CHAPTER FIVE
TYRANNY AND AGONY : CLASS CONFLICTS

When the social conditions make a strong impact on family relationships, they in turn condition and guide the social relations involving race, caste, class and ideology. These societal forces are mainly responsible for the social harmony. If there is any friction or dissension among different segments of society, it echoes in the social life disturbing the peace of the entire society. Thus in Richard Wright and Jayakānta social situations become tense and volatile when every other force—race, caste, class or ideology—dominates the other and it results in the disjunction of social life.

In Richard Wright, race plays a major deterrent that prevents the uniting of the two races: White and Black. There is always tension and rivalry and the superiority of the white race, its treatment of the black race as inferior and untouchable always makes things worse. A black man's sufferings are multiplied when he is dependent of the whites. Even though the societal essences/forces like politics and religion must alleviate the poverty and treat all people equally, in Wright the former acts as a divisive agent and the later blindly justifies it and promises better life only in the next life. Wright exposes the hypocrisy of
and he always sounds authentic in his attempts to reveal the social disjunctions. The vital impact of the racial discrimination is the marginal status of the blacks. They are denied equal job opportunities and this results in their becoming poor and rotting with poverty, hunger and disease.

As in Wright, Jayakāntaṇ's fiction also deals with no less serious social disjunctions. While colour plays the destructive role in Wright, in Jayakāntaṇ, it is class that divides the society. Though class is a convenient form to denote the status of the people, bourgeois or poor, it indirectly indicates the caste division. The bourgeois in the Indian society always represents the highcaste and the poor, the low caste. As all the agents of social forces act to the advantage or betterment of the bourgeois and this invariably undermines the welfare of the poor.

Since everything in a society is at its disposal, the dominant segment of the society persecutes the poor, harassing them brutally and depriving them economically and driving them to many vices such as prostitution and in some cases rebellion; and then hunting them down mercilessly.

Though in Wright, the focus is the racial hatred and colour prejudice, he highlights the other important
problem of the blacks, in America: the economic status. They are made to struggle which Wright himself undergoes and he records this very succinctly in this Black Boy. As a child, he always finds it difficult to have proper/sufficient food. Besides hunger, he faces a hostile white society and unhelpful black community. Thus in Black Boy, the situation is so bleak that Wright narrates his struggle right from his cradle to his youthhood in Natchez and Jackson, Mississippi, Elaine, Arkansas and on Beale street in Memphis. He is trapped between a racially fearful family and an oppressive, hostile, white society. Like his protagonists, Wright also struggles with his submissive family and a volatile white society.

Wright's life amidst relatives was devoid of love and affection. This may be due to their struggle for survival in a hostile race situation. The black male is helpless in an oppressive white society: compelled by circumstances, the black woman clings to Christianity wherein whites equate black colour with evil and the church stresses man's innate wickedness. Together they convince the blacks of their inferiority. Thus the Negro Woman has no other option except to accept the religion and profess this in the family to the members. Wright remains skeptical about a religion which values death more than life. Thus
Don McCall observes about the life which is presented in the book: "Everywhere in the book Wright is showing us how the ennui, the varieties of illness, and the explosions are hopelessly linked together in an unending and unbreakable circle of oppression" (McCall 111).

Right from page one he presents situations that are hopeless and corrosive for a young black boy. He grows up amidst poverty and penury. He often wonders about this situation thus: "I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not" (Black Boy 21). He further elaborates about the horror of his living with hunger, "there were hours when hunger would make me weak, would make me sway while walking, would make my heart give a sudden wild spurt of beating that would shake my body and make me breathless" (Black Boy 121-122). The root cause of his situation is his black complexion. The white society emphatically says that he and his kind are inferior and keeps them at a distance. The intense racial oppression makes the white community blind to see the humanness of the Negro community. In this social situation his family members from granny to aunty try to discipline him in such a way to adopt himself to be pliable and submissive to the white racial canons. But he neither takes the religious lessons, nor learns to obey the racial obligations. Instead
he rebels and as a result, conflict results all through the journey of his life. Reilly puts this succinctly thus:

As Wright resisted the pressures to conform to expectations of how he should act as a black person, he was guilty of subverting the primary social relationship which both races conspired to maintain. The white interest in the caste system was the social and economic omnipotence they derived from supremacy, while the blacks were anxious to prevent indiscriminate white reprisal for violation of the caste system. Because he refused to conform to the prescribed norms, Wright was a criminal threat to both races (Reilly 39.)

His mother's chronic illness makes him steel himself against any sort of suffering. It is his mother who teaches him to resist the black violence but makes it clear to him not to fight the white folks, since any conflict with white folks is certain death. He has to witness the terror in his very childhood when one of his uncles, one Hoskins, is murdered by the whites. This incident makes an indelible impression on his mind. His mother and aunt are fear-stricken to such an extent that they not even try to claim the dead body and perform a burial. The white terror is so
powerful that they run for safety from one place to another only to encounter a new conflict with whites. This is invariably the social situation in which Wright learns about the racial conflict.

I had grown able to respond emotionally to every hint, whisper, word, inflection, news, gossip, and rumor regarding conflicts between the races. Nothing challenged the totality of my personality so much as this pressure of hate and threat that stemmed from the invisible whites. I would stand for hours on the doorsteps of neighbors' houses listening to their talk, learning how a white woman had slapped a black woman, how a white man had killed a black man. It filled me with awe, wonder, and fear,........ (Black Boy 71).

When the family situation demands Wright's efforts for their survival, he tries to find out jobs in order to make a decent living. Taking up a job means entering in to the world of whites, where the code for blacks tells that they are not at all human and any tendency toward rebellion will ignite spontaneous violence. But Wright could not cover up his feelings. He forgets to say "Sir", or says it too slowly. He does not know how to get out of white people's ways. The whites want to know the intimate secrets and ambitions of the blacks in order to negate them. He
thus finds it extremely difficult in continuing his first few jobs. In one job after another he encounters the white terror. Wright's experiences with his white employers are terrible. His job as a porter in a clothing drugstore gives him a chance to witness his employer and his son's ill-treatment of blacks. He himself is beaten and thrown out, when he fails to address the whites politely. He is driven out of an optical company because he is a black. He and his friend are trapped in a fierce fight just because they are black. So he is made to drift from one job to another. He mingles only with blacks in a hotel as a bell boy where the discussion seems aimless, pointless and always centres around sex, women, sports and the treachery of the whites. They dream of conquering and vanquishing the whites. But in reality, the situation is entirely different. Richard Wright feels now that under these suffocating circumstances he cannot live long, so he leaves for Memphis, Tennesse. About his departure Michael Fabre comments with quotes from Wright thus:

This was the culture from which I sprang, this was the terror from which I fled (Black Boy 225) Culture was clearly the equivalent of terror, in other words white culture was hostile and black culture was no supporting environment by itself, the sheer thin margin of
southern culture, black and white, was not sufficient to nourish a personality battered by the shocks of southern living. For Wright the South was first and foremost overwhelmingly white and hostile (Fabre 18).

Wright explores and depicts the white oppression and black solitude in black life in story after story in telling visuals. In "The Man who saw the Flood", it is a poor family that suffers from nature and white's ill-treatment. The flood damages and destroys the house and other things. The black couple Tom and May and the girl child Sally find it hard to settle down. The white master (land lord) hints with an indirect threat that the family owes him eight hundred dollars and he has no other option except to toil on the land. The blacks being so poor they have no other alternative. Tom moans that "Lawd, but Ah sho hate t start all over wid tha white man. Ah'd leave here if Ah could. Ah owes im nigh eight hundred dollars. N we needs a hoss, grub, seed, n a lot mo other things. If we keeps on like this tha white man'll own us body n soul" (Eight Men 92). This clearly shows the precariousness of the black man's existence and the strangle-hold the white has got over him. He cannot move about any where without the knowledge of the white man. If he attempts to run away, he will be hunted down like a stray dog. Tom is threatened
with dire consequences and is given an account of a black man's fate who tried to escape. So there is no escape for a black man in the white society. He has to toil from dawn to dusk and any attempt of running away for freedom will result in violent reaction from the whites.

The insecurity in life and the rootlessness make the black to aspire for a better life and permanent place to live. The prejudiced white society keeps the blacks alwayson the margin and they have to struggle hard to meet both ends. To lead a decent life, the black has to do all sorts of tricks. The social situation forces the black to wear a mask to hide his true identity. He hides/suppresses his feelings of frustration and disappointment.

In "Man of all Work", Wright portrays the positive aspects of black family life (the ideal black husband and wife) and the sufferings of the poor blacks at the hands of the rich whites. The black couple Carl and Lucy are under a severe financial crisis. Lucy becomes sick after giving birth to a baby. Carl is out of work and they are about to lose their home. A white family needs a female cook and after seeing this advertisement in the newspapers, Carl impersonates his wife, and joins as a cook. A black man joins in the garb of a woman (maid servant/cook) the white's
kitchen. This itself is a violation of the social convention. Here Wright exposes the hollowness of the white family life by placing the black male inside the bathroom of the whites where the white woman is taking bath. Wright plays on the racial-sexual taboo of white female and black male relationship, as when Carl's identify is revealed the white male Dave plans to charge him with the most audacious crime: "This nigger put on a dress to worm his way into my house to rape my wife. Ha! See? Then I detected' im I shot' im in self-defense, shot' im to protect my honor, my home. That's our answer: I was protecting white womanhood from a nigger rapist impersonating a woman!" (Eight men 125).

The environment for the black male in the white society thus can be equated with walking on hot coals. While the white man vociferously reacts against the black male, the white man invariably takes advantages with the black female servants. Only when Dave attempts to have sex with the black impersonator without knowing his real identity, does the secret get exposed. In the ensuing resistance and struggle, the black man is shot at. Immediately thereafter his identity is revealed and the white couple is horrified to find a black man as their 'maid', and the white lady shudders at her having taken help from the black "maid" while taking bath. Then they resolve
the tangle with the help of a white doctor after paying two
hundred dollars as compensation to the black man. The
poverty of the blacks, the treatment their women folk
receive from the hands of the white male, the racist aspect
of black male-white woman relationship etc., are the
problems vividly tackled in this story.

While Richard Wright deals exclusively with the
political conflict in short stories such as "Bright and
Morning Star" and "Fire and Cloud", Jayakanta has written a
number of stories on the conflict. Both of them support the
leftist political ideology and hence the conflicts they
present are always between the powerful ruling class and the
poor, downtrodden people supported by the leftist forces.

Richard Wright in "Fire and Cloud" presents the
conflict with an added dimension in that a Christian
clergyman, Rev. Taylor, is made to spearhead the struggle.
It is about the black community's effort to protest against
not receiving proper relief and the resulting starvation and
death. Rev. Taylor is respected by both white and black
communities. The black community organised a protest march
so as to highlight their suffering out of starvation and
also their solidarity during such a difficult time. Rev.
Taylor becomes the focus of attention and because of his
social status, blacks seek his guidance. At the same time
the white establishment—the Mayor, and the chief of police—also seek his help to stop the protest march. The communists also try to enlist his support for the demonstration by making use of his name in the leaflets. Thus Rev. Taylor is caught between the white force and the poor, hunger-stricken blacks who seek his help to alleviate their suffering. Taylor's dilemma is expressed thus: "Ef Ah fight fer things the white folk say Ahma bad nigger stirrin up trouble. N ef Ah don do nothing, we starve .... But somethings gotta be done! Wabbe ef we had a demonstration like Hadley n Green said, we could scare them white folks inter doin something" (Uncle Tom's Children 132).

It is a typical situation in which many a black is caught. He can't please both black and white races by whatever decisions he takes. When he is in a dilemma thus whether to use his name for the protest march or not, the white mayor and the chief of the police compel him not to do so. They reason that even whites are suffering and starving and both the communities are in the same boat. When Taylor does not give any categorical reply, the police chief bursts out thus. "A niggers a nigger: I was against coming here talking to this nigger like he was a white man in the first place" (Uncle Tom's Children 152). Thus Taylor has been subjected to abuses and torture by the whites. White thugs
take him to the woods and thrash him to bleed. All these tortures become counter-productive, driving him to resolve to join in the protest march. After the torture and suffering at the hands of the whites, he thinks of meeting the white preacher Houston but he himself decides against it since he won't take him in. When he walks through a white neighborhood, he comes across a graveyard "A white graveyard, he thought and snickered bitterly. Lawd God in Heaven, even the dead can't be together!" (Uncle Tom's Children 166). And also he is cautious of not running in a white neighborhood, because a running black in a white territory means to be shot at on suspicions of burglary or some other crime. A white woman who appears some fifty feet away from the black preacher turns away indicating that the black is a rapist looming large. All these things show how the society discriminates against the blacks and oppresses them racially.

The society had conditioned the thinking of the black man, he can't even look at it from an opposite angle. It requires young blood to think in radical lines.

The preacher's son questions agitatingly about this putting up with such white oppression and laments: "Wes been waitin' too long! All we do is wait, wait!" (Uncle
Tom's Children 169). When his father admonishes him saying that alone they can do nothing, he replies thus: "But we kin make em know they cant do this to us without us doing something: Aw help, pa! Is we gonna be dogs all the time?" (Uncle Tom's Children 169). Taylor too realizes this and says: "Ah done lived all mah life on mah knees, a-beggin n pleadin wid the white folks. N all they gimme Wuz crumbs! All they did Wuz kick me! N then they come wida gunn ast me t give mah own soul! N ef Ah so much as talk lika man they try t kill me" (Uncle Tom's Children 170).

Thus as the result/culmination of white brutality Taylor leads the march.

If a preacher is driven by the white oppression and hunger to the extent of leading a protest march against the whites, an orthodox poor black woman in "Bright and Morning Star" is converted into Marxism by the sufferings she has encountered. She has endured "Long hours of scrubbing floors for a few cents a day had taught her who Jesus was, what a great boon it was to cling to Him, to be like Him and suffer without a mumbling word". But "...... a cold white mountain, the white folks and their laws, had swum into her vision and shattered her songs and their spell of peace" (Uncle Tom's Children 184). So she has joined hands with her two sons working for the party. "She loved
her son and, loving him, she loved what he was trying to do. Johnny - Boy was happiest when he was working for the party, and her love for him was for his happiness" (Uncle Tom's Children 187).

For a mother to nurture intense hatred is rather an ironical situation. But the mother in this story is driven to the extreme of hating whites, caused by her past experience.

Though her son, Johnny - Boy does not have any colour bias between the white and black as communists, she has definite views on whites. Her sufferings in the hands of the whites is such that she considers them as "White mountains" and "White fog". She resolves to fight for the cause of equality and freedom with her son. Her faith in the party is as firm as was her belief in the religion.

She proves her courage and conviction when she is tortured in the presence of her son and her son is tortured in her presence. When the whites fail to extract any information about the party meeting, they destroy her son physically. She is trapped and tricked by an informer and in order to save the members she naively reveals their names. When she realizes her fault she is terribly upset.
Her having told the names of Johnny-Boy's comrades was but an incident in a deeper horror. She stood up and looked at the floor while call and counter-call, loyalty and counter-loyalty struggled in her soul. Mired she was between two abandoned worlds living, but dying without the strength of the grace that either gave (Uncle Tom's Children 206).

She immediately swings into action and shoots down the informer. She and her son are shot down by the white police. Thus Wright portrays how the intensity of white supremacy and oppression drive even a preacher and a loving mother into revolt and spearhead the struggle.

Wright delineates in this story two women characters: An Sue and Reva the white girl, Johnny-Boy's love. As James R. Giles puts it, "Reva's love for Johnny-Boy is love not just sexual fascination"(Giles 263). While in the rest of his writings Wright shows the black man - white woman relationship under severe racial restrictions, here in Reva's love Wright exemplifies how a white girl truly loves a black man and understands and sympathises with his sufferings. Ironically, the political conflicts also stem from the colour prejudices held by the white majority. Whatever may be the surface manifestations
of the tensions, the contributory factor basically for all such clashes is thus the age-old disbelief and distrust of the blacks. Thus Wright is fully immersed in depicting this social environment which is made up of racial exclusion, poverty and hunger in his writings. The colour prejudice and white supremacy plays a dominant role in conditioning the situations and circumstances in which the blacks move in and out in his writings.

The Indian society in the same manner is rife with dissensions and disjunctions a portrayal of which has been made equally effectively by Jayakāntaṇ. Jayakāntaṇ's fiction shows in a wide and detailed canvas how the environment degrades and debases the lives of the poor and downtrodden. They are unable to extricate themselves from the web of this environment and they get caught in it and rot there. Though the chief component of this environmental factor is poverty, it is because of the prevalent social disorder, the direct result of the caste based social relationship in the society that the poor people suffer. The upper caste, "twice-born" people enjoy life at the cost of the low caste, downtrodden people. Since the social hierarchy is thousands of years old the immediate reason for the sufferings of the poor, illiterate, hunger - stricken people are attributed to their fate and sins they committed
in the previous lives. But a closer scrutiny may reveal that, while the upper caste people live in a prime locality enjoying everything under the sun, the low caste people are driven to the undeveloped, rat-infested, slums and rural places. These very geographical confinements make the inhabitants prisoners of their own subordination and the high society/ruling class hardly recognize the existence of such people. Very rarely these two segments of the society interact and if it all there is any interaction, only the low caste, slum living or rural people interact with the upper caste people by working in their places as menials. So there is no necessity for the upper caste people to go over to a slum or a rural place where the low caste people live. This situation makes the life of the poor and lower caste people as one of isolation and as a result they live apart from the dominant society. This dominant society makes the lower caste people seriously suffer, and struggle hard for their survival. Thus the dominant, upper caste society over a period of thousands of years made the oppressed low caste people invisible and consequently created a situation/context in which they evolve their own style of life. This in turn becomes the shaping spirit of the environment of their life. In this environment, the forces which determine the course of their life are poverty, hunger.
and rootlessness. Jayakāntaṇ without attributing the caste factor explicitly, focuses on how this environment has a strangle hold on the lower strata of the society.

This environment even plays havoc with the relationship between a loving mother and an innocent son. Just because they live under poverty line, unaided and unattended by the powers that be, they struggle to lead a decent life. In his first story collection Oru Piti Coru, (A Handful of Rice) the title story is about an unwed mother and her poverty stricken life. The society is blind to her sufferings, and she herself tries to cope with the hard realities of life. Though she has a son, when her son asks her, "Mother who is my father?" (Oru Piti Coru 10) she does not know the answer. Such is the plight of the people like her, that her marginal status has been exploited by the society at her tender age, defiled her and left her in the lurch. She does not know her parents either. A settled family life is only for the superior, upper caste people; but people like Rācātti have no such luxuries. Most of the characters of the Jayakāntaṇ are drawn from this group of lower caste people, they have nothing but isolation and rootlessness. They struggle as Rācātti does against the social forces which are not directly seen.
Rācātti, the protagonist of the story "Oru Piṭi Čoru" is a rootless, unwed mother. She has to feed her son and look after her daily chores. But poverty and hunger always keep company with her. With her neighbour Māriyāyi, she either finds work, or, on days when she cannot, sells her body for her livelihood. Even stealing of food from the neighbour is not strange. The frequent quarrels between mother and son, over food are not exceptions. Thus Racati's son steals food from Māriyāyi and she in turn abuses Rācātti's son Maṇṇāṅkaṭṭi. In the ensuing wordy duel, Rācātti receives a blow on her stomach. Though Māriyāyi kicks Rācātti she offers some rice for her, when she learns about Rācātti's going hungry since the day before. When Rācātti is about to take her food, her son comes and demands a share in the food. The mother's refusal results in the food spilling over. Thus Rācātti is upset and she develops labour pain and dies.

This story gives a graphic picture of life in a slum in Madras city. These people have no relationship with the larger part of the society. They are culturally and socially removed from it. Hence, people of this segment evolve their own ethics and values in life. They have nothing to lose and and nothing to achieve. It is another world; darker, under world; a hell on the earth.
If an unwed, lonely mother's suffering is endless and tragic, a poor man's ambition of earning more money by working overtime in order to make his daughter's marriage a possibility is the story of a marginal man in "Over Time". Though it is a family of five members, only the head of the family, Elumalai is made to work and earn a livelihood. In this story also, the society is not in direct collision with the protagonist, instead it has created a situation in which he is hopelessly trapped. Though with the encouragement of his wife he works hard, he is unable to cope with the problems he faces: to earn money he has to work hard; to work hard he should maintain his health. But his frail health does not co-operate with his great ambition. He suffers from tuberculosis and does not find time and money to treat it. Thus poverty prevents him from having a better treatment. Neither his employer nor any of the so called relations come to his rescue. The society has pushed him to an extreme situation where he cannot find any solution for his pressing problems. Thus he is torn between opposing forces that draw him in different directions. The upper class society is blind to the sufferings of these marginal people and in subtle and indirect ways it degrades, debases and finally destroys and dumps them.
When the marginalised, rootless people try to emulate the dominant society in marriage and love and lead a family life, they are hunted down by the establishment. In "Marriage life" Jayakṣanṭaṇa exposes the brutalization, dehumanization and loneliness of the marginal people. The law of the land, and the custodians of the law, the police, protect only the rich but chase the poor, hunt them down and persecute them. From time immemorial these people have been marginalised and ill-treated by the society and they are treated as animals. Two rootless people, a man and a woman, decide to get married. They do it as a simple one because they do not have much to celebrate about it except cooking a full meal. As they have no shelter to reside in, they are accustomed to live on the roadside: On the pavement. For the consummation of their marriage they go to the nearby public park, but all their sweet dreams are shattered when two policemen descend on the scene and arrest the woman on charges of prostitution. Instead of giving shelter and protection, the establishment harasses the poor, just because they belong to the lower strata of the society. The crudeness of the police is expressed unequivocally by the author thus: "Police is the custodian of the law. He is not a representative of conduct and a messenger of truth" (Inippum Karippum 112).
When these marginal people are unable to extricate themselves from the clutches of society's evil designs they rot and die there; because there is not a flicker of hope they could see. They are hemmed in an environment from which escape is impossible. The suffering of the marginal people in the hands of establishment is the same, whether they are young or old. But they are rootless people, who try to lead a comfortable living. This they find difficult to do because they have to at one stage or another interact with the dominant society. The dominant society simply ignores and ill-treats them.

Jayakānta gives us a graphic picture of the lonely, orphaned, rootless peoples' lives and their struggle against a hostile environment. The dominant society displays such an arrogant and destructive attitude towards these poor lot, that even the custodians of law, the police, adds insult to injury by treating them mercilessly. Police represents the brutal nature of the ruling class and it harasses and abuses the marginal people severely. At times its treatment towards the lower class people is inhuman and atrocious. An old cycle-rikshaw man is persecuted by the police just because he is poor, old and without anybody's support. The very title of the story "Pārṟukkōl" (Support), reveals the old man's predicament in a helpless society.
The old man is taken into custody and his cycle rikshaw is impounded by the police. The old man wails and weeps and pleads for his release and the return of his cycle rikshaw. But the police on the pretext of his not having a license for the cycle rikshaw, refuses to oblige the man's pleadings. The establishment has a really hardened attitude towards the poor.

In a show of utter contempt for the members of the lower classes, the police man kicks the rickshaw forcefully and it crashes down into pieces. Now the old man is lost totally. He is bereaved of any relationship "The old man rolls on the ground and weeps as he wept at the time of their parents' death; at the time of his wife's committing suicide and at the time of his children's death" (Inippum Karippum 121). He is trapped in an environment in which he can neither live comfortably nor find support. The old man's poverty, sickness and his loneliness are contrasted with the brutal behaviour of the police. The police is always after the rules, not after human feelings.

The upper society not only makes the life of the poor and rootless people miserable but it also tries to frame them and fix them on false charges since it has everything at its disposal. In "Yārukkāka Aļutānī" (Joseph Wept),
Jayakant shows how a goodhearted, timid looking, lower class man is pitted against the treachery of the bourgeois society. Joseph, the protagonist, is a very soft spoken, tireless servant of a middle class hotel. He is a poor man working and living in the same place. One night a businessman who stays in the hotel in a drunken state, reports in the next morning about his missing purse. In actuality he had handed over the purse for safe keeping during the night itself to the landlord. The owner pretends ignorance of it and Joseph who knows the truth, does not reveal anything.

Joseph, the marginal man, (almost an orphan) is pitted against a greedy employer, the drunkard business man, and two anti-social elements. Just because he is poor and submissive, he is seen as a thief. His very nature of accepting everything without any protest makes him an easy prey to such false charges. But only with the strong and solid support of another man does he prove his innocence. The central thesis of the story lays bare the evil designs of the bourgeois in hunting down the socially weak and the down-trodden people. These people are hopelessly trapped in an unfriendly, oppressive social environment.

In the same way, the rootlessness, helplessness, poverty and degradation are vigorously delineated in his
novel *Pirālayam* (the Deluge). The social oppression is so severe that the marginal people could not overcome it. They struggle, starve and rot in the vicious cycle of penury and poverty. The dominant society always tries to keep these people where they are by pretending to be their well-wishers. The social situations make people of the lower class society the prisoners of their environment. There is no scope for either improvement or escape. Their roads for better life are blocked by the dominant society.

Poverty and hunger drive the inhabitants to their struggle for survival. They are made to compromise with every other conventions of society. They steal, rob, cheat and if it happens to be a woman, she sells her body for survival. The relationship between husband and wife is not rigid. Most of the time the marriages seem to be for convenience rather than for its sacredness. Thus Ammācikkilavan, the guardian of an orphaned brahmin girl, arranges her marriage with a rickshaw-puller, Tiṇana. But actually it is Pāppatti's landlord's son Celvam who plots this marriage since he wants to keep Pāppat as his concubine for ever. Though she has pre-marital relationship with Celvam, her conscience doesn't allow her to continue it after her marriage to Tiṇana.
In the novel there are two more couples who are compelled by circumstances to escape poverty and hunger. The story also reveals the exploitation of the poor ignorant and illiterate people by the upper class, money-minded persons and power-hungry politicians. When there is rain and flood, the people of slums are rendered homeless and are at the mercy of nature and power-mongering politicians. Different political parties and many film heroes offer them help by distributing clothes, food and money. They do this in order to win their votes during the elections. Ammācikkilāvan watches the pathetic struggle of his people and their sufferings. He could not help improve them since it is an environment unredeemable by an individual. But he observes critically the conduct and behaviour of the people. During the testing times he watches the degrading behaviour of the slum people and also charges the dominant society for keeping them for ever as marginal people in order to rule them. And he feels that, they should offer them job opportunities. Ironically, he observes that there are two groups of people who supply food and clothes to these people. There is political rivalry among these two groups in enlisting the support of the 'Voters'. Their intention of supplying the essential commodities at this juncture is not to alleviate their sufferings but to make a show and
gain publicity in order to become more popular. This popularity will be exploited during elections. Time and again, every year this show is exhibited but the sufferings of these poor people remain as ever. The vested interests do not want the poor to improve their lives since they want these people to be under their firm grip. Thus Jayakāntaṇ depicts in this story that the marginal people live but pathetically. The social environment acts as an omnipotent force and controls the life of these people.

As a powerful weapon of the ruling class, the police unequivocally acts as their agent in destabilising the life of the poor and downtrodden. The marginal people have to suffer the oppression twice from poverty and the police. These oppression simply lead them nowhere. The people of this segment have struggled hard to meet their daily requirements. Socially oppressive atmosphere drives them into prostitution and bootlegging. The police comes in the scene just to prevent their indulging these crimes and if they are found guilty they are taken into custody. The police has nothing to provide these criminals but by arresting them they take away husbands from wives, mothers from children and fathers from the family putting all these people and their families into misery and more poverty. In "Nintāstuti" (Dubious Praise), Jayakāntaṇ tells the story of
the poverty-stricken life of a woman Nākammāl, and her sufferings. Living with a man, Ciṭṭipāpu, who is not her husband, she sells illicit arrack for her living. Here chiṭṭī's living with Nākammāl is nothing but a life of convenience. As long as they find each other friendly and their behaviour and conduct are trustworthy they will live together. Otherwise they will seek other people for companionship, specially during the time of police raids and arrests whoever escapes from the police should continue to earn money. Thus when Ciṭṭipāpu is arrested Nākammāl continues to trade her flesh and earn money to make a living. As soon as Ciṭṭipāpu comes out of jail she will join with him as wife. This is the way the poor, marginal, and rootless people live.

In the same way there are other people especially, women who are driven to such an extreme situation to live by selling their body. In "Tarkkam" (Debate) the life of poverty stricken women are portrayed. One is driven to beg for alms and the other is living by selling her body. Both of them live below the poverty line and this precariousness drives them to eke out a living which is the only possible way to stand alone in a class conscious bourgeois dominated society. Of course there is no other member in their families neither husband nor mother to support them. As
they are rootless, they do not know their ancestors. Their life goes on running here and there begging or trading the flesh now and then.

When the present makes its presence domineering over the poor, marginal people they can neither be nostalgic nor dream over the future because both are in no way better than the present. Thus they are hopelessly engaged in managing the present situation. Their life is just tiding over a day not a well planned, ambitiously dreamed one. In "Pattiniparamparai" (The Virtuous Generations) Jayakāntan seems to reverse the puranic story of "cātyavān Cāvitri" but with an underlying irony and sarcasm. In the puranic story the wife fulfills the wishes of her husband by carrying him to the brothel houses. There is no economic compulsion but just to show how obedient and faithful the wife is. In his story Jayakāntan makes a reversal of it by making the wife as a prostitute fulfilling his husband's needs by earning money and giving it to him.

The character of the crippled husband symbolises the disability of the society itself and its inability in helping or giving a meaningful life to the poor and the downtrodden people. They are left to find out their own ways and means to lead a life out of the chaos and confused state of the society. Thus in this story, Kulanṭaiyammā,
wife of a crippled man resorts to prostitution through which her husband makes out a living. He is shown as nice gentleman when he encounters her with a customer. The customer is disturbed by the very nature of their life and that too a wife is made to do this sort of job by her own husband. But whatever the feelings of the customer, the present reality makes both the crippled husband and the prostitute wife to carry on this way of life. The wife is shown as loving and caring for her husband. She treats him adoringly as a mother treats her child. This is how a meaning is made out of the meaningless state of the society and life. Both husband and wife are unmindful of and blind to the sensitiveness of the customer. Perhaps they too have undergone the same emotional turmoil when they were driven to this situation in the early part of their life. The society has made them as steel and rock in not feeling any thing about the nature of their life. Society itself assigns them roles like these to exact their lives.

This social compulsion makes life miserable for people like them. In "Ilakkaṇam Mīrīa Kavitai", (Poem Sans Grammar), Jayakāntaṇā focuses on yet another dimension of the social disjunction. Treating the same problem, he deals again with a poor woman becoming a prostitute and
encountering the society. Her life in the society is fraught with shame, humiliation and fortune in the hands of the police. Though Jayakānta portrays the brighter side of a bachelor in sharing the agonies of a prostitute, here again he shows how the society triumphs over these poor people, first in making/converting them into prostitutes and then punishing them for the same.

Caraṁa, the prostitute is made to put up with jealous fellow prostitutes and cunning and brutal police force. As a redeemable feature of her frustrating life, Rāmanātan visits her as a customer. Jayakānta portrays both these characters as bubbling with humanism and love, love which is unconditional and that gives whole hearted and unselfish one. When Rāmanātan pleads his inability to pay her and wants to come the next day with money, she simply makes it clear that money is not that much important, and money alone is not life, saying this she requests him to be her guest and true to her words she treats him nicely. They are somehow bound by the feeling of true love and when he says he would come on such and such date, she says that one cannot fix an engagement with people like her. She further says that they are not sure of their daily engagements. This itself indicates the precarious situation of her life.
When he visits her next time with full of dreams and plans, he is greeted with the news that she has been taken into custody for prostitution. Her words come true as far as she is concerned. Thus society creates them and destroys them mercilessly. Here society assumes all pervasive nature and shapes and dismantles the life of the poor people. The police assist and at times help society in this divisive and destructive role of the society. The police act brutally and treat the poor cruelly and their reaction to the social oppression is construed as rebellion.

Thus at times the encounter between the police and the poor rebels /radicals result in destruction of social harmony and loss of life. In Āuyatapūcai (Ritual for Arms), the encounter between the police and the radicals is portrayed. At the same time it deals with the life of a social worker who adapts orphan children and runs an institution for them. When some of the orphans attain maturity, they realize the dubious and destructive role of the society through which their life has come to such a pass. They assess the situation and resolve to punish those who are responsible for their being poor, orphan and rootless. They make war with the bourgeois society, and taking an extreme step of eliminating the rich people.
As in any bourgeois dominated society, the police is out to wipe out the menace of this terrorism. Police is an instrument in the hands of the power mongers and it has neither conscience nor any sense of understanding of the poor. Hence it deals with the rebels mercilessly and kills them in fake encounters.

Rebels like Jōti, Cuṭarvaṇṇaṇ, Arulālan spearhead the insurgency by attacking the rich killing and looting them. Except Cuṭarvaṇṇaṇ others are eliminated by the police. And finally Cuṭarvaṇṇaṇ makes a false promise to surrender to the police but he shoots down the police officer and then he commits suicide.

Thus Jayakāntaṇ presents a society which is torn by its own contradictions and especially, the protector of the society acts in a partial manner and treats the poor inhumanely. Instead of achieving social unity and communal harmony, the vested interests intensify further divisions in the society.

In the story Illātavarkal ("The Havenots") the writer portrays how the people of the lowest segment live in poverty and hunger, violence and crime. In the hands of the politicians, they are just like pawns. They are confined to a space where poverty is the rule, not an exception. They
resort to murder, stealing and prostitution for their livelihood. They do not have any proper shelter. They live with pigs and dogs with their stomachs always empty.

The political parties and their organisations concentrate mainly on places like this to enlist the support of these people. These people can do anything even for a paltry amount for a petty favour. They can assault, murder, and maim the opponents. All the political parties have their branches spread here. At times there will be clashes among themselves along the party lines. One such clash leads to violence and murder. Ťoni alias Turaicāmi is angry about somebody's changing of his party's flag from the flag mast. So he runs amuck and in the ensuing violence kills one person. He runs to a posh locality and hides in a house which has been targeted by him for many days. Though he is treated nicely by the inmate, he is unable to stay there, but escapes and is hunted down by the police.

This story has some similarities with Richard Wright's "The man who lived underground". Both the stories deal with the marginal people and the protagonists are accused of murder; both of them go into hiding; in Wright's story it is the sewer and in Jayakāntaṅ's it is an old man's house. Both enjoy the hiding place and play with the upper
society. Unable to keep hiding, they come out and succumb to the police brutality.

This novel *Pāvam Ival Oru Pāppatti* ("Pity She is a Brahmin") mainly centres around trade union activities of a sugar mill and the conflicts that arise out of the rivalries in different groups during the trade union election. Jayakāntan points out how the bourgeois call the shots and control the labour organization with money and muscle power. The novel is an indictment of the conduct of the bourgeois that corrupts the society, when a labour leader organizes labourers in order to project their rights and demand their legitimate share of the profit; the bourgeois forces also stealthily infiltrate into the organization. Thus Veṇupillai, a sugarmill contractor makes all out efforts to win the election. Turaicīṅkam, the labour leader, with the help of radical left wing members like Parantāmaṇ, Umā and others spearhead the struggle, and as a result of animosity and violence, Veṇupillai is murdered. The radicals almost all of them suddenly disappear underground.

The ugly events that mar the public life in India form the basis of this realistic tale.

Parantāmaṇ, is the chief among the members of the leftist group and, in an intertextual reference, he is the
follower of Catyamūrti of Jaya Jaya Caṅkara. Police start hunting these revolutionary activists and kill some of them so as to prevent the spreading of violence. But the police also make fake encounters and kill innocent unconnected people.

Policies and principles make a thorough transformation in some people at times. A sparkling example of this phenomenon is Parantāman's mother, Pāppattiammaḥ who though ignorant, supports his activities. When a police officer takes her to identify a dead body's identity to find out whether the dead man is her son, she says that he is not her son. Even at the trial she repeats the same and adds further that he is the son of the world, he belongs to the society. We have in this mother a strong echo of the Christian mother of Wright's short story "Bright and Morning Star".

Thus Jayakāntan presents the conflict in terms of bourgeois versus the leftist radicals. The very emphatic statement by Pārantāman's mother indicates that the struggle is on and people like Parantāman are out to serve the society, not family alone.

If we look at the root causes of any conflict political or religious, racial or caste, we find that
economic imbalance and exploitation of weaker sections by the stronger group are some of them. In India, the dominant group always seems to be the uppercaste and the weaker group is the exploited one. In Jayakar's novels he presents this conflict between the "haves" and "have nots" and exposes the brutalities of the bourgeois and the sufferings of the downtrodden. Thus in his novel Väikkai Alaikkiratu (Life Beckons) he portrays the struggle between the bourgeois and the rootless poor people as an unending/eternal one.

Though there are many characters of equal importance, Räjä is the protagonist who represents the poor segment of society. But his uncle and his friend Citamporam Pillai represent the bourgeois class. With the connivance of the police they hunt and destroy the lives of the poor. The story exposes the murky goings on in the upper class and the lower class segments of the society. Pitiably poverty drives the poor into badways: bootlegging and prostitution. Just because they have money power, the bourgeois enjoy these at the expense of the poor. The Protagonist Räjä is pitted against the bourgeois society which makes his life miserable. Accidentally he stumbles upon the socially harassed and exploited people like Čaraņka, a bootlegger,
Kāmāṭci, Razia the prostitutes, and an orphan Taṅkam. Rājā is liked by Cāraṅkaṇ and Taṅkam for entirely different reasons. Cāraṅkaṇ wants Rājā to subdue Taṅkam into prostitution. But Taṅkam seeks his help to escape from the clutches of Cāraṅkaṇ and the rich old man Citambaram Piḷḷai. When he tries to oblige both of them the conflict thickens resulting in his landing at his uncle's house and finally he is caught between a bourgeois girl, his uncle's daughter, Kītā and the rootless woman Taṅkam. But the conflict gets complicated when Citamparam Piḷḷai reveals Rājā's connection with Cāraṅkaṇ to his uncle who sends him out. After the death of his mother he becomes an orphan and his returning to Cāraṅkaṇ's fold in order to lead a decent life with Taṅkam runs into rough weather since Citambaram Piḷḷai is having an eye on Taṅkam. But Cāraṅkaṇ's solid support makes Rājā's plan a reality. His uncle's arranging a marriage to Kītā and her committing suicide makes him sad. His sorrows continue further, when Citambaram Piḷḷai, with the connivance of police murders Cāraṅkaṇ.

Thus the poor is made to struggle for a decent life in the society because the bourgeois society not only keep the poor under their control but destroy it when it challenges them. Mūṅkil Kāṭṭu Nilā (The Moon of the Bamboo
forest) gives a vivid account of the struggle between the haves and havenots and how the untouchable, and the degraded segment of the society, rises against the bourgeois society and the atrocities it commits upon them. Jayakānta selects an untouchable woman as the protagonist but he gives importance to the economic swindle of the bouragois and her struggle against it. The conflict intensifies when the upper caste people construct a cement factory and divert the canal to it thus denying water to the lower caste people. Though the factory owners promise to provide water through pipes, the low caste people refuse to accept it. Nilā, the protagonist organises protest marches, blockades and sit-in strikes. Though she is suspended from her teaching service of the local school, she continues her struggle against the upper caste people. When the entire menfolk of the lower caste are arrested, the womenfolk spearhead the struggle. Nilā says "We are going to die any way, why should we die in fear and submission?" (Mūnikil Kāṭṭu Nilā 23-24).

The Indian society is hopelessly lopsided: On the one hand there is caste conflict, on the other there is class struggle. But as the above discussion shows the class division is also along the caste line: The upper caste is bourgeois and the lower caste is proletarian.
While in America, the blacks are kept under an oppressive racial segregation, denying them the basic human freedom and employing them as no more than animals in work and treatment, they in course of time become a community which is caught between heavy work and meager wages. This endless dilemma makes them live in perpetual poverty, hunger and disease. Only rarely do the suffering blacks raise their voice against this oppression. But in Wright's fiction, though some are submissive to their oppressive environment taking whatever they receive and meekly accepting the life as it is, others not only try to improve their life by moving from the most oppressive situation to the less oppressive situations, but also try to protest against the white oppression which is the root cause of their hunger and poverty. In this endeavor even religious clergy and loving mothers also take prominent roles.

In India also the systematic classification of the people into many castes and assigning them and keeping them in an inferior status there permanently has been going on. Vast majority of the people are poor and always under severe economic constraints. As in Wright's fiction, in Jayakanta also there are people who surrender themselves timidly to the oppressive social situations, and those who try to
improve their life by taking on the society directly. Unlike in Wright, there is no movement from one place to another to find a better life instead, they organize people and wage a struggle which results in the rich versus poor confrontation. As in Wright, in Jayakantā too the outcome of the confrontation is not made known. But the poor rising in protest against the oppressive economic conditions itself is an indication that things will not be the same for long.