamma] killed a demon ages, ages ago, a demon that had come to ask our young sons as food and our young women as wives. Kenchamma came from the Heavens…and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma Hill is all red…. Tell me, how could this happen, if it were not for Kenchamma and her battle? Thank heaven, not only did she slay the demon, but she even settled down among us, and this much I shall say, never has she failed us in our grief. (2)
The Goddess is very powerful and cures illness. Siddanna’s wife Sati asks her neighbour Satamma:

What goddess sanctified the neighbouring region, and when Satamma said it was our Kenchamma, Sati tore a rag from her sari fringe and put into it a three-piece bit and a little rice and an areca nut, and hung it securely to the roof. And of course, she woke up the next morning to find no fever at all. (72-73)

The Kanthpurians ascribe all their problems to the will of Goddess Kenchamma, so much so that they invoke her grace and benediction to destroy the English in India. Himavathy was believed to be the daughter of Kenchamma, the goddess of the hill, and the promontory near the village was thought to be the ‘abode of Siva’. Several myths have also been associated with river Himavathy, the daughter of Kenchamma. The Kanthapurians offer goddess Kenchamma ‘saree’ and ‘gold-drink’ to ward off the malevolent influences. During ploughing time, the villagers wait for the ‘Rohini’ star to “yoke their bulls to the plough” (151). Ploughing is considered to be fruitful only if the omen of the Eagle—the vehicle of Goddess Kenchamma, shows itself. The villagers light bonfires and sing and dance in Kenchamma’s honour. They sing: “Kenchamma. Kenchamma. Goddess, benign and bounteous, Mother of earth, blood of life, harvest Queen rain-crowned, Kechamma, Kenchamma, Goddess, benign and Bounteous” (10).

The founding of the Kanthapurishwari temple is very interesting:

In fact, it did not exist more than three years ago, and to tell you the truth, that’s where all the trouble began. Corner House Narasamma’s son, Moorthy — our Moorthy as we always called him — was going through our backyard one day and, seeing a half sunk linga, said, “why not unearth it and wash it and consecrate it?” “Why not!” said we all, and as it was the holidays and all the city boys were in the village, they began to put up a little wall and a tile roof to protect the god. (15)

There is priest in Kanthapura also. Young Bhatta, who “began his life with a loincloth at his waist, and a copper pot in his hand”(8) is transformed into a rich
landowner who has no scruples about buying up the fields of freedom fighters when they are auctioned after the 'no-tax' campaign. He hoards the money he is paid at religious ceremonies, and soon starts lending it out. Thus the Brahmin, whose duty it is to lead the people along the right path, has slipped into being an avaricious moneylender. He is not worried about religion but money. He is so busy going to town on legal business that "it was so difficult to get him for an obsequial dinner or a marriage ceremony" (30). When things get hot in Kanthapura he goes to Benares on a pilgrimage. Later he sells all his lands in Kanthapura and settles down at Kashi because "in Kashi, for every hymn and hiccup you get a rupee" (259).

The novel is replete with rituals especially in relation to the celebration of festivals like 'Sankara Jayanthi', 'Rama festival', 'Krishna festival', 'Deepavali' etc. "Karthik is the month of the gods, and as they pass by the Potters' Street and the Weavers' Street, lights are lit to see them pass by" (118). Fasting, as an important ritual, is undertaken by the villagers to gain divine grace and appease the gods. Moorthy undergoes fasts several times. Ratna offers "ten coconuts and a kumkum worship" (95). The novel shows the dynamic power of a living religious convention. Religion seems to sustain the spirit of the people of Kanthapura. The political activity of the inhabitants of Kanthapura gains power from their religious faith. In the novel, Gandhi is considered as a god who came to save India. The sage Valmiki goes to heaven and informs Brahma that on earth, men have come from across the ocean and trampled their wisdom and persecuted them:

When the sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality, there was born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world has never beheld. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle when he began to lisp the lanaguage of wisdom. (16)

In the novels of Markandaya also we find people very religious. In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukmani prays when the rains do not come:
That year the rains failed...a week went by, two. We stared at the cruel sky, calm, blue, indifferent to our need. We threw ourselves on the earth and we prayed. I took a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to my Goddess, and I wept at her feet. I thought she looked at me with compassion and I went away comforted, but no rain came. (72)

The false priests were so common in the villages that not only the novelists under our consideration but other Indian novelists also have spoken of these fraudulent priests. Khurana observes: “There are lakhs of so-called ‘God men’ performing so-called ‘miracles’ to impress people. A magician uses tricks to entertain. These God men also do the same — but to exploit” (1986:9).

Bhattacharya portrays the arrogance and hypocrisy of the higher castes. The ritual of a milk bath for the idols is not a novel feature introduced by him but is prevalent in many temples of India. Bhattacharya in He Who Rides A Tiger satirises the blind religious faith of the ignorant masses who will grudge to feed famished destitutes but fill whole-heartedly the alms bowls of the sadhus, dressed in saffron cloth, and misguided devotees who will turn a deaf ear to the cries of children dying of hunger but donate buckets of milk for bathing of the idol in the temple.

In He Who Rides A Tiger, Kalo, by force of circumstances, becomes a rebel. He transforms himself into Mangal Adhikari, the Brahmin priest; like Raju in The Guide, and by a clever trick performs the miracle of making an image of Shio rise out of the soil under an old banyan tree. He soon becomes a prosperous priest of the new temple and is idolised by the same rich and powerful people who had despised and persecuted him when he was wretchedly poor. Kalo is sarcastic when he says that sins committed in one’s life may have to be expiated in another through sufferings. He knows that the real evildoers seem untouched by Karma. They eat well, utter the name of ‘Shio’ and ‘Rama’ and live peacefully and comfortably.

The sentiments expressed by the Indian novelists are underlined by the words of Sanal Edamarku, which is worth quoting:
Keeping people away from material realities and pressing them too hard around delusional beliefs like astrology, auspicious times, palmistry, demonology, reincarnation, extra-sensory perception, telepathy, prayers, pujas, mantras, pilgrimages etc. are a cunning way to ward off from social revolt. The forces representing the status quo want them to get addicted to such beliefs. So, deliberate efforts are made towards this end. Secondly it is a source of income for thousands of astrologers, palmists and spiritual leaders without doing any productive work. (1985:29)

**Caste and Untouchability**

Brahmanoasay mukhama sit  
Bahu rajanayah kruta:  
Uru tadasay yadvaishya  
Padabhayam Sudro ajayat.  
*(Purusasukta Rigveda, X 90,12).*

The above quoted hymn describes the four classes as having come of the different limbs of the body of creator i.e., the Brahmanan came out of mouth, the Kshatriya came from arms, the Vaisya from thighs and the Sudra from the feet. The original purpose of this division was to establish the organic relation between the classes. The main aim of this division was to provide work and bread to all, according to their mental and physical capacities, and skill. Originally the varnas were based on character and profession and not on birth. Mahabharata defines Brahmana as one, “who possesses virtues like truth, charity, fortitude, good conduct, gentleness, austerity and compassion” (Mahadevan, 1986:72). Manu also says: “A Sudra becomes Brahmana and a Brahmana becomes Sudra by conduct” (Butlet, 1967:97). The concept was evolved to keep the social fabric in a harmonious condition. Subsequently, the caste system became a rigid and dividing force, and class by birth became prominent. The concept of untouchability developed with the passage of time, which, according to Gandhi, is the greatest blot on Hinduism.
The theory that all people were divided into four classes is one of the most important aspects of the Hindu religion, laying emphasis on the performance of social duties and obligations according to carefully formulated codes of behaviour so as to keep the Brahmins on a higher plane in the society of all times. Of the four classes, it is the first and the last that attract attention of the scholars. For, the Brahmins controlled the religious institutions while the Sudras constituted the bulk of the populace.

The literature of the Hindu religion was mostly written by the priestly class; and naturally, therefore, they presumably advanced their own class interests. "The statement a 'Sudra is the servant of another to be slain at will', would have led to social anarchy, whereas the emphasis was always on social order" (Embree, 1966:75). The origin of the class structure was supposed to be divine and not human. "No priestly class in any other civilisation perhaps has made such claims for its sanctity, as did the Brahmins; but neither has any other received such willing recognition of that sanctity" (Embree, 1966:75).

The caste system in Indian villages, originally based on occupations, became rigid in the course of thousands of years. The village structure and the economic and social relations among different castes living in individual or clusters of villages were so balanced and harmonised that they withstood outside pressure and survived for centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no tendency in the caste system for further rigidification. Rather there were distant waves in the atmosphere for relaxation. English education had penetrated into the villages though in a very limited scale. Gandhi's messages for removal of untouchability were being circulated in the villages by sincere, Khadi-clad, congress workers. Moorthy and his comrades in Kanthapura were such men.

Among the Brahmins there were many sub-castes. Brahmins of higher sub-castes did not marry in lower sub castes and did not take cooked food in such families. The intra caste relationship was more rigid in different non-Brahmin castes than in Brahmin castes. Marriages in all castes were strictly within the caste. For consideration of different social problems arising within the caste and irregularities committed by individual families,
regular caste meetings were convened and there were heated discussions and specific decisions were taken. Any family disobeying the decisions and directions was excommunicated. Moorthy was thus excommunicated for visiting a pariah's house. On occasions of caste meetings of different artisan castes, regular feasts were arranged and different families made contributions for them. The untouchable castes formed a separate group in the village.

Landless agricultural labourers, Dhobies, Chamars and Panas had caste professions, the first of washing, the second of toddy tapping from date palm trees and the third of basket weaving, drum beating and hide collection, but they also worked mainly as agricultural labourers. Each individual untouchable cast considered the other caste in the group as untouchable and refrained from inter-dining and inter-marriage with them. In every village they lived in separate sites at the outskirts and the entire group of castes was untouchable to the caste Hindus. But their functions were essential and without them, it was not possible for the caste Hindus to manage their day-to-day life and business. They formed the main source of labour for agriculture, they did the washing and chopping of fuel, drumming etc. They took cooked food in all types of caste Hindu families and were invited by them on their social functions but sat separately. The question of any caste Hindu person taking any type of food in the houses of the untouchable caste people did not arise. In Kanthapura Moorthy was excommunicated for visiting the house of an untouchable in the course of his campaign and for having taken a sip of milk, which they offered him. The caste Hindu people in the village did not take any type of liquor but the untouchable males had no inhibition to take toddy tapped from date palm. Similarly bidies and cigarettes were not generally smoked by the caste Hindu people. Smoking was a taboo for the Brahmins but permissible for the non-Brahmins.

The caste Hindus did not allow their wells to be used by the untouchables. In Untouchable we find Sohini, Bakha's sister and other women of the lower caste begging for water at the well. The higher castes did not allow the untouchables to enter their houses, or use their mats for sitting. The untouchables could not enter the temples or participate in social and religious functions on equal basis. Bakha and Sohini were chased
out of the temple as they were untouchables. Persons from caste Hindu families washed their clothes if they touched untouchable persons. Several forces have worked to relax these practices and fuse the Indian society into a cohesive one, reducing its divisive characteristics and caste barriers. Gandhi focused attention on the plight of the untouchables and the baneful effects of the practices of untouchability. The removal of the practice was the most important social programme of the national movement before independence. The practice was made illegal under the Constitution.

To uplift the untouchable classes, reservations of seats in legislatures, services and educational institutions were made. Special facilities like scholarships, exemption from payment of fee in educational institutions, free hostel accommodation, etc. were provided to the untouchables to come up in the social ladder. There have, however, been some changes in the villages. Now educated persons of other castes attend social functions of educated persons of untouchable castes if he is a colleague, neighbour or friend. The caste prejudice among educated people is thin. There is inter-dining and social interaction. The progress of English education, westernisation, publicity and propaganda has succeeded in eroding these caste barriers much during the last sixty years. Smoking *bidis* and cigarettes is not a taboo to any caste in the villages now. Poultry rearing is being done by many Caste Hindu families and eating of eggs has become common. But now the date palm toddy is not much in use. Liquor of other varieties has entered the village points, mostly in illicit manner.

Indian saints have preached brotherhood, and the feeling is certainly noticed amongst the Indians but limited to their caste brethren. The Kshatriyas are looked down upon by the Brahmins; the Vaishyas by the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins. The sudras are treated worse than animals. This inhuman treatment to lower caste people is prevalent even today in villages. Moral code of conduct is restricted to one’s caste as is rightly presented in the case of the low caste Bhakka in *Untouchable*. Ambedkar rightly observes: “Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious” (1936:23).
But there are brave young people in the villages who want to break the shackles of the caste system. Anand has such a rebel in his novel *The Village*. Lalu, the protagonist is a little headstrong and impetuous by nature, Lalu one day eats in a Muslim cook shop in protest against his own caste-ridden society, and gets his hair, which is the symbol of Sikhism, cut in a hair-cutting saloon in the town. In reaction, his villagers, who are all Sikhs, at once swoop down upon him, blacken his face, seat him on the back of a donkey and parade him through the village. Though the rebellious boy yields to a force much stronger than his, his progressive spirit is not thereby subdued or bent. Anand’s novels contain other characters who are progressive and think against the caste system. The poet in *Untouchable* harangues not only about the prospect of the emergence of a ‘casteless‘ society but also a ‘classless society’, in which all distinctions get obliterated and individual freedom is fully realised. He says:

> We must destroy caste; we must destroy the inequality of birth and unalterable vocations. We must recognise an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone...[We must accept] the machine, which clears dung without anyone having to handle it—flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of casteless and classless society. (132)

Ananta in *The Big Heart* is a man of action. He is a revolutionary urging change both in his personal and public life. On the personal level, he chooses to live with Janaki, a young widow, breaking the conventional norms of caste and religion. He looks after her with tender care even as she is dying of consumption. The Ananta-Janaki relationship meets with serious social disapproval of the caste-brotherhood, but exemplifies the self-sustaining love that needs no social or institutional scaffolding.

The sufferings of the untouchables are quite well portrayed in Anand’s *The Road*. In this novel the temporal locale of the text is shifted to post-independence India. Anand was a personal witness to the discrimination and humiliation to which Harijans were subjected in a remote village of Haryana. As Anand himself explains:
Well, it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, to find that the outcastes not only in South India, but also in the mixed north were still consigned to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragic-comic to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. (Cowasjee, 1973:52)

The high caste Hindus are unwilling to let go the ossified caste-structures, since they enjoy a privileged position in this orthodox dispensation. In the novel *The Road*, this section is represented by the landlord—Thakur Singh, and the priest—Suraj Mani. It is important for them to keep the untouchables poor, because it is wealth and not caste that determines the social status in the changing world of materialistic values. If the road brings prosperity to the men of lower castes, it must be restricted. But there are also good people in the villages. Dhooli Singh in *The Village* is one example. When their huts are burned, the homeless harijans are sheltered in Dhooli Singh’s field. The Sarkar supports the chamar workers and even the priest and landlord are forced to relent, as the general tide is not in their favour. However, the attitude of the high caste boys does not change; they still treat the untouchables as dirt. Bhikhu knows that he has the physical strength to hit back, but he decides to quit and find a break elsewhere. He takes the road he has helped to build, and starts his journey to Delhi “where no one knew who he was and where there would be no caste or outcaste” (110).

Just as the caste system has been in India since time immemorial, attempts to abolish it have also been there from that time onwards. Right from the days of the *Upanishads* thinkers have spoken against the caste system. Buddha preached against it 2500 years ago. In the nineteenth century, there were four major movements with the main aim, among other things, being to abolish the caste system. They were: “Brahmo Samaj”, “Arya Samaj”, “Rama Krishna Movement”, and “The Theosophical Movement”. In the twentieth century, the Gandhian protest against the caste system became an equally powerful force. The famous fast undertaken by Gandhi in 1932 to prevent the
establishment of separate electorates for the untouchables was the climax of protests against caste system in India.

To Anand, casteism is an age-old lie made by the powerful and wicked in society to uphold discrimination. His prime concern as a social critic is to remove the caste system as it damages social cohesion by giving certain sections of society an unfair advantage over others permanently. Casteism is a hydra-headed evil contagion like smallpox. It is a heinous crime. It poisons and destroys the dignity of a man. Hence it must be rejected. Anand started his career as a novelist by presenting the evils of the caste system. Besides Untouchable; The Road and The Big Heart also project caste system from different perspectives as the greatest malady of Indian society.

In Two Leaves and a Bud, Buta is a barber by birth, but the ignominy traditionally attached to his low caste is rarely thought of, and he is greeted as Buta Ram by the poor coolies of high-caste origin, as he is a Sardar in position and as he is not reduced to penury like them. Though Munoo in Coolie and Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud are Kshatriyas by birth, their belonging to the wealthless class compels them to greet and obey people like Buta of the barber caste. The two novels may be regarded as proletarian novels as their heroes belong to the unpropertied class who must sell their labour in order to exist.

The Big Heart deals with one aspect of casteism that has not received a significant consideration in either of the two novels, Untouchable and The Road, which is snobbishness. The caste snobbery among the upper-castes makes their social life filled with unnecessary hardships. The ‘superior’ sub-castes within a caste treat the ‘lower’ sub-castes as ‘untouchables’. To dispel this ‘untouchability’ from the public eye, the lower sub-castes do anything on earth to cultivate friendship with superior sub-castes. Lala Murli Dhar’s ridiculous insistence that Gokul Chand should attend the marriage of his grandson is only due to his desire to assimilate his family with the ‘superior’ caste of Kaseras through friendship and social inter-mingling. His proud feeling that his family has attained a ‘superior caste status’ makes him turn his back on his community of coppersmiths without actually establishing deep and intimate connections with the
"superior" Kaseras’ community. He insists on the presence of Gokul Chand at any cost, at Nikha’s marriage to Kausalaya; but he does not care to invite the members of his own brotherhood for the ceremony.

Gokul Chand’s fear of being expelled from his Kaseras community for attending the marriage of a thatthiar and Lala Murli Dhar’s ambition to attain the caste of kaseras, and the problems that accompany it, are basically due to the perpetuation of the caste system that could be avoided only if society were willing to abandon the old caste and sub-caste divisions. Though the scavengers were Hindus and also worshipped Hindu Gods and Goddesses, they were however not allowed to live in Hindu colonies; they could not worship in the Hindu temples; they could not get water from Hindu wells and their children were not allowed to study in the schools with the children of Hindus. All the doors were closed for them except the doors of the latrines. The untouchables lived isolated from the mainstream in secluded areas. They had an animal like existence. Even for the most essential things like water they had to depend on the other castes. The scarcity of water had made the surroundings of the outcastes’ colony so filthy that the idea of sanitation and hygiene even if forcibly injected would have had no relevance to the ground reality. As seen in the novel Untouchable, untouchable women had to:

Collect at the foot of the caste-Hindu’s well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers...the outcastes had to wait for a chance to bring some caste Hindu to the well, for luck to decide that he was kind, for Fate to ordain that he had time to get their pitchers filled with water. (26)

Bakha in Untouchable is illiterate and although he wishes to go to school and study, no school will accept him, as he is an untouchable. When Bakha meets the schoolboys of rich upper class families his desire for learning flares up:

And he had wept and cried to be allowed to go to school. But then his father had told him that schools were meant for the babus, not for the bhangis [lowly sweepers]. He hadn’t quite understood the reason for that, then. Later, at the British barracks he realised why his father had not sent him to school. He was
sweeper’s son and could never be a babu. Later still, he realised that there was no school, which would admit him because the parents of other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of a sweeper’s son. (44)

What Anand makes strikingly clear is that even though the cleaning of latrines is Bakha’s profession, he handles it with a great deal of dexterity and cleanliness. When Bakha does his work, he works at the latrines ‘happy and contented’. Anand says, “Though his job was dirty, he remained comparatively clean. He did not even soil his sleeves handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them” (18-19). What are remarkable are Bakha’s heightened sensitiveness to cleanliness as well as his self-respect. Anand purposely portrays the dirty habits of the upper-caste Hindus in order to show that notwithstanding their claims to be clean, they in their habits are many times dirtier than the untouchables. For example, the woman, to whom Bakha had gone for chapattis, abuses Bakha as ‘eater of your masters’ just because he had sat at the doorstep of the woman’s house and had as such defiled it. On the contrary, she displays her dirtier habits by asking her child to ease himself in the drain and afterwards to rub himself clean on the ground in the absence of some one to give him water.

The caste Hindus employ abuses for the people of lower castes while they use decent language for the people of their own caste or class. Since the untouchables were considered thick-skinned, devoid of finer sensibilities, and closer to animals, they were thought to deserve a thrashing. Tulasidas’s provocative lines in Ram Charit Manas that “a drum, a yokel, an untouchable, an animal, and a woman—all deserve thrashing” (V, 58) confirm this discredited belief. Hence, an upper-caste Hindu of some significance who refrained from using physical violence or abuses against the untouchable was considered a weakling. Range Gowda in Kanthapura, being the Patel of the village, cannot reconcile to the practice of non-violence in dealing with low-class elements. Range Gowda threatens Bade Khan, the policeman that he would not be at peace with himself till “that dog has eaten filth”(81). Even Havildar Charat Singh in Untouchable employs abuses against Bakha by calling him “scoundrel of a sweeper’s son” (17) even if it is all in a tone of love and affection. The fact that Bakha is prepared to be a sweeper all his life for the
sake of this Havildar shows that he knows the abuses to be no more than harmless expressions. The condition of the untouchables was really pathetic. Forster in his preface to the novel Untouchable says:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. (8)

Untouchable depicts graphically the hardships and humiliations that Panchamas suffer. It exposes the ugly deformity of the Hindu society. The novelist does it just by narrating the life of Bakha, an untouchable boy. When Bakha touches a high caste Hindu accidentally, the Hindu becomes furious and abuses Bakha. "Swine, dog, why didn't you shout and warn me of your approach! Don't you know, you brute, that you must not touch me?" (53). His crime is that he forgot to announce his approach as he moved on the road. Bakha pleads and apologises but the man gives Bakha a sharp slap. This is the worst moment in his life. Some time later, when Bakha peeps into a temple, a sudden cry "polluted! polluted!" rends the air. The priests and the worshipers rush out. "Get off the steps; scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service. You have defiled our temple!" (69). Then Bakha sees his sister Sohini following the priest. She tells him that Pandit Kalinath had tried to molest her and when she resisted, began to cry, "polluted! polluted!"

In The Road Pandit Suraj Mani does not allow the untouchables to worship in the temples. Sajnu, the son of Thakur Singh the landlord, physically bars the way of Bhiku and his mother Laxmi when they want to go to the temple for worship. They also try to declare Dholi Singh an outcaste, though he is actually a sympathiser of the outcasts: "To be sure we will declare him outcaste any how..."(34). In The Confessions of A Lover, Krishna Chander and his aunt Devki are also excommunicated for mixing with the Muhammadans who are also considered semi-untouchables. Devki, owing to her excommunication, commits suicide. Krishna Chander says: "Our caste brotherhood excommunicated my aunt for giving food to the Muslim step mother of my friend. And
my aunt ... committed suicide” (97). In *The Bubble*, Anand criticises the Brahmins for

drinking cow urine and feeling contempt for the untouchables: “Our Brahmins drink cow

urine as a nectar before the ceremonies and yet feel tainted if the shadow of an

untouchable falls on them” (38).

The untouchables had to beg for food as a reward for their work. The food, which

is the left-over of the other castes, is thrown to the untouchables. The practice of the

untouchables feeding themselves on the left-overs of food of upper-caste people has been

quite common in the past and is still prevalent in far-flung rural areas. Bakha thus begs:

“Bread for the sweeper, Mother. Bread for the sweeper... the sweeper has come

for the bread, Mother! The sweeper has come for the bread,” he shouted a little

louder. But it was of no avail. He penetrated further into the alley and standing

near a point where the doors of four houses were near each other, he shouted his

call: “Bread for the sweeper, mother; bread for the sweeper.” (76-77)

The caste Hindu is armed with the feeling of six thousand years of social and

class superiority—a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that the untouchable is a

human being, but insists on treating him like a sub-human creature, to be ignored or

bullied or exploited as the occasion demands. “It is this that makes the temple priest

Pandit Kalinath treat Sohini, Bakha’s sister like a juicy morsel of girlhood to be molested

with impunity” (Purohit, 1998:87). On the other hand, six thousand years of suppression

have left deep marks upon the untouchable’s life and psychology. He is caught in a

vicious circle from which there is no escape. Compelled to clean dung and live as mere

dung, he has to depend for water on the mercy of the caste Hindus and for food on left-

overs given by them. Bakha resents his lot and mortified by it, wants to protest against it,

but the servility of centuries, which is ingrained in him, paralyses him even when he

vaguely thinks of retaliation. When he accidentally touches and pollutes a man on the

street, a crowd gathers around him. Then:

His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, faraway

from the torment. But then he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a
physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been
even enough to unbalance the skeleton like bodies of the onlookers but a moral one.

(54)

Similarly when, at the temple, Sohini tells Bakha about her molestation by the
priest, his first reaction is, “I will go and kill him”(71). Next moment however, he feels
the cells of his body lapse back chilled.

The strangling tentacles of the caste system are found in the novels of Narayan
also. In *The Bachelor of Arts* the rigidity of the caste system prevalent in the society
troubles Chandran’s mind. He fears that perhaps his parents would not allow him to
marry the girl he loves. He blows out the lamp and sits in his chair completely absorbed
in the thoughts:

Suppose, though unmarried, she belonged to some other caste? A marriage would
not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If India was to attain
salvation these watertight divisions must go — Community, Caste. Sects, Sub-
sects and still further divisions. (56)

In the caste-ridden Hindu society, arranged marriages are the only possibility.
They hold a belief that marriages are made in heaven, and that it is all settled already, the
husband of every girl and the wife of every man. It is nobody’s choice. However
irrational it may appear, the belief still holds water and the practice continues even today.
It is really disgraceful that even today the system of *Chaturvarnya* is being upheld in one
form or the other. The lower castes are looked down upon with disgust. Save Chandran,
Raman and others of the younger generation, Narayan’s characters refuse to come out of
the caste barrier. Raju’s mother (*The Guide*) is first sympathetic towards Rosie, but
changes her attitude when she learns that Rosie belongs to the *devadasi* class. Even
Jagan, (*The Vendor of Sweets*) that fanatic preserver of Gandhian principles, is reluctant
to accept a non-Hindu girl as his daughter-in-law. Raman’s aunt (*Painter of Signs*) does
not favour Daisy to be Raman’s wife as she belongs to another religion and in protest she
goes on a pilgrimage. Narayan correctly portrays the perverted mentality of the Hindus.
There is no denying the fact that the picture as portrayed by Narayan is widely seen even today; marriages are arranged within the castes, and the lower caste people are harassed in the way or the other, and are looked down upon by the high castes in the society. There are a very few persons like Marco (The Guide) who does not stick to his caste as he accepts Rosie, of a dancing class, as his wife. But their marriage ends on a very sad note.

The village society is divided into castes and sub-castes. Each caste tends to live in a separate part or street of the village with the untouchables entirely separate from the rest as we have seen in Waiting for the Mahatma. In this way a large section of the Indian population was kept away from the mainstream of life. And since the Hindu religion demanded that the untouchables should not be allowed to acquire property, it was but natural that they had to live somehow completely at the mercy of the so-called high caste people.

There are other novelists of the modern period who underline the sufferings of the untouchables. Roy in her Booker Prize novel, The God of Small Things, portrays the untouchables of the village called Ayemanan in Kerala and exposes the pitiable condition they found themselves in even after independence. In The God of Small Things, Velutha, like Bakha, is not allowed to enter the house of the upper class. He and his fellow low-caste people were not allowed to touch anything that the upper class touched. Roy observes:

Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time in her girlhood, when paravans [untouchables] were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a paravan’s footprint. In Mammachi’s time, paravans, like other untouchables, weren’t allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed”. (73-74)
In *The God of Small Things*, on the lower strata of the society are the Paravans, the Pelayas and the Pulayas who are considered to be untouchables. When the British came to Malabar a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas were converted to Christianity and joined the Churches to escape the scourge of untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as ‘Rice Christians’. It didn’t take them long to realise that their progression was from bad to worse. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. After independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservation or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians. “It was like having to sweep away your foot prints with out a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all” (73-74). But it must be noted that Christians were among the pioneers who tried to alleviate the condition of the untouchables. Punnyan Kunju, the father-in-law of Mammachi, had founded a school for the untouchables. Velutha is a good example of the modern untouchable who was educated and gainfully employed thanks to modern education, but socially remained an outcaste. Chiefly because of education and encouragement we find a change in Velutha’s behaviour:

There was an unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quite way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel. (76)

When Velutha returned to Ayemenem after four years Mammachi rehired him in the factory, although the workers were of the view that “paravans are not meant to be carpenters” (78). Society would not allow people of lower strata to come up in life — firstly, by depriving them of education and secondly by denying them job opportunities. Roy underlines this agony of untouchables in her masterpiece. They were also demanding that untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names. They demanded not to be addressed as Achoo Parayan or Kelan Paravan, or Kuttan Pulayan, but just as Achoo, or Kelan, or Kuttan (69).
Rao also could not avoid speaking of the evils of the caste system. In Kanthapura we find Moorthy and his followers opposing the caste system. The village folk at first could not digest what Moorthy preached. Mixing with the low castes was even beyond their wildest dreams and Moorthy has to face great opposition too. Some oppose Moorthy’s campaigns and schemes. The Swami does not approve of his mixing with the low-caste people and instantly excommunicates him. The caste feeling was so strong in Kanthapura that when Narasamma comes to know that her son Moorthy is mixing with pariahs, she would not serve him food in the kitchen:

When the food is cooked, she lays a leaf in the main hall, and does not even put a glass of water for the libations. And she goes to the veranda, where Moorthy is reading and says, “The leaf is laid”. “I am coming”. And Moorthy sits by the kitchen threshold and eats like a servant, in mouthfuls, slowly and without a word.

(64)

When Narasamma passes away, Moorthy takes food at Rangamma’s place. And Rangamma, too, gave him food at the kitchen door as Narasamma had done. Although Rangamma is disappointing and rigid in the beginning, later she deservingly becomes the leader when Moorthy gets jailed and all people admire her for her natural goodness, generosity, intelligence and dedication to the cause.

When policeman Bade Khan comes to stay in the village, due to the existing rigid cast segmentation, he could not stay either in the potters’ street or in the Sudras’ street, or in the Brahmins’ street. So he went to Patwari Nanjundia who too refused to help him and suggested that he should go to the Patel Range Gowda.

Rao in Kanthapura shows the effect of Gandhi’s call to eradicate untouchability. The greatest crisis in Moorthy’s life occurred when in the course of his campaigning Moorthy goes to the pariah quarters to find Rachanna. As he is not at home, his wife welcomes him and asks him to come inside. Moorthy cannot decide for sometime whether to go inside the house of the untouchable or not. Rachanna’s wife quickly sweeps the corner and spreads a wattle mat for him and places before him a little milk in
a shining brass tumbler. Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips and taking somehow one sip, lays it aside. Thus, Gandhi's fight for social equality and untouchability succeeds in Kanthapura.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, except an occasional reference to Muslims and cobblers, there is little mention of caste. It appears Markandaya makes particular reference to the Muslim women with an intention to express her dislike for the *purdah* system. But Markandya gives a detailed description of the class system, which is the dominant factor of social stratification. In the village, the landlords are at the top of the social hierarchy. The landless farmers, the labourers, etc., belong to the lower class. Even though Nathan has tilled the land for thirty years, he is told that the land would be given to another tenant if he fails to make the payment. He thinks "money is not every thing" (95) but for the rich people money is everything. The rich traders like Biswas turn even the times of scarcity into a season for profiteering.

**Gandhism and Independence movement**

Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest living influence on India and its people in the beginning of the twentieth century. He stood for the downtrodden, especially the untouchables, whom he called the People of God or 'Harijans'. While trying to win independence for India, he made all efforts to uplift the untouchables. Unnithan in his book *Gandhi in Free India* calls him a dual revolutionary. "He was a dual revolutionary because he wanted to change not only the goals but also the means" (1979:121). Gandhi features in many Indian novels. Anand wrote his first novel *Untouchable* with Gandhi's sanction. In Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* Gandhi is a character. Rao's *Kanthapura* is a Gandhian epic. As Nehru says Gandhi was:

Like a powerful current of fresh air...like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scale from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people's minds. (1972:358)
Gandhi always spoke for the untouchables. His solidarity with the untouchables is clear from this statement in *Untouchable*:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an untouchable...Therefore, I pray that, if I should be born again, I should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra, but as an outcaste, as an untouchable. (164)

In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, when Gandhi comes to Malgudi he visits the Harijan colony. When it was known that Gandhi would visit the colony:

The authorities did everything to transform the place. All the stench mysteriously vanished; the garbage and offal that lay about, and flesh and hide put out to sun-dry on the roofs, disappeared. All that night municipal and other employees kept working, with the aid of petrol lamps...Gandhi noticed all the hectic activity, but out of a sense of charity refrained from commenting on it. (33-34)

Gandhi regarded untouchability as the greatest crime and a blot on Hinduism. He fought against so many social evils regarding women such as infant marriage, barriers to widow marriage, dowry system, heavy expenditure in marriages, purdah system etc. The removal of untouchability is Gandhi’s remarkable contribution to the service of humanity. Gandhi considered this evil not only cruel but an inhuman institution as it was below human dignity and was a heinous crime. Gandhi stood strongly for the abolition of untouchability. He criticised the Indians for denying the untouchables their rights. In *Untouchable* he addresses the people thus: “As we all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of the foreign nation, we have ourselves for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our iniquity” (162).

Gandhi wanted everything to be opened to the untouchables:
All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums, must be declared open to the untouchables. And if you all profess to love me, give me a direct proof of your love by carrying on propaganda against the observance of untouchability. Do this, but let there be no compulsion or brute forces in securing this end. Peaceful persuasion is the only means. (166)

Dissenting voices about Gandhi can also be heard in the novels. About the teachings of the Gandhi-men Achamma, in Kanthapura, says, “We shall be dead before the world is polluted. We shall have closed our eyes” (19). In The Sword and the Sickle after their abortive expedition to Allahabad, as the comrades and peasants travel by train back to Rajgareh along with the Count, they join him in the criticism of Gandhi. They criticise Gandhi’s rejection of the machine, his propaganda for charkha and condemnation of ‘destructive machine age’, which sounds similar to Lalu’s father Nihal Singh’s preference of bullock cart over train. The sharpest attack comes from Prof. Verma:

The Mahatma knows that the spinning wheel is a good slogan, though he knows that all the yarn necessary for the needs of the country cannot be provided by hand spinning. So he shuts a corner of his left eye behind his glasses and winks at the factory-wallahs to go ahead with their plans. (212)

Though Lalu is no conscious disciple of Gandhi, he approaches Gandhi with the hope that he would lead the Kisan movement to victory, as in Champaran and Kheda, but receives only advice. The advice consists of values, which should be practised, and a course of action to be followed. The first step in the action is for the peasants to conquer fear. This advice, which is practical enough to appeal to the peasants, is accepted with unprecedented success. They do not mind going to jail under Lalu’s leadership. Lalu was a soldier who had been used to violent action but does not indulge in any violent action after meeting Gandhi except slap the chaprasi who was belabouring the innocent peasant. This was perhaps a situation where violence was justified.
Granny, Sriram’s grandmother, in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, considered Gandhi as one who “preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into temples and who involved people in difficulties with the people” (141). A villager said to Sriram, “men of khadi are troublemakers” (79). Gorpad, an ardent follower of Mahatma and a terrorist, feared, “Mahatma will not let me be violent even in thought” (50). The carter, in the same novel, thought, “these politicians, Gandhi-folk, they won’t leave anyone in peace” (71). These responses and voices mirrored the Gandhian consciousness in the colonial and the post-colonial India. Again, there are businessmen who impartially contribute money to Gandhi’s Harijan fund as well as the war fund. The contractor who worshipped a portrait of Gandhi, which he hung on his wall and gave five thousand to the Harijan fund; contributes the same amount to the war fund too. Bowing his head shyly he says to Sriram, “I’m impartial; when the governor himself comes and appeals how can we refuse? After all we are all business men” (108).

There are also ardent followers of Gandhi like Bharati and Gorpad who would lay down their lives for Bapuji; again, there are men like Jagadish who pervert Gandhi’s preaching to suit their own purposes. In *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan is portrayed as a fanatic observer of all the externals of Gandhism. He spins and produces yarn for his own clothes, scrupulously observes dietary restrictions, (twenty drops of honey in hot water ... is the natural way taking in all the sugar we need). Jagan himself says: “I don’t drink more than four ounces of water a day, and that must be boiled at night and cooled in mud jug open to the sky”(109). He uses only those sandals, which are made of hide of a cow that has died a natural death. As Jagan sits in his sweetmart reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, he has one ear perpetually cocked at the frying noises in the kitchen, and one ear permanently glued to the front stall where customers and beggars crowd. He keeps double account and treats parts of sale produce as ‘free cash’. And unashamedly he declares: “If Gandhi had said some where, ‘pay your sales tax uncomplainingly,’ he would have followed his advice, but Gandhi had made no reference to the sales tax anywhere to Jagan’s knowledge” (117).
Tara Malhotra has drawn a realistic picture of Jagan. She writes: "Jagan is a bundle of contradictions, a professed Gandhian whose high-minded Gandhian principles are soon found to be a smoke-screen" (1969:53). Jagan could not pass his B. A. from sheer incapacity, but he is never tired of declaring unashamedly that it was his love for his country, which made him give up college and throw himself heading into struggle for political emancipation—under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

Almost like Jagan, Natesh in *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a great opportunist whose Gandhism is only skin deep. As the Municipal Chairman, he prefers the Gandhian cause to serve his personal ends. In fact his Gandhian principles are confined merely to his wearing of Khaddar and putting photographs of national leaders on the walls of his drawing room. Gandhi is depicted in *Waiting for the Mahatma* not as a great political leader but as a great soul, a fine man integrated through and through, with never a false note in his speech, action or thought. Mahatma Gandhi, no doubt, had a soft corner for the untouchables. On his visit to Malgudi, he came to the house of the municipal chairman and there he beckoned a sweeper boy to come and sit on the divan much to the worry and anger of the Municipal Committee Chairman: "Oh lord, all the world’s gutters are on this boy, and he is to leave a permanent stain on that Kashmir counterpane" (31).

There are five characters in the novel who are representatives of different types of politicians — Bharati, the true Gandhian disciple; Sriram, the man of mixed motives in need of a leader always; Jagadish, a believer in violence and sabotage; Natesh, the typical politician too common in our country; and Granny, the affectionate old woman in love with conventions. In spite of Gandhi’s teaching of *ahimsa* and non-violence, he had some followers who could not grasp his principles. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*:

In association with Jagadish and under his expert guidance, Sriram did a variety of jobs which he hoped would help the country in its struggle for freedom; he set fire to the records in half a dozen of law courts in different villages; he derailed a couple of trains and paralysed the work in various schools; he exploded a crude bomb which tore off the main door of an agricultural research station, tarred out ‘V’ for victory and wrote over the emblem “Quit India". (113)
There was a wrong notion that Gandhi was against industries. Though Gandiji was opposed to large-scale industries, he allowed large-scale industries, to a limited extent:

What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work, to be thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all; I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of few but in the hands of all. (Saiyidain, 1970:60)

Gandhi was also not against modernisation, but he was against the exploitation of man by man:

I am socialist enough to say such facilities should be nationalised or state-controlled. They ought only to be working under most attractive and ideal conditions, not for the profit, but for the benefit of humanity, love taking the place of greed as the motive. (Suda, 1972:176)

He was an advocate of the small village industries keeping in view the abundance of human resources. He adopted the small-scale industries to absorb the maximum human labour. He felt that “much of the deep poverty of the masses is due to the ruinous departure from Swadeshi in the economic and industrial life” (Hajela, 1985:58). Through Sarvodaya he wanted to establish a world free from exploitation, slavery and suppression. “Sarvodaya literally means the rise, the good of all including the good of the enemy and the evildoer” (Iyengar, 1984:260).

Gandhi could influence all sorts of people. In Swami and Friends the Non-cooperation Movement led by Gandhi spreads throughout the country. It also starts in Malgudi, Swami and his school friends lead a crowd to Board High School and there they break window panes, damage school furniture and interfere in the proper functioning of the school. Swami is caught and punished by the headmaster and has to leave the Albert
Mission School. Malgudi does not remain untouched by the political upsurge even in the thirties. The broken windowpanes show the ravages caused by the strike in the school. Again a public meeting is organised by Swami and his friends to protest against the arrest of Gouri Shankar, a prominent political leader of Bombay. Swami listens to the ‘plight of Indian peasants’ and boycotts English goods and appeals to wear home spun “Khaddar”. The cry ‘Gandhi Ji Ki Jai’ and ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’ pierces the air. There were people who believed that Gandhi would become the sole ruler of India. Sriram says: “I hope when Mahatma Gandhi becomes the Emperor of India, he will make it a penal offence to make or play this instrument. This is also a British gift. I suppose,” he told himself (85). The common people think that Gandhi will become the king. For them the political movement is to replace a white king with a brown one.

The average Indian is not a heroic character at all, and Sriram, who represents the average Indian, is an unheroic hero. Gandhi has the magic touch — he lifts Indians out of dust and makes them into men. Gandhi visits Malgudi and Sriram, through his meetings with Bharati, awakens from his “age-old somnolence” (14). The awakening is however, to the beauty of Bharati, not to any comprehension of Gandhi’s ideology of non-violence and Satyagraha. The Mahatma speaks to Sriram “dispelling his notions”:

Before you aspire to drive the British from your country, you must drive every vestige of violence from your system. Remember that it is not going to be a fight with sticks and knives or guns but only with love. Until you are sure you have an overpowering love at heart for your enemy, don’t think of driving him out. You must think of him as a friend who must leave you. (51)

It has been argued by some scholars that the action of Kantapura covers precisely the period of about fourteen months from January 1930 to March 1931. Jha is of the opinion that “the period covered in the novel is between Gandhi’s Dandi March in 1930 and Gandhi-Irvin Pact in 1931” (1983:34). Kantapura is a true account of Gandhi’s ideals and principles and their impact on an Indian village. Iyengar has rightly called the novel a Gandhi Purana. To cite Iyengar: “Kantapura is thus remarkable in
many ways: the theme is the impact of Gandhi’s name and ideas on an obscure Indian village, any one almost out of the seven lakh Indian villages....” (1984:390)

Narasimhaiah, has also commented about *Kanthapura* in his Introduction to the novel:

It pictures vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of resurgence of India under Gandhi’s leadership: its religious character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideas precisely in the way Gandhi tried to spiritualise politics, the capacity for sacrifice of a people in response to the call of one like Gandhi.... (ix)

Moorthy is a true devotee of Gandhi and propagates his ideas by inspiring the people of Kanthapura to wear cloth spun and woven by their own hands and to give work to the workless:

Because millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and every thing foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless. (24)

He distributes free spinning wheels to the people of Kanthapura to spin and weave. Rao has shown the boys like Dore, Puttu, Chandru, Ramu, Pandit, Venkleshia, Srinivas, Kittu and Seenu discarding foreign clothes. Like Gian Talwar of *A Bend in the Ganges* and Sriram of *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Moorthy also discards his foreign clothes by throwing them into the bonfire. “And he wandered about the fields and the lanes and the canals and when he came back to the college, that evening, he threw his foreign clothes and his foreign books into the bonfire, and walked out, a Gandhi-man” (49).

Inspired and influenced by the ideology of Gandhi, Moorthy starts preaching Gandhian philosophies of non-violence, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability. When Range Gowda wants to teach Puttayya a lesson for unjustly drawing all the canal-
water to his fields, Moorthy advises him on Gandhian principle of non-violence and love for the enemy. Again when Range Gowda wishes to settle score with Bade Khan, the policeman appointed by the British Government to watch the political activities of the freedom fighters in Kanthapura, Moorthy dissuades him from doing any violence. Like Gandhi, Moorthy believes in equality and fraternity, and is against all sorts of discrimination. For him, the Brahmins and the pariahs are all alike and are the creation of the same God: “Brothers, and this too ye shall remember, whether Brahmin or bangle-seller, pariah or a priest, we are all one, as the mustard seed in sack of mustard seeds, equal in shape and hue and all” (170).

The national freedom movement sweeping all over the country led by Mahatma Gandhi and other congress leaders has influenced the people of Kanthapura also. The house of Rangamma has become the centre of congressmen’s activities. Besides books on the independence movement, spinning wheels were also brought from the congress office. Moorthy and other young boys are seen busy in campaigning for the swadeshi ‘spinning-wheels’. They go to the Sudras’, Potters’ and Weavers’ quarters to announce that spinning wheels are being distributed free of cost and during the first month the cotton also will be given free of cost by the Congress. When Moorthy is sentenced to three months’ rigorous imprisonment by the ‘red-men’s’ judges the entire Kanthapura becomes sad and gloomy. On the pronouncement of judgment, the whole afternoon no man leaves the court’s veranda and not even a mosquito moves in all Kanthapura.

In the novel, the story of Mahatma Gandhi’s birth is narrated in a mythical style by Jayaramachar. It is quite reminiscent of the manner in which the incarnations of Rama and Krishna are described in the Puranas. Gandhi is introduced to the village audience as a hallowed figure of divine powers whose birth was not that of an ordinary child but of God coming down to earth at a moment of national crisis for the eradication of evil and the restoration of good, in a country which has ever been loved by the supreme creator-Brahma. The seed of Gandhism is sown in the hearts of the villagers at the very outset through the Harikatha recited by Jayaramachar. But fantasy soon gives place to realism. Gandhi has further been compared to Lord Shiva. The Kanthapurians invoke the grace of
Brahma, the creator, by apprising him of the tyrannous rule of the British. They beseech Brahma to send them one of his Gods so that he may incarnate on Earth and retrieve India from the demonic grip of the British rulers. Brahma pronounces: “Siva himself with forthwith goes and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery...The messengers of Heaven shall fly to Kailash and Siva be informed of it” (22-23).

Rao has compared Gandhi to Lord Krishna in the novel: “You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country” (16). Gandhi is also compared to Raja Harishchandra, Rao writes: “Like Harishchandra, before he finished his vow, the gods will come down and dissolve his vow, and the Britishers will leave India and we shall be free, and we shall pay less tax and there will be no policemen” (172). Ayyappa Paniker feels that “the divine or the supernatural is deeply involved in the human and the natural predicament in Kanthapura” (Panikar, 1981:109). Not a single individual is left unaffected by the whirlwind of the Gandhian revolution, most of them turning into active followers of Moorthy including even the women like Rangamma and Ratna and a few still holding their attitudes of hostility and indifference.

The night before the day the Mahatma is to make salt at the sea, the people of Kanthapura cannot sleep in their eager wait for his success. In the morning at five when the Mahatma has to make salt, all the people of Kanthapura — men, women, boys and girl—find themselves in the river crying out “Mahatma Gandhi ki jai” and taking a dip in the river in token of their co-operation with the Mahatma. And the following morning they hear about Gandhi’s success — about how he had taken a handful of salt after his ablutions and brought it home; and then how “everybody went to the sea to prepare salt, and cartloads and cartloads of it began to be brought back and distributed from house to house with music and clapping of hands” (174). After this comes the sad news to the village that the Mahatma has been arrested. The people of Kanthapura are stunned. Moorthy advises them to go on fast for the day, and hold meetings.
Rangamma is a widow with no children but the childlessness instead of warping her mind, has broadened it. Her heart is as big as the house of which Waterfall Venkamma is jealous. She is like a mother to the young men who are interested in Gandhi-work. She is probably not the only literate woman in Kanthapura but certainly the only one who purchases and reads papers and magazines, and through which she has acquired a fund of general information about astronomy, aeroplanes, the life of people in Russia and so on (48).

Moorthy has convinced several people of Kanthapura — Brahmmins, pariahs and others, to take to spinning. The poor, particularly women, have taken to spinning willingly, even eagerly. Moorthy, being a devotee of Gandhi and having spiritual awareness, tries to improve the social status of Harijans. He collects some subscription from them, thus giving them a sense of self-respect. The women of the village have a very high opinion of Gandhi and Moorthy. Nanjamma says:

“No sister, I do not imagine the Mahatma like a man or a god, but like the Sahyadri Mountains, blue, high, wide, and the rock of the evening that catches the light of the setting sun”...And what shall we call Moorthy?” said Radhamma.

“Why, the Small Mountain,” said Rangamma, and we all said, “that is it”. (176)

The followers of Moorthy have firm faith in him. They remain non-violent and loyal to the pledge given to the Mahatma. But under the blows of lathis and continuous humiliations they lose their patience in some cases and make counter-attacks. Rachi is a simple Satyagrahi but a time comes when she loses her patience and sets fire to the whole village saying, “if the rice is to be lost let it be lost in the ashes” (252). Rangamma inspires the Satyagrahis to face the oppression of police boldly and preaches that no one can hurt the immortal soul: “No, sister, the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul”(153).

Kanthapura is really a village epic and a Gandhi purana. In the novel we are told of all the major political activities of the Congress during the thirties, that is, the Dandi march of Gandhi and his followers in 1930 to inaugurate the Civil Disobedience
Movement (170-173), the response of the villagers to the Movement by way of launching Satyagraha (182-201), observing non-cooperation by not paying taxes and showing disloyalty to the Government (206-209), the formation of the Congress Committee in the far-flung villages and their constructive programmes (100-111). Nehru’s social programmes (256-257), the decision of Gandhi to attend the second Round Table Conference (255-257) and, above all, Gandhi’s all-pervading influence on the nation, which runs through the entire story.

We also find here the various social programmes of the Congress during the period — emphasis on the removal of untouchability (57-66), spinning as a step towards self-dependence (28-33), propaganda and demonstration against drinking (182-200), and the like. While showing these, the Satyagraha of the Congress volunteers (182-200), fasts by Gandhi’s followers (90-99), police atrocities on the Congress demonstrators (182-200; 224-253), are also very vividly depicted. What makes this novel a distinctive success is that these pictures have not remained mere pictures showing the freedom struggle on the surface alone, but they have all combined together to reveal the true spirit of the age of Gandhi — the spirit that strove to win freedom both politically in the common sense and morally in the Gandhian sense. In Rao’s novel, the village is destroyed but it attains a symbolic victory. The gain is collective whereas the loss is individual. Narayan’s novel ends with the death of Gandhi, which symbolises the loss at the national level. The marriage of Sriram and Bharati also takes place in the end.

An anti-British movement started in India along with the Independence movement and the coming of Gandhi into the limelight. This nationalistic sentiment permeated into the villages and had its effect on the villagers. The sentiment is seen in the novels of Anand, Narayan and Rao. In Anand, John de la Havre in Two Leaves and a Bud and Nihal Singh in The Village express this strong feeling. John de la Havre is a compassionate revolutionary who dispassionately attacks the British official policy of colonisation, and condemns the evils unleashed under the guise of the civilising mission. He repeatedly states: “Yes, why not let the natives run their own show? It is their country and we have really no right in it” (21). But even a peaceful demonstration of the coolies
is interpreted by the authorities as a mutiny and is put down with the help of the Royal Air Force.

In *The Village*, the nature of colonial power and its destructive effect on the village community is increasingly felt. The British government is criticised for its indifference to the suffering of poor peasants and for contriving with the scheming feudal lords. The elder generation of peasants like Nihal Singh and Harnam Singh consider the *Angrezi* Sarkar solely responsible for their suffering. Nihal Singh complains: “They destroyed the Sikhraj and favoured thieves like Harban Singh who betrayed our race and killed the righteous” (8). But surprisingly Lalu for all his perceptiveness is enamoured of the ways of the white men — their cleanliness, intelligence and technological advancement; and is unaware of the palpable designs of colonial power structures that empower the European minority and enslave the native population.

The founding of the Indian National Congress is interesting:

The Indian National Congress became instrumental in rousing national consciousness in the hearts of the Indians. The National Congress was brought into being under the guidance of the British Polity. It was a secret plan, pre-arranged, as an intended safety valve, safeguarding the British rule against the rising forces of popular unrest in India. The formation of the Indian National Congress was a hesitant but an organised effort towards national movement. (Pathan, 1989:128)

Gandhi’s immeasurably charismatic personality and political vision inspired patriotism and anti-colonialism, which spread like legends that “multiplied and permeated through the Indian consciousness. They meant different things to different groups of men, castes, class and ideologies” (Narasimhaiah, 1967:63).

In *Swami and Friends*, Mani and Swami listen to Gauri Shankar, a Gandhian in Khaddar, who addresses them and they decide “to boycott English goods, especially of Lancashire and Manchester cloth” (94) and resolve to wear “Khaddar, the rough home-
spun" (94) and organised an evening "bonfire of foreign cloth" (95), in the wake of the Swadeshi movement led by Gandhi. *The Bachelor of Arts* displays Chandran’s protest against any sort of injustice, untruth, slavery, imperialism and distortion of Indian history by the British colonial rule. Krishnan in *The English Teacher* is worried about English teaching in India and feels that teaching English to Indian students is like feeding them "on literary garbage" (171) and the fate of English teachers in India is like "the paid servants of the department of garbage" (171). In *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan is "a disciple of Gandhi" (Walsh, 146) and a devoted follower who "long after Gandhi’s death continues to spin charka everyday" (Sundaram, 1982:151).

In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy the Gandhian, gives leadership to anti-British activities. The policeman Bade Khan’s indifferent attitude towards the villagers and the coming of more police to suppress the village freedom activities strengthen Moorthy’s domain of works. Even the Patel Range Gowde, the elders of potters and weavers and pariah colonies agree with him to undertake religious and social activities in the village to promote national struggle at the same time. People start a Congress committee in the line of Karwar Congress Committee. Moorthy, Patel Range Gowda Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu - all become members of it. Moorthy’s influence upon the villagers is deep rooted. More of women than men are attracted by his social activities. Picketing of toddy either at the fields or at the shops, burning of foreign cloth, opposing of British laws, etc. lead to almost all the people of Kanthapura getting involved in the national movement. When Moorthy, Range Gowde and others are in jail again, the Satyagraha continues in the village under the leadership of Rangamma and Ratna. The government auctions the lion’s share of the lands of Kanthapura to the rich people from outside, forcing most of the villagers to other villages like Kashipura, Malur and Ramapura. Thus by fate they are forced to sacrifice their lands and assets for the liberation of their mother nation.

**Education**

In the villages, the number of girls going to school is found to be less than that of the boys. The number of students finishing their school final examination is also low. Due to the compulsory education programme this condition has improved. All have now
realised the importance of education. It is their education that helps Rosie (*The Guide*), Bharati (*The Painter of Signs*), and Daisy (*Waiting for the Mahatma*). Even Gauri (*Gauri*) benefits from her education. As Gauri takes the road to the town, she seems to have made a correct assessment of her era. The road she takes is a road to progress, free from the stumbling blocks of old myths. Gauri could hold her own only through the education and qualification in nursing she has obtained, and which ensures for her an employment. The solution Gauri finds for her predicament is the solution Anand offers for the predicament of Indian woman: education can free her from the clutches of superstition, and employment can give her economic independence, and together these can ensure for her a life of dignity and freedom.

The educational system came under severe criticism as it was completely dominated by materialistic considerations. In *The English Teacher*, Krishna thinks that the existing educational system has made the people good for nothing. He:

... could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories, while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture, and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leaving and garbage. (205)

Narayan favoured a ‘leave alone’ system adopted by the Headmaster in *The English Teacher*, which he felt, would transform children into wholesome human beings. This type of education is in fact, a revival of the old Indian tradition of open-air schools run by saintly teachers with specific emphasis on inculcating moral values among the students.

In most of the villages there were only primary and secondary schools. Only very few villages could boast of a high school. The *Pyol School* was a common phenomenon in the village. It was held on the broad verandah of the village headman’s house where all the classes were held at the same time. In *The Guide*, the *Pyol School* was on the
verandah of an old house in Kabir Lane. The master reclined on a cushion in the corner, flourishing a cane at twenty boys. The pupils would start fighting, scratching, yelling and peeping into the house as soon as the master’s back was turned. The master’s interest in the boys was confined to his obtaining his fee of one rupee a month and anything else in kind that they cared to bring him. Raju’s father sent him considerable quantities of jaggery, rice and vegetables. The boys made considerable progress under him and Raju himself learnt to read and write before the master took him off to the Board School. The old master himself took them to the Board School, seated them in their new class and blessed them.

Naturally, the pupils did not like going to school. Raju in The Guide did not like his school much. In Swami and Friends, Swaminathan was subject to Monday blues and he:

... considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that dismal yellow building, the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher and the headmaster with his thin long cane. (1)

Change

Industrialisation played almost a revolutionary role in the lives of the Indian people. It made the Indian economy more united, cohesive and organic. It raised the tone of economic life in India. Further, it gave birth to modern towns and cities and produced two important classes of the contemporary society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The dumping of cheap British and non-British machine-made goods into India and the advancement in transportation which made it possible for these goods to reach the interior villages forced thousands of village artisans to unemployment. The newly started factories did not care to absorb the village artisans and so they found no source of survival. Anand considers the machine as an indispensable vehicle for socio-economic transformation. In The Big Heart Ananta says: “I tell you the machine is in our midst
already, there! And we have got to decide to go and work it rather than sulk” (89). The thathiars or the traditional coppersmiths of the village near Amristar in *The Big Heart* lost their traditional jobs because of the setting up of a new plant for copper works by two rich copper smiths. A few were engaged in the plant as workers; still the bulk of the coppersmiths remained jobless. Among the village folk, Lalu in *The Village* stands out distinctly with his independent ideas, rational thinking, and radical views. Lalu subscribes to the need for change and modernisation. His values, therefore, are in contrast to the traditional values of the village.

The onrush of industrialisation upset the traditional village life and ushered in new ideas and outlooks, social and economic, which we call modern. *Nectar in a Sieve* explores how the march of progress, on the one hand, commercialised village life, produced a population of wage slaves and raised their standard of living, and on the other hand, uprooted the tenant farmers from their age old attachment to land, left them dispossessed and caused their eviction and displacement. The establishment of a tannery in the village ushers in a new era in the life of the village community. The age-old agrarian society is suddenly awakened to a new reality and social relations. The tannery slowly pollutes the serene atmosphere of the village with its stench.

The age-old economic and social authority in the village begins to disintegrate and crumble under the onslaught of industrialisation. For example, the land, which the peasants like Nathan used to cultivate are taken away from them and are sold to the factory owners. The peasants are now left with no income and they cannot keep the wolf away from their doors. The tannery also opens up opportunities for alternative occupation. Those who work in the tannery instead of working in the fields, acquire financial stability. The new situation has taken toll of Rukmani’s family. The financial crisis due to drought and flood compel their sons to seek alternative employment. Arjun and Thambi are compelled to join the tannery and later migrate to Ceylon. Murugan is sent away to the city as a domestic help. Raja is killed and Selvam stays behind in the village, but does not take up the traditional occupation of farming.
Srivastava has noted how the tannery has corrupted the moral and ethical values of the village people: "The tannery represents a world of immorality, greed and corruption invading another which is moral, happy and pure" (1979:115). The villagers now want to make money by any means. Evils like theft and prostitution increase. Kunti and Ira turn to prostitution in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

The tannery also takes it toll on the village environment. Along with the stench, it creates noise pollution, destroying the serene and quite ambience of the village. It expands and claims more and more land. It changes the face of her village beyond recognition and alters the lives of its inhabitants in myriad ways. All relationships are counted in terms of money that has made people narrow-minded, selfish and self-centred. Nathan is cruelly evicted from the land he has been cultivating for thirty years. The water of the river contains the stinking waste material of the tannery and the productivity of the land decreases. Kuti, the youngest child dies of starvation. Similarly, Rukmani's daughter Ira represents the new generation who substantially differs from her mother. With the tannery comes the end of Ira's carefree days. Other families too are affected, like the family of Janaki, the hapless Kannan and others.

The main urban contact of the villagers is with the town. Most of the villagers, small, marginal and even large farmers, artisans and labourers who are poor have no contact with the town. They were born in the village, lived there and died there. The circle of their movement was at best ten to twelve miles around. They visited their relatives, fairs or markets only within that circle. Margayya, though very rich, was reluctant to travel to Madras, even on getting the news of his son's death. The movement of people was generally on foot. Women of richer families used bullock carts especially on ceremonial occasions. In *The Village*, the household of Sardar Harbans Singh travel to the town in a bullock cart. So also Lalu and Gughi go to town to see the fair by scrambling on to the top of a straw laden cart going to town. Most of the goods from one village to another were transported as head loads. A few large farm families owned the bullock carts and it was used for the transportation of goods in large quantities. In the novel *The Village* goods are sent to the town of Manabad in bullock carts. Again, in
Kanthapura goods are carried by bullock carts. The bulls of Rama Chetty and Subba Chetty are famous in Kanthapura.

The people had invariably no contact with the town and availed very little of the modern amenities like the post office, dispensary or school. The traders had contacts with the town. There were no wholesale shops in the villages. The traders visited the town and brought back grocery and other articles in bullock carts. Trucks were used only for big construction works in the past. In The Guide, trucks are seen arriving with loads of earth for the construction of the railway. The smaller shopkeepers in the village bought goods from the bigger shopkeepers and carried on their business. In The Guide, Raju’s father goes to the town in his own jutka (horsecart) to buy articles for his shops. There were other businessmen who bought agricultural products like rice and coconuts from the village and sold them in the town. Moneylenders also went to the town to visit the law courts. In Kanthapura the priest Bhatta, who is also a moneylender, “was always going to the city”(30) to meet the lawyer and to do other business.

There were people from the villages who served in the town as clerks, lawyers and teachers. Besides, there were students studying in high schools and colleges in the town. The buses from the villages were fully packed and uncomfortable. In The Maneater of Malgudi we get a sample of the travel by bus. The bus in which Natraj travelled to town was overcrowded. Most of the factory labourers from the villages, working in factories in the town, lived in wretched slums there, continuing their rural habits of living, but acquiring some of the vices of the city and catching diseases to which they were not exposed to in their villages. In Coolie the life of Munoo in the city is an example. The poor labourers of the villages living in the city slums or working as domestic servants in the houses of wealthy people were not able to adopt the city manners and culture.

The village communication system has greatly developed. For the transportation of goods between the towns and villages the trucks have replaced the bullock carts. Many young men migrate to the towns in search of work. There is a two-way flow of goods and services between the towns and villages. The railway facilities have also increased and
this too has helped the villagers. The village of Nandpur in *The Village* is an example. Goods can be sent from the village to the town in no time. Along with the modernistic forces of education, health and hygiene, rationality, political consciousness and individualism, the evils of urbanisation such as drinking, smoking, crime and juvenile delinquencies have entered into the villages. In *Nectar in a Sieve* we find “all noise and crowds everywhere, and rude young hooligans idling in the street and dirty bazaars and uncouth behaviour, and no man thinks of another but schemes only for his money” (66). Many undesirable ways of foreign societies are percolating into the villages through the towns and cities. Several cinema houses have been established in all urban and semi-urban places and they are crowded every evening.

Many economic measures to improve the condition of the people were introduced from the fifties onwards. The credit structure in the villages has also been completely transformed during these years. Earlier moneylenders were the main source of credit. Though, co-operative credit societies were formed and working in different places, their existence was not felt. The villagers took loans when they were a must. In *The Financial Expert* “The Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank” functions well in Malgudi. The protagonist of the novel Margayya sits under a banyan tree in front of the bank helping the villagers who wanted to take loans from the Co-operative Bank.