CHAPTER TWO
LIFE AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

As writers of social change and human equality, Richard Wright and Jayakāntan are the products of their society and their contemporary polity and history. As Marx observed, their social environment can be said to have shaped their lives and writings. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx qtd. in Schwarz 610).

Their hunger-filled, poverty-stricken, rootless childhood moulded their personality in such a way as to focus on and highlight these horrible social crimes in their writings. They are compelled by their sufferings to turn into rebels against the establishment. The exploitation and oppression, inequality in social justice and the indifference of authorities toward the plight of the poor are forces that condition the writings of such writers and give a direction and purpose to their writings. As a critic succinctly puts it "Change in character follows change in social structure, especially in economic patterns" (Trachtenberg 13). Richard Wright's and Jayakāntan's writings amply demonstrate that the changes in their writings simply coincide with, or in direct relation to, the change in their social
relationships: When they were successful in their writing career they gradually attained economic self-sufficiency; politically they were very forthright in identifying their causes with Marxism, and later they abandoned the party. All these were reflected in their writings. This relationship between social status of the writers and the subject of their writings strengthen the notion that literature is a product of society and that the behaviour of characters within it are products of historical forces. As Prawer said "Literature speaks of man in a definite socio-historical setting, and is produced as well as received by individual, socially conditioned men" (Prawer 403). Richard Wright and Jayakanth are two such socially conditioned men, trapped in identical family situations, who reacted to their environment identically in their writings too.

Richard Wright was born on September 4, 1908 on a plantation in Roxie near Natchez. His father Nathan Wright was a sharecropper, mother Ella Wilson Wright was a teacher. Suffering from extreme poverty, they migrated to Memphis, Tennessee to improve their economic status. But soon Richard Wright's father deserted the family, putting the family in a precarious situation. Richard and his brother had a torrid life of hunger and poverty. His mother had got only menial jobs which gave her a meagre earning. In 1916,
they moved to Elaine, Arkansas to live with Wright's aunt Maggie and uncle Silas Hoskins. Unfortunately, Silas was murdered by certain whites and his property was taken away by them. They fled to West Helena, Arkansas and then moved to Jackson, Mississippi. As if to add to their woes, in 1919, Richard Wright's mother suffered a stroke. The sufferings of his ailing mother had a devastating impact on young Richard. He chose to live with his uncle Clark and Aunt Jody in Greenwood, Mississippi, where he could be near his mother. Yet here too many restrictions placed on him by his aunt and uncle demoralized him. He was later permitted to live with his grandmother from early 1920 and he was there until late 1925.

Wright could not get proper education because it was greatly disturbed by the family's disorganization and estrangements. The frequent moves and his mother's chronic illness made it difficult for him to attend the school regularly. He first entered Howe Institute in Memphis, Tennesse, around 1916. During his stay with his Aunt Addie in Jackson, Mississippi, he enrolled in the Seventh Day Adventist School. His aunt, who was a fanatical Seventh Day Adventist, was the only teacher. Wright was constantly forced by his aunt and grandmother to pray to God. He resented their goadings and threatened to leave the house.
This bitter experience left him with a permanent, uncompromising hostility toward religious solutions to mundane problems. In 1921 he joined a fifth grade class at Jim Hill Public School, Jackson, Mississippi. Within two weeks he was promoted to the sixth grade. In 1923 he enrolled at the Smith Robinson School, also in Jackson. In September 1925 Wright registered for Mathematics, English and History courses at the new Lanier High School in Jackson, but had to stop attending classes after a few weeks because he needed money to earn for family expenses.

Wright encountered many hurdles in the white-dominated, racially-divided society. He and his lot lived under a constant threat of being punished at the slightest provocation. The racial oppression, colour prejudice and economic exploitation humbled them to the extent of voluntary servitude. They clung to their religion, which, they felt, gave some solace to their sufferings. They could not find ways for intellectual development. Colour played a dominant role in deciding one's fate. A black could never be human; he was considered to be and treated and suffered like an animal. The 'Ku Klux Klan' perpetuated white supremacy, spreading terror among blacks by eliminating them indiscriminately. The white woman was regarded as sacred;
"a goddess on earth". The black touching a white woman was tantamount to murder and thus warranted lynching and capital punishment. So, blacks at the earliest chance migrated to North America, where the treatment was comparatively different. Wright lived through these traumatic experiences of colour prejudice, racial oppression and white supremacy during his early life. So, he longed for freedom and defied his aunt's authority, disobeyed his grandmother's religious codes and read story books. When he wanted to go and explore the world outside, he was confined to a certain place, geographically. When he went to Memphis in 1925, he felt comparatively free and discovered a sort of freedom in reading books.

From an early age, he dreamed of becoming a writer. When he was still in school at Jackson, he published a story "The Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre" in 1924. The two years he remained in Memphis from 1925 gave him ample opportunity for reading. He developed a passion for reading and discovered Harper's Magazine, the Atlantic Monthly, and the American Mercury. He read H.L. Mencken's articles, books and a Book of Prefaces and one of his six volumes of Prejudices. He was particularly impressed with Mencken's vision of the South as hell. A Book of Prefaces
introduced him to Dreiser, Conrad, the French and British realists. In short, it served as his literacy 'Bible'. Of the American writers, Edger Allen Poe's horror tale, the gothic, the fantastic, and the detective had considerable influence on him. Henry James, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Sherwood Anderson and above all Theodore Dreiser had served a decisive role in shaping his writings. Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell and Ernest Hemingway also influenced him. In British literature, Shakespeare's tragedies, the writings of Jonathan Swift, Thomas Hardy, George Moore, H.G. Wells and his contemporaries James Joyce and D.H. Leverence were of great interest to him. From Russian literature, Dostoevsky's influence was considerable and Tolstoy, Chekov and Turgenev deeply attracted him. In French he was familiar with the writers like Balzac, Dumas, Voltaire as well as Mauppassant, Flaubert and Marcel Proust. Frazer's Golden Bough and Joseph Warren Beach's The Twentieth Century Novel are important works that influenced him. During his Paris years, his contact and collaboration with French existentialists, thinkers and writers such as Sartre, Camus, and Simon de Beauvoir, and his genuine interest in and knowledge of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, among the German
School of existentialists, had a lasting influence. Michael Fabre sums up:

Wright certainly derived more from Conrad or Poe, with regard to the expression of moods; Henry James and Hemingway with regard to the use of symbols; from Gertrude Stein with regard to speech rhythm; and he learned from Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and above all Dostoevsky. Yet the impact of the American realists was important because it came first and because it closely corresponded to Wright's own experience (Fabre 61).

After arriving at Chicago in 1927, he served his literary apprenticeship during the ten years he spent there. In 1933 he became an officer of the John Reed Club; he joined the Communist party in the same year. He contributed poems to New Masses and published revolutionary verse in the Middle Western Reed Club Magazines Anvil and Left Front. When he was employed on the Federal Writers Project, American Stuff carried one of his stories which resulted in the publication of his first book Uncle Tom's Children in 1938. With the publication of this book, Wright proved that he "was capable of translating into artistic terms two things: What it meant to be a Negro in America and what it meant to America to have created this alien Native Son" (Davis 147).
Like Richard Wright's childhood, Jayakāntaṇ's childhood was equally miserable and full of struggles for survival. Jayakāntaṇ was born in 1934 in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu. There was poverty and rootlessness in his childhood, because, his father had deserted the family quite early. Jayakāntaṇ managed to study only up to the elementary level. Abandoned by his father, he and his mother fought hard to make a living.

His uncle guided him at times. At the early age of ten, he worked as a railway porter, assisted a horse wagon driver and joined a drama company. Later, he moved to the city of opportunities, Madras. His uncle managed to get him minor employment in the Indian Communist Party office as a messenger; subsequently he worked variously as a compositor for the party Newspaper; as a receptionist at the state committee office; sold books and collected funds for the party. In 1950, at the age of sixteen, he became a full-time Communist Party member. In a short period, he became one of the propaganda workers of the party. Party workers encouraged him to study books, supplying him with hundreds of books and appointed two teachers to coach him. It was here that Jayakāntaṇ learnt quite a bit of ancient Tamil literature. The thirst for learning egged him on and
so he learned much about Western literature too, during this period. He was equally attracted to Hindu religious scriptures and Indian epics such as the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana. He had exposure to the works of many great writers: particularly Cupramaṇya Pāratiyār, Putumaippittan, Rakunāta, Citambara Cupramaṇyam in Tamil; Premchand, Krishan Chander from Hindi; Bankim chandra and Sarat Chandra in Bengali; British writers: Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Bertrand Russell D.H. Lawerence, and Aldous Huxely; Emily Zola, Balzac, Mauppasant in French; and in Russian, Tolstoy, Chekov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Maxim Gorky and Sholokov. All these writers have influenced Jayakānta’s writings one way or another, some explicity and some implicitly. Besides these literary works, he learned the essentials of Indian philosophy from Swami Vivekananda.

Jayakānta’s early writings especially the short stories are influenced by Putumaipitta. Notably, he imitates Putumaipitta’s technique beginning of a story and the ending of it. The chief feature is the interrogative sentence. Detailed description of the place or the protagonist of the story and the authorial comment at the beginning or at the end of a story are other characteristics. Jayakānta confesses that he is "crazy
about Putumaipittan's writings" (Or IlakkiaVātiyin Kalaiyulaka Agupavaṅkāl, 46). If one can trace the influence of Putumaipittan in Jayakāntar's short stories, his models for his novels and novellas have been Leo Tolstoy for techniques and Bertrand Russell for ideas. Tolstoy's vision of people that they are not completely bad or completely perfect but they are the mixture of the both is shared by Jayakāntar. In his early days Jayakāntar read Tolstoy's works in Tamil translation and perhaps this would have influenced him immensely because there is a marked shift in his style after the sixties. It simply resembles Tolstoy's style in Tamil translation. This is evident in a short story titled "Niṟaṅkaḷ" (colours). Tolstoy's syntactic patterns have been adopted freely. On many occasions Jayakāntar mentions Tolstoy and his works. "When I read Annakarenina in my early writing career, I was struck by the grandeur of the novel". In the same breath he says that "I was attracted towards French and Russian creative writers of 18th and 19th centuries. Among them Tolstoy was the first and foremost in attracting my taste and thinking."

(Imayattuku Appāl 5).

In one of his essays "My favourite Books" he writes thus: "Tolstoy's influences on me may be great."

(Jayakāntar Kaṭṭuraikal 257). Besides this his views on
marriage, society and morals are influenced by Russell. He confirms it thus. "Russell has diverted the focus of my thinking. He has released me from my dogmatic attitudes. I fully recognize and whole heartedly accept his view on morality (ethics?), society, politics and Man". (Jayakāntan Katturaikal 137). Thus we find Russell's influence in his fiction on love, marriage and sex.

Two different but powerful forces shaped his creative genius. One is the ancient Hindu religion and its flexibility in adapting to the ever-changing needs of society, being part of the life of the majority of the Indians. The second one is that movement and ideology which was born in the West and which advocates the removal of inequality in establishing a classless society: Marxism. His understanding of socialism was through the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Pāratiyār and through the philosophy of Marx. His understanding of Hinduism is that there shall be no discrimination among the people and that all are equal: all things are for all as all property is to be regarded as public property: in short, an ideal of a Hindu Socialistic society. His Hinduism is that which was in vogue during the Vedic age, when the great Vedas envisaged in their ages a grand society. He thought and conceived of
the Marxist's socialist society as one on a par with the Vedic society.

At the same time the socio-historic environment had a deep impact on his writings. He had some differences of opinion with the members of the Communist Party. There were some painful and traumatic experiences during this period with regard to his relationship with some friends in the party. The radical developments and changes that took place in the Indian society in particular and around the world in general had a direct bearing on his attitude and belief. He was very much fascinated with the socialist oriented activities of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. He was very much impressed by Nehru's conviction that socialism could be achieved through love and peaceful means. Under Nehru's leadership, India achieved remarkable success in the fields of science and technology, industry and education. But unfortunately the benefits were reaped by the capitalists only and their exploitation of society resulted in widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

In Tamilnadu the Dravidian movements took a strong anti-Brahmin stance and focussed on the Tamil literary and cultural pride. Jayakantān vehemently attacked the policies
and programmes of the Dravidian movement. He was very much worried about the constant religious animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims. These developments kept the Gandhian concept of religious amity a mere dream, and peace was disturbed time and again by periodic conflicts. Besides, the caste wars became intense and occurred regularly and society was plunged into a crisis. All these developments forced him to be the spokesman of the weak and the poor. He championed the causes of the exploited, the meek and the women. He started writing short stories taking up these issues as the themes of his stories. In the beginning he took Putumaipittan's short stories as his models. In story telling, style and sentence structure he followed Putumaipittan's technique. As he grew into maturity, and his contacts with works in other languages widened, he evolved a style and a philosophy of life of his own.

Thus we note that both Richard Wright and Jayakanta had an unpleasant even tortuous phase in their boyhood and youth. The biographical similarities and identical reactions to the situations in their lives and their evolving a vision of life similar in many parts were worth recording in detail. In addition to personal factors,
sociological factors too played a key role in influencing their art and talent.

Literature is produced in specific socio-historical, cultural and ideological contexts. The creative writer reflects, echoes and at times reacts in the process of his interaction with the society. The writer depends on the social and cultural institutions and he derives his sources from the everyday world. Especially, in the modern novel, the writer focuses his attention on the social world and its complexities ruled by many historical factors. Thus literature transposed an entirely new meaning of the social, not simply in thematic terms or its treatment of the material content of everyday life and ordinary persons, but in its grasp and the dialogic richness, ambiguity, openness and unfinalised nature of human interaction, social relationships and social meaning (Swingewood 77).

Society is made up of institutions, practices, customs and beliefs; it is divided by class, caste and religion. These social forces mould the role and direct the course of human nature. To make these forces positive in
refining and restructuring man and human nature respectively, art acts as an agent of change. Literature as art acts as an agent of change in man and society by interpreting and criticising the problems of man and society. Thus literature springs from the socially committed man's heart who longs for change in life and social activity.

Richard Wright's writings in the tradition of American literature and Jayakanth's writings in the tradition of Indian literature were the product of their social compulsions. These social compulsions were the legacy of the historical forces that acted in such a way as to evolve the course of social life in the societies of America and India.

When the European settlers of America started writing of their experiences, there was only American writing, but no American literature. They borrowed profusely from the European tradition and in particular imitated the British writers as a matter of course. But later on, when the American writer found that the European forms did not suit his experiences of a new nation, he evolved "a writing which fitted the continent's novelty and strangeness: the problems of its settlement, the harshness
and grandeur of its landscape, the mysterious potential of its seemingly boundless open space" (Ruland and Bradbury 4). The new style was made from America's nationalist principles of the spirit of the people and the power of their aspirations. It reflected their distinctive institutions and evolved from their folk and popular art. Its rich landscape and the new social feeling, different but forward looking political institutions also contributed to its literature. Thus a very American literature rose from the interpretation of American beliefs and American dreams, American theologies and American democratic ideologies, American landscapes and American institutions, American ideas of mission and destiny, the achievements of what was now seen as unmistakably a home made world (Ruland and Bradbury XIV-XV).

In the American literary tradition, the novel occupies a prominent place, because it gives enormous freedom and flexibility to the writer to explore the life on the continent and its complexities and contradictions. Unlike the English or the Indian, the American society had no solid social structure. It did not have a long and settled history. Such a conditionality might recall to the
reader's mind the statements made by H.L. Mencken and the subsequent remarks of Lionel Trilling on the American novel and the social hierarchy. It may sound paradoxical but without a deep class conflict or hierarchical consciousness, the American novel did grow quite strong and deep-rooted. The instability of the society is reflected in the gap between the aspirations and ideals and the actual experiences of the individual. Hence,

Almost all American novelists have presented the relationship between the individual and society as a struggle between irreconcilables, and it has often been noted that American literature is rich in images of isolation and escape (Millgate 203).

And this gulf between the experience and the ideals of individual on the one hand, and between society and individual on the other had produced a unique literature. Richard Chase points out that "The imagination that has produced much of the best and most characteristic American fiction has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies of our culture" and it "tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience" (Chase 1). The contradictions apart, we find the extreme ranges of experience in abundance in the Afro-American novel.
In the American literary tradition, the Afro-American novel has a distinct place of its own. It springs from an exclusive group experience: the experiences of slavery, caste and separate institutions. The Afro-American novel had its beginnings as early as 1853. It is a product of the hybridization of black American folklore and literary genres of the Western world. Hence transcultural influences are inevitable for its development and growth. The difference between the American novel and Afro-American novel is found in their respective historical circumstances and the use of a narrative tradition that illuminates their limitations and possibilities of human condition from their respective perspectives. The Afro-American novelist focuses on the evils caused by the white supremacy. As a critic remarks,

creative Negroes voice the aspirations and resentments, the hurts and traumatic hatreds, the desires and dreams and terrible frustrations of their own race. They know what it means to be a Negro in White America, and they protest with all the force of their being against the myth of innate racial inferiority (Glicksberg 51).

The Afro-American novel considers liberty, justice and equality as its trinity of objectives. It illuminates
the black American experiences of quest for dignity as a free people, and the struggle for freedom from colour and caste discrimination. The Afro-American novelist has a dualistic frame of reference: they are outside the larger society and at the same time they are by virtue of language and cultural history American. So

in the case of the writer of African descent, her or his texts occupy spaces in at least two traditions: a European or American literary tradition, and one of the several related but distinct black traditions. The heritage of each black text written in a Western language is, then, a double heritage, two-toned, as it were. Its visual tones are white and black, and its aural tones are standard and vernacular (Gates Jr. 4).

The first generation of writers in the Afro-American novel were mainly self-educated and missionary school-trained preachers and teachers. They had craved for justice and social reform. They frequently highlighted one issue in their themes, plots, and characterization of their novels – the supremacy of whites and their atrocities on the blacks. They drew their inspiration and materials from
folklore, slave narratives, the Bible and popular fiction. Moreover,

A tragicomic vision of life, a tough-minded grip on reality, an extraordinary faith in the redemptive power of suffering and patience, a highly developed talent for dissimulation, a vigorous zest for life, a wry sense of humor, and an acute sense of timing are basic black values. These values, mainly the product of the resiliency of American cultural survivals and the resistance to class, color, and gender domination, are the major sources of tension in the themes, characters, and forms of the Afro-American novel (Bell 20).

At the end of the civil war to the turn of the century, the preoccupation of the black writer was with the struggle for freedom from colour and caste discrimination. In the process they were defining and developing themselves as an ethnic community and as individuals. Furthermore, they revealed in their writings the stark reality, rituals of lynchings, and white brutality.

The post-war I years saw the dawn of the Negro Renaissance, better known as the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro movement. The torch-bearers of this movement
highlighted the uniqueness of black music, dance and literature. They advocated in their writings the resolution of the psychological and social dilemma of the modern black American and sought the affirmation of the human spirit over the forces that threatened its integrity and development. Though the movement reigned supreme during the 1920s, it declined within a decade because it represented the efforts of the black intelligentsia whose goal was a sort of humanism; it faded out as it tried to lift lower middle-class blacks out of their ethnic community and advocated an alliance with the white working class. But it turned out to be a tame affair and during the economic disaster of 1929, it lost its prominence.

During the 1930s, the depression settled over the country. This period was a painful traumatic one for most of the blacks. Robert Bone vividly sums it up:

These were the years of organised hunger marches, of mass demonstrations for an increase in relief payments, of tenement leagues to fight evictions, of spontaneous sit down strikes, of the rise of industrial unionism, and of a sharp leftward turn in American politics. By and large, the American intelligentsia of 1930s allied
itself with these popular movements, articulated their grievances, and expressed their aspirations for social justice (Bone 112).

The black writers too joined the general trend exploring and expressing the mood of their people. The direction of the thirties then was a move toward realism and naturalism and still closer toward proletarian literature. This displayed revolutionary enthusiasm, highlighted the working class life, and their real conflicts and sufferings; expressed social themes and swift action, clear form and a direct line. Thus it had an attachment to the toiling masses. With the publication of his *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1938, Richard Wright, too joined the bandwagon.

In the history of the black novel four distinct movements/periods have been identified: (1) The assimilationist or apologist period before World War I (1900–1920), (2) The period of the Harlem Renaissance (1920–1930), (3) The period of protest literature (1930–1950) and (4) After the Protest (1950–1960). Richard Wright belongs to the protest period by virtue of his protesting themes and attitudes to the racial question.
Richard Wright's artistic talent was moulded by diverse influences such as the Negro folk tales, the African heritage of 'strong will' against 'heavy odds', his strong inclination to hear the fanciful and the imaginative, the Bible and a host of European writers about which mention has earlier been made. He was further influenced by white and black social scientists of the Chicago school and attracted to the Communist ideology. He envisioned the ideal of a biracial working class solidarity. He drew heavily from Robert E. Park's theories on "social disorganisation" and the "Marginal man" and these served as the basis for his conception of Afro-American character and culture which was reflected in the writings during the 1940s (Bell 151).

Richard Wright made it possible for the black writer to move closer to the mainstream American literature. When Wright started his writing career, he felt that he had no literary antecedents worthy of emulation or deviation. So he turned to the novels of the Western tradition for models.

I read their novels. Here, for the first time, I found ways and techniques of gauging meaningfully the effects of American civilization upon the responsibilities of people. I took these techniques, these ways of seeing
and feeling and twisted them, bent them, adapted them, until they became my ways of apprehending the locked-in life of the black belt areas ("How Bigger is Born", *Native Son* 19).

So he advocated black use of white literary means. In his celebrated essay "Blue Print for Negro writing", he calls for the employment of sophisticated techniques, and he suggested to the black writer that "Every iota of gain in human thought and sensibility should be ready grist for his mill no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications" (*Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* 399). Thus employing sophisticated techniques, Wright emerged as the first major black novelist. He was the most articulated spokesman for the oppressed black minority in the 1930s and 1940s. His was the first voice of the hitherto voiceless blacks; besides he gave them a 'face' too. His achievements made it possible for the black writing to become a powerful movement. His writings belong to the mainstream American literature even as they initiated a new phase in the modern Afro-American literature. A black critic gives Wright a place among the pioneers of black literature: "If a tradition of modern Afro-American narrative exists, it is only possible because
Wright achieved the concentrated power of a black hole that attracts all nearby stars and gives birth to the quasi-Stellar brightness of successors" (Baker Jr 172).

With the publication of Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), his writing career was launched. But it was his novel *Native Son* (1940) that made him a celebrated writer and brought him fame overnight. Critic Irving Howe commented thus "The day Native Son appeared the American culture was changed forever" (Howe 100). By the time his autobiography, *Black Boy* (1945) appeared, his name had been included in the annals of American literature as a major writer. By 1947, he became more dissatisfied with American racial policies. His visit to Paris during 1946 made him compare and contrast the freedom and acceptance in America and Paris. And moreover the American Government had suspected of his Communist leanings. After leaving America for Paris in 1947, Wright struggled for eight long years to come out with his philosophical novel *The Outsider* in 1953. It was the first existentialist novel by a black American writer. His next work, a psychological thriller, *Savage Holiday* (1954), consists of only white characters, and it was the least effective by Wright. Then came *The Long Dream* considered to be his bildungsroman, which returns to his
early thematic concerns of the racial conflicts in the South. Eight Men a story collection was published posthumously and it contains Wright's important fictional work "The Man who Lived Underground". Lawd Today which is regarded as his first novel and American Hunger, the second part of his autobiography, were published posthumously. In addition to his fictional works, Wright produced several non-fiction works. 12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States (1941) deals with the history of racial prejudice in the United States of America; Black Power (1954) recalls his visit to a British colony in Africa; The Color Curtain (1956) is on a conference held in Indonesia by the free nations of the third world; Pagan Spain (1957) about his visit to Spain and the poverty and corruption he observed there; White Man, Listen (1957) is a collection of his four lectures on race relations. In all of these works, the themes of racial oppression and social prejudice have been treated predominently. They have direct or indirect links with his own life. This autobiographical note runs as an undercurrent in all the writings he had undertaken.

Thus Richard Wright made an important contribution to American literature in the categories of naturalistic fiction as well as in protest fiction. His choice of the
material is magnetic and the style of narration is electrifying. So it at once attracts the reader and shocks him to the utmost. He had a telling influence on and an inspiration for his immediate successors. This influence had enriched the Afro-American novel a great deal. A prominent Afro-American critic observes thus:

the history of black literature in this country splits along a great divide: those artists who represent the black experience most realistically or mimetically, and those who represent it metaphorically or allegorically. One way to figure this great divide symbolically is to imagine at the paramount position of influence and emulation in the tradition of Richard Wright on one side and Ralph Ellison on the other (Gates Jr XXVI)

Like America, India has a multiracial social set up. While America was swarmed by explorers and settlers, India was invaded by different conquerers at different periods of history. Aryans came first and entrenched themselves firmly driving out the native inhabitants to the deep South. The literature which the Aryans developed was Indo-European, and Sanskrit was its medium; and in the South, the Dravidans had four languages and one of them was
Tamil. Other Indian languages are supposed to be the offshoots of these two. In India over the years there are as many languages as there are regions. So "Indian literature resembles, European literature rather than British or Polish literature. There is as yet no self-consciously national Indian literature. But of course here is a specifically Indian culture; it stands apart from and above political disunities" (Smith 716).

Indian literature has a composite development and growth. It has been the recipient of various impacts and influences during the different periods of history from various races and religions. During such periods, there were conflicts and confusions, harmony and disharmony which resulted in different levels of cultural consciousness and intellectual development. These differences and conflicts arose because when the Aryans entered the scene in India there were at least three language families such as Austric, Sino-Tibetan and Dravidian. As Krishna Kripalani puts it:

The Dravidians claim for their speech an antiquity which almost rivals that of Sanskrit, and it is conceivable that when the Aryan sages were discoursing in Sanskrit by the shore of Ganga, the Tamil poets were composing secular love lyrics on the banks of the

67
Cauvery, while the Buddhist, and Jain evangelists turning their back on the literary medium of the learned Brahmins were preaching their gospel in the spoken dialects of the people (Kripalani 3-4).

Tamil is the oldest language among the Dravidian family of languages. Its history dates back to the pre-Christian era by all historical linguistic accounts.

But in the Tamil literary tradition, the novel as a literary form emerged only during the late 19th century. Only after the advent of the Portuguese Christian missionaries like Beschi alias Viramamunivar did modern prose in Tamil develop. Viramāmunivar's Paramārta Kuru Katai is known to be the first prose work in Tamil during the late 17th century. So many religious-oriented stories were written in Tamil to propagate religion. Christian missionaries played a sterling role in the development of prose in Tamil. When the native speakers of Tamil followed this form, they started writing stories in Tamil emulating the British novelists. In the beginning they struggled to have a firm grip on the form of novel since it was new to them. So they employed the traditional Indian story telling forms: episodic and ethical preachings. These were due to the influences of Indian epics, and religious compositions.
At the same time they started translating contemporary British novelists. They took Western novels as their models and adapted, constructed and followed the models and ideas of the West into their writings. The spread of Western type of education, new economic growth under the British rule, the emergence of middle class in the aftermath of industrialization, and the emergence of periodicals, and magazines have brought in new trends in literary tastes and creation. The influence of Western ideas is strong, feels a critic and comments thus:

More than the specific and individual influences, the very exposure to Western liberal tradition and writings animated the first generation who strove to create Tamil works, often in the image of literary works that moved them. In creating new forms and genres they openly expressed indebtedness to certain models and authors (Kailasapathy 89).

During the late 19th century and the early 20th century the Tamil literature reflected the social life of the upper class and the political aspirations of the national movement. New writers were appearing who were thoroughly imbued with European traditions and culture, but
who turned more and more to the genius of their own languages and cultural traditions. Though they were inspired mostly by British writers, after the October Revolution a strong and growing interest developed in the literature, doctrines and social ideas of the Communists; and these additional influences were felt in Tamil literature and in humanistic thought in a notable manner.

The first Tamil novel, Vētānyakam Pillai’s Piratāpa Mutaliyar Carittiram appeared in 1876. Though the story element was predominant, it depicted the contemporary social life. Inspired and influenced by Cervantes, Goethe, Goldsmith and Henry Fielding, Vētānyakam Pillai made it possible for his successors to follow his model. So the second generation novelists adapted their stories from various European writers ranging from British, French and Russian. They translated a number of contemporary Western novels and novels from Indian languages like Bengali, Marathi, and Hindi. The growth of the Tamil novel cannot be fully accounted for here due to lack of space. It is, however, highly relevant to note the trends and names in the twentieth century Tamil novel. After the Twenties, the Tamil novel grew in leaps and bounds. During this period, the Tamil novel exhibits four distinct trends more or less
in the same period. Thus surprisingly they were of simultaneous existence:

1. The Gandhian novel (1920-1960)
2. The leftist novel (1940-1960)
3. The novel of the Mañikkōti era (1930-1940)
4. The novel of the Dravidian movement (1940-1960)

When Gandhi spearheaded the freedom struggle, many writers under his influence wrote novels, taking as their themes freedom struggle, social reforms, untouchability, child marriage, widow remarriage etc. This Gandhian phase of writing is "a writing which subscribed to and prescribed the Gandhian ideology as the remedy for all individual and social evils and suffering" (Prasanna IV). This phase of writing continued till the 1960s. Another trend that emerged, during the 1930s and lasted for a decade with the Mañikkōti type of novels. This can be termed as avantgardist that had its initial inspirations from the Western modern trend ... This writing adopted a tone that was more often questioning than being judgemental and explored grey areas. This writing had its anchorage and forum in a magazine called Manikkoti which has now become an inseparable part of Tamil literary history (Prasanna IV).
The writers of this period had not studied Tamil as a discipline. Most of them came from different disciplines ranging from Sanskrit, English, Philosophy, Economics, and Medicine. These writers were influenced by Bengali, British, French and American novelists and writings. As a critic puts it,

Most of these writers were romantics, whose individualism, aesthetic commitment and creative zeal called for felicitous, sensitive and unrestricted language and style. To them, pure Tamil was intellectually abhorrent. The sheer power of their works and the others who followed them established Marumalarcci Natai—the style of the renaissance—as the principal medium of literature and communication (Kailasapathy 20).

Almost during the same period, the Dravidian racial pride gained currency and the Self-Respect movement was formed. Initially it was a socio-cultural force, but soon it turned out to be a political movement, that too very strong and mass-based. Later it branched out as Diravidar Kaḷakam and Dravida Munnētra Kaḷakam. The writers of this group were called Dravidian movement writers. The Dravidian movement was founded as a forum for the welfare of the
Dravidian people and to achieve freedom from the widely felt Brahmin and North Indian dominations. As they believed that these two dominations were through religion and its puranic literature, they attacked religion and puranic characters. Cankam and post-Cankam poetry, and the life depicted in them - love, war, commerce, wealth and wisdom of the kings - all these were glorified in their writings. They vociferously highlighted the problems of untouchability and the suffering of and the ill-treatment meted out to the widow; they sternly advocated widow re-marriage and highlighted her insecurity and her feelings of love and affection; they pointed out the problems of unsuitable marriage - marriage between old man and young girl; the problems of inequality among the castes, religious superstitions, and the hypocrisies of the moderates in their writings. They employed highly ornamental language, full of alliterations and metaphors. This became very emotive and highly provocative. Most of their novels are extensions or expansions of their short stories. The lust and greediness of the rich, the chaos and complications made by casteist people, the scheming and perverted roles of the priests in trapping innocent, orphan girls were also highlighted in their writings. In their novels, the incidents seem superficial. The conflicts among characters are not the result of conflicts in social set up
or class conflict but perversions of the characters (Pongilalan 49).

So with the advent of Dravidian movement and the emergence of the Communist party, many writers belonging to backward castes emerged on the literary scene. Since its inception it had remained as the domain of the non-Brahmin citadel. These writers are from the depressed castes who are still, in many ways socially untouchables. Traditionally they have had no access to learning and were considered culturally backward. Jayakantan in India, Daniel and Dominic Jeeva in Srilanka, to cite three examples, who are outstanding fiction writers, never had any formal education. To them writing itself has been a continuing process of self-education, concerned with protest and experiment, the exciting process of exploration and growth, they solved their impulse through writing. Naturally they brought with them idiom or idioms that were fresh, robust, plain and simple but capable of infusing a new life into our language (Kailasapathy 44).

The three most important influences of Indian writers during the thirties were Gandhian philosophy,
Marxist theories and Freudian psychology. Among the three, the first two were strongly felt. The advent of Marxism on the Indian literary scene was a phenomenon that India shared with the rest of the world. In Tamilnadu the Gandhian writings and Dravidian writings were dominant till late 1960s. During the same period the Marxian writing emerged. The left wing writing was one which aimed towards an egalitarian society by questioning and demolishing the conflicting elements in life. The exploited and the exploiter was and still continues to be the favourite themes of this genre .... The tone was often judgemental and this writing was a fallout of the political development of Eastern Europe and was part of a world phenomena (Prasanna IV).

Jayakāntaṇ emerged as a prominent writer of this leftist writing. He systematically attacked compartmentalization of human beings into social groups. His early writings heavily lean on Marxism.

Jayakāntaṇ started writing with the declared objective of knowing the people and supporting the underprivileged and the exploited. He felt that society is divided between the cheats and the cheated, the exploiters and the exploited, the mighty and the meek, the rich and the
poor. He cast his lot always with the underprivileged, the cheated, the exploited and the meek. He raised his voice against injustice of any kind and that was his primary duty.

Jayakāntan's first published work appeared in 1958 in the form of a short story collection: Orupitjecoru (A Hanful of Rice). All the stories of this collection deal with the life of the poor, slum dwelling people in Madras city. From then on he has been steadily publishing his fiction: short story collections such as Inippum Karippum (The Sweet and The Bitter, 1960), Tevanvaruvārā? (Will God come? 1961), Mālaimayakkam (The illusion of Fame, 1962), Cumaitānki (The Rest Pillar, 1962) - all stories of this collection highlight the social life of the marginal people: their frustrations and aspirations; their invisibility to the larger society is focused. Collections like Yukacanti (The Encounter of Ages, 1963), Upmai Cuțum (Truth will Hurt, 1964), Putiyavārrppukal (New Moulds, 1965), Cuya Taricânam (Vision of the Self, 1967), probe the problem of intercaste relationship between Brahmin and non-Brahmin people. His first novel Vālkkai Alaikkiratu (Life Beckons, 1957) deals with the struggle between rich and poor. He highlights this struggle in the following novels: Piralayam (The Deluge, 1965), Urukku Nūrupēr (One Hundred Radicals in Every Town, 1979), Pāvam, Ival Oru Pāppātti (Pity, She is a

In a literary output that should be judged as remarkable - about forty novels, two hundred short stories and fifteen collections of essays and a few translations - Jayakāntan has been advocating intercaste relationships between the upper caste, especially the Brahmins, and other lower caste people and also inter-religious marriages. Thus his primary concern is to make all people equal. In his perception, there should be no discrimination socially, economically and religiously and humanity is one and the same. He strives towards this goal in his writings.
The foregoing discussions of the biographical parallels and the sociological and literary traditions to which the two writers belonged has to be considered a necessary preliminary exercise before a closer look at their works can be taken up. Society exerts such a strong influence on the budding writer that the function and objectives of his literary output get determined by social factors. To quote the Marxian thought, the writers "are in various ways, representative of their country and its developing and changing national spirit, of their time, and of the class which they belong or with which they identify themselves" (Prawer 403).