CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

SOCIETY AND LITERATURE

The twentieth century has been a vital period of upheavals all over the world. It has witnessed changes in many spheres of human activity. These sweeping changes have also paved way for many rebellions at the individual, social, economic and political levels. Such radical transformations have been the cause everywhere of the widespread dissensions, disunion, and disruption in human affairs. It is worthwhile examining these causes deeply as a preliminary exercise. The world wars, the ideas of Marx and Freud, and the advancements made in science and technology and the legacy of Western imperialism/colonization have all in one way or another dramatically altered the social life of this century. This has had a far-reaching impact on the literatures of the world. It is really worthy of attention that the sociological context has had a powerful influence over the content of many literary productions, both in the developed West and the developing East.

In the First World War, which was fought for four years, eight million soldiers and twelve million civilians
died. In its aftermath revolutions took place in some countries, and yet in some other countries famine and epidemics struck mankind quite devastatingly. Man's attitude to life and death could never be the same again as a result of "the Great War" (as it was known) and literature was prompt enough to reflect the impact of this devastating event in human affairs.

But the impact of the Second World War that followed in two decades was much more terrible than the first. During the Second World War, most of the casualties were in East Asia and Eastern Europe. These societies, particularly in Eastern Europe, were almost on the brink of extinction because the Second World War had consumed about fifty-five million people. Thousands of families were affected, their members were separated and deprived of their basic rights. Millions of people were butchered because they belonged to the wrong race/religion. In short, the war was senselessly barbaric and destroyed every traditional notion of victory, heroism and glory.

After the war there were many radical changes all over the world. The chief of which was that Europe lost its political primacy to the United States of America and Soviet Russia. Until the nineteenth century, Europe was the centre
of the world and the very concepts of the East and the West grew out of the sense of importance felt by Europe as the power centre. But these notions were to undergo a vast sea change at the end of the Second World War. There were also novel ways of looking at human society and its different constituent elements. The comment of a political observer confirms this: "Europe, divided under the hegemonies of two powers - one American, the other bi-continental - lost the privilege it had enjoyed during five centuries: it was a victim of aberrant actions and of the refusal of science - or its impotence -- to generalize a valid conception of human nature and its races, ethnic groups and cultures, as well as a correct interpretation of history as a means of paving the way to the future" (Moraze 135).

When the war-ravaged Europe was relegated to the background, the United States of America and Soviet Russia occupied the centre stage of the world and emerged as super-powers. Inevitably, there ensued a cold war which divided the world into two hostile camps: the Red East and the Democratic West. The former comprised of the peoples' democracies of Eastern Europe, to which after 1949 was added the Communist China. The Democratic West was led by the United States of America protected by its formidable military power and included some Western European nations.
New differences among the erstwhile allies surfaced and many countries were divided, borders were shifted and the political map of the world was altered. The war inspired nationalism and patriotism in the societies of colonised Africa and Asia.

The First World War was the first major foreign conflict in which the United States of America was involved. But it was less directly affected than Europe. America became the centre of the industrial activity and emerged as the leader of the free world. It represented the triumph of industrialism, capitalism and democracy. It was in sole possession of the atomic bomb, while its industrial power was much expanded and agricultural production was abundant enabling it to undertake a programme of aid to Western Europe and Japan. And finally America emerged as the unchallenged superpower. The American society had emerged from the war more convinced of its basic values, suspicious of foreign entanglements, uneasy about the direction of world affairs, distrustful of the progressive politics of the prewar years. Looking to itself, the nation concentrated on business, economic expansion, and advancing of technology, the spread of consumerism; new development seemed simple
extensions of traditional American principles of individualism; self-advancement and the pursuit of abundance for all. Yet change was everywhere visible as the economy boomed. Wealth spread, mores altered, the texture of life changed, new technologies appeared in every home and street (Ruland and Bradbury 295).

In a parallel movement not only in America but in the whole world, the war stimulated many new technologies and made rapid strides in the growth of scientific knowledge even while it had brought about sweeping changes in many societies. Science became the great shaping force of the twentieth century. The enormous advancement achieved in the field of technology helped rapid industrialization, faster transportation and instant communications. Thus

The world at mid-century had become in a very real sense a world society. Revolutionary developments in transport and communication had brought all peoples close to each other. The common language of science and technology carried the same meaning wherever it was applied. The common danger to life on earth from the radio-active effects of nuclear explosions was shared by all.... (Ware, Panikkar and Romein et al 4).
Although science thus became omnipotent with its omnipresence, although it made man revise and reject some of his traditional beliefs, old ideas and theories, although it helped to achieve sophistication in air travel and medicine, it has also brought about a nefarious side effect on each and every society of the world. It is to be felt in the fact that there has been disjunction in enjoying the fruits of science in society. Every society has to contend with the emergence of two distinct groups. One section of people enjoys the benefits of scientific achievements: more ease in travel, plenty of goods, convenient communication, better medication; the other group is crippled with social dislocation, more poverty, widespread pollution and intense class conflict. This conflict is more widespread in the developing nations than in the West. This situation of the developing nations is a direct consequence of history in which Europe and the West have played the leading parts. The problem that then arises in relation to science can be formulated as follows: how is it that science itself, and the civilization that claims to expect such great things of it, have not yet been able to keep their promise to make individuals and nations free, equal and brotherly? (Moraze 34).
If an analysis of the impact of science on society is made, it becomes clear that this failure to make people equal and free was the outcome of the scientific aspect of industrialization. This was in turn reflected in the social aspect of the twentieth century when the bourgeois overturned the scale of values. In short "The universe of what they felt and produced would soon have science as its centre, technology as its force of gravitation, and components of a scientific nature in other disciplines as its mass" (Moraze 118). Thus the world wars with the help and aid of science and technology made the world society into two. The schism among the people of the world had already existed through class consciousness, religious divisions and parochial tendencies. Now the advent of science and technology in the war background accentuated the divisive tendencies more than ever. This "widening gap between technically advanced and technically backward lands was matched by a widening gap between expert elites (mutually ignorant of one another's skills of course) and the mass of common people" (Palmer 540).

The widening gap between a privileged few and the penniless lot has been the result of rapid industrialization. In Europe, the working classes influenced by the socialist theories of Karl Marx and
Frederick Engels, had grown increasingly militant in their demand for social reform. And in Russia, the October revolution made it a force to reckon with and many East European countries followed suit. Inspired by the success of the October Revolution, the Marxist philosophy gained currency the world over. Karl Marx's economic theory, and his firm belief that the class of the proletariat would one day conquer the bourgeois society spelt out the dialectical process and his Das Capital is about the forces of production. He recognised the barrier separating socio-economic factors from physical ones, and he strongly believed that environment has a decisive influence in shaping man's character. He believed in the theory that "equality between the sexes was an integral aspect of a society in which the exploitation of one individual by another would have been eliminated" (Ware, Panikkar and Romein et al 1144).

Class consciousness and the consequent conflicts had existed in all human societies much earlier to the advent of Marxian theory. But in the ancient times the ruling and owning classes were so superior in their political, economic and social status that the conflicts between the have and the have-nots had been only a few, far flung and even mute. But with the arrival of the Marxian
revolution the awareness among the oppressed classes grew to such a keen pitch that the disjunctions in the society now have grown in volume and intensity. It is not as if Marx created more class conflicts but that society has become much more keenly aware of the disunity and dissension among its various sections than ever.

While Marx's philosophy awakened the social man, Freud's probings unlocked the secret chamber of the man: his mind. He described the areas of the mind as conscious, the pre-conscious, the unconscious, the libido, and the censor. His theories of psycho-analysis based upon clinical case studies revealed insights into an individual's personality formation. He described sex as an instinctual force (libido) which is necessarily at odds with the needs and demands of society, of civilization itself. He built his theories upon the discovery of the unhappy effects (neurosis and psychosis) of civilization's repression of sexual instinct; his aim was to help patients free themselves from the ignorance of sex fostered by bourgeois morality. But he recognized that repression of some sort was essential for civilization, for the achievements of culture, which he claimed owed their
energy to a process of sublimation, or rechanneling of sexual energy into art, religion, and thought (Trachtenberg 23).

Besides sexual desire, Freud located the passion to know, that is knowledge as an object, in the unconscious.

According to Freud, there are two crucial moments in a man's life. One, at adolescence he discovers that he is not the centre of the universe, and then that his parents are not the centre of the universe either. Secondly, before assuming his role and responsibility in society he dreams of fairies and heroes. Such Freudian theories had far-reaching influence on literature. He suggested that for the writer, dreams give access to the self, along with a language for their understanding. This had a fruitful and liberating influence on contemporary writers and artists. So much so that it transformed the central character of the twentieth century literature as the Freudian man. The influence of Freudian interpretation is subtle and its appeal is universal because its analysis is independent of any class affiliation or ideology. Thus some critics observe that

Like Marxism and even Agrarianism, Psycho-analysis can be seen as part of the growing internationalization of the American literary intelligence. As Laurence
Holland notes, by 1940 the psychiatrist, the archetypal symbol, and the Oedipus complex had become part of modern mythology (Ruland and Bradbury 324).

Unlike the Marxian revolution that accentuated and sharpened conflicts in the society, the Freudian theory did not contribute to any social dissensions. But it made man keenly aware of the battle within himself, the eternal war going on between different instincts. Again the literary works, many in the West and some in the East, have shown the active influence of Freud by their complex and keen presentation of the battle within man, excluding the moral conflict.

These currents of thought spread slowly all over the world and brought in new ideas, shook traditional certainties and stirred a rescrutiny of concepts and values which had been taken for granted. The age old ideas concerning family, religion, soul, salvation, efficacy of prayer, were all questioned not only by agnostics but also by ordinary men and women. Man's view of himself and his relation with society, with nature and with God was changed remarkably. At mid century
the best contemporary minds were doing in an attempt to impose order on a reality that seemed increasingly impenetrable and chaotic. Gödel in Mathematics, Hisenberg and Niels Bohr in Physics, Heidegger and later Sartre in philosophy, Freud and Jung in psychology, all of them aware of the contradiction inherent in reality, were in a variety of self-conscious hypotheses recharting the world and producing maps in which the normal geographical features were replaced by contour lines of the psyche, measurements by sensations, history by myth (Brian Lee 115).

Thus the world at mid century had become in a sense a world society. The application of scientific knowledge in many spheres of life and the impact of ideas concerning the nature of human society and man's place in it changed values and guided social action. As knowledge expanded and new notions gained ground, two central ideas, the idea of nationalism, and the concept of unity of mankind had emerged stronger. The idea of nationalism inspired people under foreign regimes, who started agitating over self-rule. The Western education and the knowledge of mankind provoked the writers and thinkers who in turn
advocated the unity of humanity. Though the two ideas were often in conflict, the idea of mankind as one gained more currency. This was amply demonstrated by the work of different types of writers in different disciplines: "Northrop Frye and Leslie Fiedler in literature, Levistrauss and Stanely Diamond in anthropology, Ferdiand Braudel in history (and many others) have begun to understand culture as the resource of all people, not as the privilege of a few" (Ostender 7).

But despite the idea that mankind is one and culture is "the resource of all people" there existed some differences in some societies which led to inequality. It may sound odd and even contradictory but it has to be ascertained that even as the idea of oneness was fostered by idealists, there was also an alarming increase in dissensions and inequalities in many societies. The age old fears and prejudices of men were once again whipped up by the changing social and political conditions. Particularly, the false idea of inequality of races was nourished and fostered by many Western societies. This was due to the dominant role played by some "high-culture societies" in manipulating relations between nations to their advantage. And in some cases some European nations with their superior power and
skill employed small bands of people who established trade first and then conquered and ruled countries in the continents of America, Asia and Africa. The impact of colonization was one of the contributory factors to social dissensions in this century and this factor has to be analysed in detail, by going backwards in time and history.

These small bands of Europeans during the sixteenth century onwards were marching on an ambitious venture of conquering and subjugating any country that was sighted by them. They went on their way in Asia and the prize catch was India, and in the West, it was America. While India, including other countries, conquered by them became an "exploitation colony", America became a "settlement colony".

When the Europeans started settling in America in the seventeenth century, America had to accommodate different ethnic groups ranging variously from the native tribes such as the Red Indian, the Hurrons, and the Iroquois to European settlers such as the British, the French, the Swedish, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch etc. The settlers started their life as farmers. When the British settlers found the labour force from Britain far short of the actual demand, a solution was found in the form of importing labour from Africa. The Europeans had been buying
slaves since the sixteenth century and bringing them to America. On the arrival of the Africans, the social fabric of America was totally changed. The country had to accommodate broadly three distinct ethnic groups: the native Americans, the European settlers, and the African Blacks.

The African blacks were brought to America as slaves, so they were treated as animals. The life in the new world was one of isolation or separation for both the slave and master. Family life was not possible among slaves because at any moment husbands might be sold away from their wives, children from their mothers. The whites led a life not as members of a close-knit community but as individual farmers. So tension and rivalry among them were inevitable. They treated the Red Indians treacherously and cruelly. They committed racial oppression and social discrimination upon the blacks. From the beginning of the colonial life, slavery and racism had gone together. Out of this racial oppression and slavery rose the two principal emotions of American society: Fear and hatred (Franklin 424).

During the periods of settlement and slavery and later in the war about slavery, the whites regarded red men, black men and yellow men not as human, but as inferior to their race and so not more than animals. The whites were
under the impression that they are second only to the angels in creation. Thus the American society emerged with two distinct alien races as its two principal entities. The two races lived in a world apart from each other. Thus observes a critic: "It was the system of slavery with its basic assumption of an inherent difference between the white man and the black man that gave rise to the deliberate separation of the races" (Franklin 424).

By the seventeenth century, slavery was codified and consolidated by the Whites. They made it a system of covering not only the life of an individual but the succeeding generations. It was kept as an instrument of racial control, and the economic, social and racial importance of the system encouraged the elaborate defence of it. Slavery was considered by the Southerner as well as the Northerner as a domestic institution. The Whites regarded America as a white man's country and slavery was beyond the constitutional reach of the Federal government. Thus

unlike the first white immigrants and indentured servants, the Africans were the only group to be systematically deprived of their old world cultural links and social support systems in order to transform them into slaves for life. This development which
began as early as 1640 was the result of the interplay of the economics of slavery and the psychology of racism, for the increasing demand for cheap labour led to political acts in the late seventeenth century and a social ideology by the late nineteenth century that imposed severe restrictions on the civil rights of blacks and denied their human rights (Bell 7).

But the American black never looked upon slavery as part of the order of nature of a permanent condition. The indignities of slavery never became nor were accepted part of their outlook of life. The blacks found that the racial dogma that was developed during slavery was to rationalize the existence of that institution. The masters further attributed the black's dependence, poverty, and ignorance to his inherent inferiority.

This racial "inferiority" of the black and the supposed white racial purity had become a device to justify the continued prejudice against the black. Hence after slavery, the blacks found, both economically and psychologically, an unfavourable climate for their full integration with the white society. The Southern states took harsh measures and created a subordinate and restricted status for
the black population. To assert white supremacy over the blacks, they used the practice of segregation, disfranchisement and denial of education. The denial of literacy which was the chief mode of acculturation in Euro-American society kept them at a distance.

During the First World War, as the industry expanded and the supply of immigrant labour was stopped, the recruiting agents turned to the South. A mass migration was the result. In the Northern cities, blacks encountered negative and discriminatory attitudes of employers and white fellow workers. The unskilled, heavy and menial jobs were regarded as black jobs.

The practice of segregation on the basis of race and colour was codified into a system. This was made possible with the backing of a spate of new legislations reinforced by violence, intimidation and race riots. In the South "Under the pattern of segregation, Negroes had to sit in coloured waiting rooms, travel in coloured sections of trains, use service lifts, walk in coloured parts, read in coloured libraries and attend coloured schools" (Ware et al 1169). In the North segregation was not followed as a policy, but blacks had to live in the poorest slums and to fill the lowest job. By unsystematic but effective job
discriminations, inability to rent or buy housing space, and the exclusion from public eating places, blacks in Northern cities were forced to live in the ghettos in miserable existence. Whether South or North, they had to be prepared to meet the stereotype of the lazy, easy-going, irresponsible person of inferior mentality whose slum living, poverty and lack of education had been thought of an inevitable part of his racial characteristics (Ware, Panikkar and Romein 1169).

Based on the racial characteristics of the colour of skin and hair, and their presumed inferiority and the ritual of race relations (non-reciprocal social action), the white society denied them equality of opportunity, status and elementary rights. After the civil war, there were political exclusion, social segregation, and discrimination in employment and residence. Discrimination in housing became the most stubborn obstacle to full integration. There were many restrictions on the part of unwilling builders, real estate brokers and lending institutions to build, sell or finance to blacks except in areas where non-whites already predominated. This segregation of living led in effect to the denial of facilities such as schools or parks. In the suburban areas they were denied access quite blatantly. The result of these restrictions were poor
housing and higher rents and thickly crowded accommodation for the black population. The most important and serious one was isolation from the broader community.

Facing all these indignities and economic distress and political exclusion, blacks looked in all directions and tried to find ways and means for an appropriate strategy. They were wrestling with their own quality as Americans/blacks, and seeking to resolve the dilemma between separation and integration. Immediately after the war, education became an indispensable element in the struggle for full participation both on the part of millions of blacks as individuals and in the organized expression of their aspirations. Missionaries, Churches and public spirited citizens in the Southern states and in the capital of North, with the aid of the Federal government, established institutions of higher education for blacks. These institutions played a vital role in providing a body of educated leaders and serving as focal point for the formation of opinion for mutual support and the development of the black. But in "the opening of the twentieth century it was apparent that the struggle for full citizenship would be more complex than it had first appeared. The elaborate design of subordination developed by the white south confronted the Negro with a pattern of expected and enforced
behaviour which placed many practical and psychological blocks in the way of his advance" (Ware, Panikkar, Romein, et al 1168-1169).

When the struggle for full citizenship met with mute response, social rifts were widened. During the 1930s the Communist party advocated self-determination or separate state for the blacks but had enlisted little support. This "plight of blacks in the South and in the ghettos of northern cities did not become prominent, did not enter public consciousness as a potentially tragic rift in American society, until the civil rights movement of the late 1950s, dramatized by the boycotts and marches led by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and the several ghetto uprisings and riots in the middle 1960s" (Trachtenberg 6). Thus the experiences of the blacks were nightmarish and historically they were the experiences of Africa, the transatlantic or middle passage, slavery, Southern plantation tradition, emancipation, Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, Northern migration, Urbanisation and racism. Through these experiences, blacks struggled for life, liberty and wholeness as Americans.

This wholeness was denied to blacks on the basis of physical differences. The attitude of the white majorit!
and their assigning special roles to blacks affected personality formation of blacks. The result was the cultural conflict: blacks verses whites. And "Furthermore, blacks and whites are still in conflict, with blacks struggling to release themselves from the restraints of caste and with whites struggling to prevent removal of all such constrictions. The struggle still prevents social unity' (Starke 5).

This situation in the American society has had an inevitable impact on the literature of the blacks. Many black writers felt it their primary responsibility to focus on the sufferings of their fellow blacks. The interaction between society and literature gets undeniable proof in the writings of the black writers and prominent among them is Richard Wright who had a pioneering role to perform.

Richard Wright sees disorder and dismay pervading black life, and racial oppression and social prejudice ruling it. His primary objective is the portrayal of the relationship between blacks and whites. He tries to expose the great social crime that America perpetrated upon the black masses and the effect of the crime on the life and personality of the black. A critic comments on Wright's work in this regard: "Richard Wright was a man with a
mission and a message: his mission was to overwhelm the sensibilities of the white world with the truth of his naturalistic vision and the power of his craftsmanship; his message was that the Afro-American was America's metaphor" (Bell 154-155).

As the global depression reached its peak in the 1930s, artists and intellectuals enlisted in social and political causes; unemployment, economic chaos, and the growing menace of fascism all served to convince many creative people that old order no longer worked. Most turned to Marxism as an alternative, directing their talent and energy toward a worldwide proletarian revolution. In their hands, art sometimes became a weapon and sometimes merely a polemic. In the hands of Richard Wright in America and Jayakāntha in India, it had become a weapon.

In India cultural conflict and social disunity due to stratification on the basis of ethnic, religious, and racial distinctions were even more intense than in America. India has been subjected to many invasions by different races at different periods of history. Indo-Aryans, Mongols, Muslims and Europeans all by turns had subjugated India. These rulers had contributed immensely to the formation of a pluralistic Indian society. Its character
and constitution have been commented upon thus:

Indian society is old and it is extremely complex. According to a popular estimate it has covered a span of five thousand years since the period of its first known civilization. During this long period several waves of immigrants, representing different ethnic strains and linguistic families, have merged into its population to contribute to its diversity, richness, and vitality (Dube 1).

Aryans were the first to arrive in India. Even though they had a flair for poetry, philosophical speculation, and elaborate rituals, they did not bring a civilization with them. They were mainly pastoral people. They were racists because they regarded themselves as superior, looked down upon and deprecated the native inhabitants of the land; coined several derogatory terms about them; and above all they practised ritual purity and regarded interdining and physical contact with the other races as pollution. This led to the creation of the "complexion" (Varna) and also caste (Jati). Thus the Indian society began taking shape. When the area of interaction between Indo-Aryans and the native inhabitants widened, the ideological and social frame of the society also had
emerged, dividing the society into groups hierarchically. The Indo-Aryans were divided into three groups; Warriors and the aristocracy (Rajanya), the Priests (Brahmin), and the cultivators (Vaishya). The cultivators (Vaishyas) gradually took to trade and commerce. These three groups were called "twice born" groups because they had first a physical birth and a second birth when initiated into varna status. Apart from these three, there were two other groups which were drawn from outside the Indo-Aryan group. The Peasants (Shudras) are the fourth and the untouchables (the Pancham) are the fifth (Dube 5-6).

But generally, Indian society can be divided into four groups only, the fourth and the fifth having been merged together. These two groups were denied the twice-born status. They were assigned very low occupations and their status was supposedly so low and polluting that any physical contact with them was prohibited. This process of Aryanization was not smooth but characterized by considerable cultural conflict and warfare. The Aryans encountered in the South India a well established, exquisitely refined Tamil society. According to a modern social historian

The texture of Hindu society in the South was
influenced by strong regional traditions that existed there during the process of Aryanization. Tamil society, scholars believe, was well established in 200 B.C. An early grammar, Tolkappiyam (200 A.D.) provides some profiles of the organisation of society and describes life in the hill areas, in forests, in cultivated plains, in coastal areas, and in desert areas. In the rich corpus of Sangam literature (200 B.C. - 200 A.D.), one gets the portrayal of Tamil society emerging from segmented social formations into larger well-knit states under kings whose bravery and valour were celebrated. Comparable to Kautilya’s Arthasastra and Manu’s Code is the great Tamil Classic Tirukkural (A.D. 300) by Tiruvalluvar (Dube 13-14).

The main thrust of this Tamil classic is on virtue, wealth, and pleasure. Deliverance from worldly woes into a heavenly abode is not at all mentioned in this work. It simply gives guidance to the householder, the ascetic and the king or man of power. The codes for individual conduct, the rules for social harmony and the ways to achieve success in life are explained. Aram or righteousness is meant for one and all, irrespective of the social status. It makes no distinction between the king and an ordinary citizen. Attainment of a place in this world rather than other worldly honours (Moksha) is its central theme.
Thus when the process of Aryanization spread to Tamil society, they found that the idea of deliverance was not there (Moksha) and there was no discrimination between the prince and the peasant. And in the Indo-Aryan society, the concept of *karma*—a theory that the deeds of one's previous lives influence the present life, and deeds in this life determine future lives—embodied the notion of rebirth. On the other hand, as Tirukkural exemplifies, in Tamil society, life in this world was considered more important. Thus Indian society emerged out of divergent regional and ethnic elements. Many non-Aryan beliefs, deities and rituals were incorporated into the Hindu social system. The texture of the old Indian society had developed through the dual process of considerable conflict and much accommodation. Parenthetically speaking, it has to be noted with caution that the term "Indian" as a qualifier has been used in this study more for the sake of convenience than an exact description. The term "Indian" is quite inclusive and refers to a conglomerate, complex and rather contradictory society. The beliefs and practices were sometimes quite opposed to each other, especially when they belonged to the peoples of the North and the South.
generally acceptable model that contains the features of all parts of the country is envisaged in this argument to present a mosaic of the Indian society.

The Indian social system is noted to be bounded and rigid. Manu's laws of social system, Manusmriti, provided a complex code and framework for the structuring of the Indian society. It derives from different literary sources including the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Dharma Sutras and the two great epics, Mahabharatha and Ramayana. In the process, a tradition has been evolved and the Indian society framed it so that one's status is determined by the accident of birth in a caste and not by the quality of one's performance, and the criterion of status evaluation was ritual, not economic or political. There are elaborate rules governing the maintenance of purity and avoidance of pollution. The goals of an individual's life were prescribed as the path of righteousness (Dharma), pursuit of health (Artha), pursuit of bodily desires (Karma), and salvation (Moksha). There were four stages of life: celibacy (student life or Bramacharya), the Householder's life (Grahastya), the hermits life (Vanaprastha), and renunciation from family and worldly concerns (Sanyasa). The vital fact to remember is that all these were applied only to the twice-borns.
When its codes and rituals became rigid and discriminatory, there was dissent in its rank and file. Out of this dissent emerged religions like Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. And at the arrival of Christianity and Islam the society had achieved a high degree of variety and complexity. Of the two, Islam made a greater impact on the Indian society. Islam, the religion of the Middle East, was carried into India by the early conquerors. Beginning in the eighth century, many zealous Muslim invaders from Persia, Turkey, and Afghanistan found their way through the Khyber pass and overwhelmed the Hindu Kingdoms and destroyed many temples. On the ruins, they established their mighty empire and remained predominant until the seventeenth century and sowed the seeds of religious rivalry. Many Hindus were converted into Islam and the conflict became more intense and widespread.

During the seventeenth century, the British replaced the Moghul rulers and finally when they emerged as the dominant force in the subcontinent, antagonisms grew even more complex. Though both the Hindus and the Muslims resented the Westerners, the Muslims found it hard to adjust with the changing socio-political climate. And during the process of industrialization, their traditions kept them
back still more. Their holy book the Koran laid stress on religious rather than secular education, and its preachings were against the new commercial practice. But many Hindus rose to positions of power and wealth while a number of Muslims remained poor.

When the East India Company set foot in India in 1608, Portuguese traders had been there for more than a hundred years, and the Dutch were in control of the coast. All these European powers were after the exotic Indian spices, drugs, silk and Calico. Defeating the rivals, the British moved inland and brought the subcontinent under their control. The company's original intention was to trade, not to govern, when trade prospered and more Britons settled, the need for protection arose and the British army arrived. Soon, the British Parliament was involved deeply in India's internal affairs and it gave apparently noble excuses for its motives, saying their mission was not to exploit but to civilise India, since the British thought the Hindu customs were barbaric.

The British, with the help of the Western educated Hindu reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy of Bengal, brought many revolutionary changes in the society. They abolished female infanticide, ritual strangling, and Sati (the burning
of widows on their husband's funeral pyres). They brought changes in the system of justice, based on equality before law and replaced ancient Hindu codes that meted out punishment that varied by caste. But, regarding women, the changes were too slow to give them equality and freedom and social status. Backed by a history of two thousand years, women were treated as personal property. To put it plainly, "In India, Hindu women lived under severe legal and social restrictions, their scope of activity defined their place in the extended family system. Seclusion was common, child marriage frequent, permanent widowhood the rule and education rare" (Ware, Panikkar, Romein et al 1143). Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi lent powerful support to the cause of women's welfare. The introduction of Western education and the growth of modern industry were the most potent factors in breaking down the rigidity of caste stratification and the curtailment of women's freedom.

The Indian society was thus given a new shape and structure by the British rulers, though it was not acknowledged by the Indians themselves for a long time. The impact of the British rule on Indian society was gradual, slow and imperceptible. It can be said that the British unified India through roads, railways and canals. They made English India's official language in 1837. As facilities
for education and employment were thrown open to Indians, they grabbed the new opportunities and a new phase in the history of India began. The British-trained lawyers and the educated Indians began to see themselves as Indians rather than Bengalis or Punjabis. As this sense of identity grew, they raised the banner of revolt and started the freedom movement. The movement was split into two on the religious lines. The first was initially formed as the Indian National Congress (1885) and later the Muslims formed their All India Muslim League in 1906. The ancient Hindu-Muslim antagonism and the Muslim fear for their minority rights in an independent nation had prompted the split and later in 1947 the separation of India into two nations - Pakistan and India.

During and after the Independence, the Indian States, particularly in the South, took enormous efforts to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, and untouchability. They also attempted to provide equal opportunities to women. The Government of India constitutionally offered all possible assistance to the State Government. In Tamil Nadu thanks to social reformers like E.V.R. Periyār and statesmen like Kāmarāj, the caste system was assailed and the propagation of education was done on war footing; writers also contributed to this objective; their crusade was against
child marriage, casteism, untouchability, widowhood and exploitation. Among the writers in Tamil literature there was a conscious effort only by a few writers to project these issues in their writings. Of these writers, Putumaippittan, Vā. Rāmacāmi and Jayakāntan merit a vital place. In the late fifties Jayakāntan emerged in modern Tamil fiction as a spokesman of the under-privileged.

Jayakāntan wrote and spoke for the uplift of the poor, the women and the downtrodden. As a non-Brahmin and as one tempered with scientific socialism, Jayakāntan could go to the roots of perhaps the oldest and long standing conflict in the South Indian society: Brahmin versus non-Brahmin. It was his conviction that a Brahmin is not a caste name and that 'Brahminism' is not the monopoly of one community, instead it is the hereditary property of any Indian practising Brahminism. He highlights the problems of the social life in a society divided on the basis of class and caste.

Hailing from different races, reared by different cultures and having lived in different social milieu, Richard Wright and Jayakāntan share some aspects of the commonality of mankind. In the opinion of many critics,
"Richard Wright was the first twentieth century writer to deal extensively with the economic and moral problems of Negro as they existed in the Ghetto" (Emanuel and Gross 222). And Jayakāntan was the first Tamil writer to explore the lives of the downtrodden, the physically handicapped, the prostitutes, the models and the beggars. A noted Tamil writer claims: "Putumaippitan took the scene of short story to the streets and Jayakantanan drove it to the lowest level of life" (Cuntararāmacāmi 14).

Richard Wright and Jayakāntan have had an unpleasant, even tortuous years in their boyhood and youth. They went through "the workshop" gathering rich, complex and mostly disturbing experiences, which served as valuable material for their writing career later on. It should also be pointed out that the bitterness in personal life caused an angry glow in the heart which kept on burning. These angry men sought expression for their smouldering hatred of the society in their literary outpourings.

Richard Wright has almost succeeded in depicting the struggles of man in a hostile environment. He is the interpreter of the sufferings and miseries of the blacks to the white people. Jayakāntan's writings examine social inequality, caste barriers and the resultant frictions; the
secondary or slave like status of women, all made him to be a crusader of social justice and a spokesman of the scientific socialism.

Richard Wright's writings have only one story to tell; the conflict between the black and white. Jayakant depicts the conflict within the Indian society caused by caste and economic factors; in his writings he also espouses the unity of the society though it is divided by caste, religion and wealth.

The title of the dissertation signifies the disunion in the American society along the colour line and in the Indian society on the basis of class and caste. While the segregation in America is historically recent and consciously too strong, in India, the caste barrier is historically too distant and ancient and it has become part of being and unconscious to most of the oppressed people.

Thus we see a comparable social situation, similar human context, and identical artistic, literary reactions in these two societies.

In this dissertation, an attempt is made at a parallel study of these two writers who belong to different nations, different races, different cultures and in a sense different periods of time. But when their childhood is
taken into account both of them are more or less the products of hunger, poverty and above all Marxist ideology. Hence there are similar reactions to similar social situations. Their literary works prove the statement that "Literature is one as art and humanity are one" (Wellek and Warren 50).

Since the aspirations, ambitions, the reactions to failures and successes are similar everywhere, there are inter-cultural identities which make things easy for comparison. As Chellappan observes, "...Comparative literature in the broad sense sees the unity of human consciousness and the unity underlying the different ways in which the human spirit has sought expression creatively producing different cultural patterns..." (Chellappan 110). Wright and Jayakānta expressed creatively their reactions in a hostile social environment. Their writings instantly achieved recognition and caused surprise by their innovative ideas. They have created a new awakening in their respective literary as well as social traditions. Initially the cultural distance between these two writers are felt great by the researcher. But the distance between the two writers gradually disappears and there emerges a comparable literary worth of both the writers. Claude Levi Strauss' observation that "the human mind is everywhere one and the
same and that it has the same capacities" becomes quite apt here (Levi Strauss Qtd in Fokkema 121). Thus the apparent gulf between the works of these two writers is scrutinized closely and a comparable ground has been prepared on the affinities of the writings of the two writers. Further probing of the writers and their social environment yields rich rewards. As the well known definition points out,

Among the various components of comparative Literature, Remak puts study of affinities in theme first: A systematic revitalizing of the comparative might be the most natural and effective way of bringing literary criticism, and evaluation into comparative literature through the comparison, by analogy or contrast of (not necessarily casually) related works, works comparable because of elective affinities in theme, problem, genre, style, simultaneousness, Zeitgeist, stage of cultural evolution etc. (qtd. in Chellappan 111).

This dissertation examines the themes, Zeitgeist, genre, style and problems of Wright's and Jayakanta's works.

The dissertation in Chapter two examines, "The Life and Literary Background of Richard Wright and Jayakanta", their childhood, education, political
affiliation, literary apprenticeship and other related matters.

The third chapter, "Race and Caste Conflicts", deals with the conflict in American Society on the racial lines of black versus white and in the Indian society those encountered between different castes.

The fourth chapter, "Sexual politics/conflicts", analyses the social oppression of black women in American society and the black male white woman confrontation and the consequences. It then highlights the plight of women in Tamil society and their sufferings as an oppressed segment of the society as presented by Jayakāntaṇ.

The fifth chapter, "Tyranny and Agony: Class Conflicts", probes the social relations between the poor blacks and the rich and powerful whites in America as portrayed in some works of Wright, and poverty stricken weaker section and the rich, dominant section of the Indian society discussed by Jayakāntaṇ. Works of Wright and Jayakāntaṇ that portray these conflicts have been analysed from this angle in this chapter.

And in chapter six, "Art and Commitment", an attempt has been made to assess the artistic merits of the two writers' works. And their commitment and its impact on
their art are also discussed.

Chapter seven, Conclusion: "Two Humanists", highlights briefly the important features of the foregoing chapters and makes a detailed study of comparison of their writings and brings out the similarities and dissimilarities.

The socio-political situation of the world during the twentieth century in general, and the shaping up of the American society and Indian society by racial, cultural, philosophical and scientific factors in particular, have influenced the literatures of these two societies. Finally, Richard Wright and Jayakant emerge in this study as the spokesmen of their societies. The chapters that follow will attempt to prove the validity of these statements.