I would also place the ultimate mystical experience in the ahistorical because *ex-hypothesi* it involves the cessation of the discursive activity and seeking of the mind or spirit. This would be, in fact, the cessation of the mind…”.

(G.C. Pande 1999: 18)

Human beings are inescapably and formidably historical beings; there are innumerable ideological, intellectual, political, economic, linguistic and literary forces that enter into the cultural construction of our mental life. It is history which tells us who we are. Several scholars from the different schools of contemporary literary-cultural theory such as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Louis Althusser, Fredric Jameson, Clifford Geertz, Stephen Greenblatt and Judith Butler have remarked that there is nothing called ahistorical ‘essence’ constituting our identity. According to them, there is nothing as such ‘human nature independent of culture’ to be called as the eternal basis of human history. For these thinkers, human person is subject to historical and cultural specificities. In view of these thinkers, human beliefs, aspirations, dreams, hopes, fears and ethical values are very much enmeshed within historical cultural institutions, in their epistemologies, ideologies and discourse of particular era and society. Stephen Greenblatt, a leading American theorist and the founder of the school of literary-cultural criticism, known as ‘New Historicism’ writes:

...... I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions – family, religion, and state – were inseparably intertwined. In all may texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Whenever I focused sharply upon the moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force. (1980: 256)

Drawing on the thoughts and conceptions of such ‘culture’ thinkers as Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Paul Rainbow and Clifford Geertz, Greenblatt points out that men are born “unfinished
animals” (4) and it is through the “cultural system of meanings that create specific individuals by governing from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiments”. (3)

Another prominent American culture theorist Clifford Geertz in his book Interpretation of Cultures (1973) gives prominence to the role of symbols in the functioning and formation of the human self. He maintains that culture is a “system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about an attitude towards life”. (p.89)

In his view, “the function of culture is to impose meaning on the world and to make it understandable” (Wikipedia). Thus, there is an inalienable relationship between culture and the construction of human self and it won’t be incorrect to describe human beings using his phrase as ‘cultural artifact’.

Vidyut Chakraborty in the introduction of his book Construction of Communal Identity in India notes that identity is a spatio-temporal phenomenon. In his view both the ontological (who we are) and epistemological (who we think we are) dimensions of human identity hinge on the trajectories of nation, region, religion, class, gender, language and citizenship. Highlighting the limitations of essentialistic and trans-historical invocation of the self, Prof. Chakraborty remarks that the human nature is never fixed but is in constant flux due to socio-cultural and historico-political reasons.

Keeping in mind the tenacity of the arguments coming from the diverse schools of historico-cultural theorists regarding the formation and functioning of human subject, it may be held that history has an inescapable impact. There is a necessary relationship between the senses of self and social institutions and even the innermost experiences of the individual are shaped by the institutions of a society. Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language. (2005: 9)

No doubt, human beings are historically constituted subjects and the mediation of history through its various cultural institutions is must for the transformation of human beings’ ‘abstract potential’ into the full-fledged human person, yet human beings are the ones and the only ones endowed with the potential and capacity to transform and transform and transcend their
The wondrous ‘other’ of history, which cannot be apprehended, explained and communicated through the categories of reason and discourses is considered by saints and mystics to be equally or even more powerful dimension of human subjectivity both in the East and the West.

Though there are striking differences in the accounts of the spiritual experiences, all the mystics claim a union with the Divine and the experience of this ‘ultimate’ is attended by an ecstatic quality in which the soul is in a state of joyous and blissful exaltation. (Pranjape: 1988)

The western theologians, mystics and philosophers such as Marlin Buber, Rudolf Otto, Soren Kierkegaard and William James have explored and elaborated at length this trans-historical aspect of human subjectivity. Their views have been dwelt upon briefly here below. Insights and illuminations from the Indian Texts such as the Upanishadas and the Bhagavadgita have also been taken into account, though very briefly.

A German Theologian, Rudolf Otto (1896-1937), in his book The Idea of the Holy (1950), argues that the experience of the divine, which is purely subjective, direct and immediate, does not fit in with the norm of everyday life experiences. This feeling not amenable to concepts and defies complete analysis, is experiences ‘when the soul is rapt and swayed by an ineffable something’ (p.114). Otto implies the word ‘numinous’ for his supra-sensuous and supra-rational ‘power’ or ‘presence’. This encounter with the numinous is described as a feeling which

[M]ay at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship, it may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its ‘profane’, non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may
become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature
in the presence of – whom or what? (Otto 1950: 12)

This ‘numinous’ experience has two aspects: Mysterium Tremendum and Mysterium Fascinas. The former is characterized by the elements of awfulness, overpoweringness and urgency; while the latter involves the tendency of attraction, fascination and captivation. According to Otto, the feeler ‘is in the heightened state of intoxicated frenzy and hilarious excitement while confronting the awe inspiring uncanny and unfathomable presence of the divine and is at the same time consists of his/ her ‘creature feelings’ and that of an acute sense of absolute dependence on the supernatural.

One of the founding fathers of existential school of philosophy, the Danish philosopher and mystic, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is of the firm belief that the reason and the intellect should be abandoned while seeking the spiritual wisdom, as it contributes little or nothing or may even hinder the knowledge of religious experience. Spiritual truth being subjective in nature and derived from feeling cannot be attained through the concepts and categories of reason. He considered the intellectual approaches to the highest truth as absurd and ludicrous. He strongly criticized those thinkers who consider the object of faith as something ‘objective’, ‘out there’, like tables and chairs. For him the object approach may be appropriate for scientific, mathematical or any other category of truth, it is certainly not appropriate and amenable to existential truth, the truth that have bearing on one’s existence and meaning. This truth being purely ‘subjective’ in character cannot be grasped through philosophical, scientific or even historical methods but only through the passion of infinite concern when the existing individual abandons himself to the faith. And faith for him is not an intellectual assertion of some proposition; rather it is passion, inwardness, infinite concern and assimilation. Kierkegaard himself provides his definition of faith in his book, Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1941). ‘An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness … ’ (1941: 182). When Kierkegaard says that the ‘truth is subjectivity’; by subjectivity he does not mean that the individual subject becomes the standard of truth but that the highest truth can be discovered only in subjective consciousness. Kierkegaard located the highest truth not in the universal ideas but in the passion of individual existence. In this state of subjectivity, the individual transcends both the aesthetic level (where sensual gratification is the highest pursuit)
and the ethical level (where a sense of duty takes priority over beauty and gratification) and approaches ‘the ultimate’ on a truly religious level (where faith prevails over reason)*. This experience is characterized by the utter uniqueness and particularity, incapable of being characterized by any general principle.

In The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1958), American psychologist William James gives an exquisite and lucid exposition of the nature and varieties of the spiritual experience. William James like other western theologian and thinkers, considers the object of the mystical/spiritual experience lying outside our conceptualization of it, hence indescribability is the essential mark of the mystical. He describes four fundamental characteristics of the mystical experience in his book. First, the mystical experience is ineffable i.e., it remains inexpressible in language; it defies all descriptions. Second, this experience is transitional and temporary. The experiencer soon returns to the normal state of mind. Third, there is a noetic aspect to this experience. This experience teaches something to the experiencer which remains otherwise unknowable. Fourth, this experience is characterized by the element of passivity. Once in the grip of the divine revelation, the mystic is obliged to respond to that. It is not something that the experiencer can turn on and off at will.

Indian Perspective:

In his book The Meaning of India (1996), the distinguished Indian novelist Raja Rao writes: ‘India is not a country (desa), it is a perspective (darshana)’. One of the connotations of this quote is that the distinctiveness of India lies not in its geographical specificities but rather in its rich cultural heritage of darshana (vision, insight) and dharma inscribed in the great Indian scriptures of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata etc. The great Indian seer and mystic poet Shri Aurobindo writes, indicating where one can find the central ethos of India ‘if we would understand the essential spirit of Indian civilization, we must go back to its first formative period, the early epoch of the Vedas and the Upanishads, its heroic creative seed-time’ (The Foundation of Indian Culture, 110). Thus it is a drishti (an outlook) as reflected in the above holy scriptures, being primarily and essentially spiritual and mystical, constitutes India’s core identity. However, “to be spiritual, then is not to deny the body
or the mind, but to assert, any experience, a higher reality that transcends these”. (Paranjape 2005: 25)

The two major texts of Hinduism, the Upanishad and the Bhagavadgita, in addition to many more, display the ultimate expression of mysticism and spirituality. The Upanishads are among the world’s most influential creative works forming part of a tradition of religious literature known as the Vedas.

“They represent the earnest efforts of the profound thinkers of early India to solve the problems of the origin, the nature and the destiny of the man and of the universe, or – more technically the meaning and values of ‘knowing’ and ‘being’. ” (R.E. Hume, VII, Preface)

According to Mahendranath Sircar, “The Upanishads are source of philosophical wisdom and mystical inspiration” (1, Hindus Mysticism). Both the theories of the divine reality – the Emanation view that all things in the universe are flowing from God and the Immanence view that the universe is immersed in God – are inscribed in the spiritual reflections of the Upanishads. The following passages from the two major Upanishads display a distrust of intellect and thus stress the point that the highest truth is revealed in a non-discursive and mystical way.

‘Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither, like blind led by the blind’. (Katha Upanishad, 58)

“……the word that all the Vedas glorify, all self-sacrifice expresses, all sacred studies and holy life seek. That Word is OM.

That word is the everlasting Brahman: that Word is the highest End.
When that sacred Word is known, all longings are fulfilled.

It is the supreme means of salvation: it is the help supreme. When that great Word is known, one is great in the heaven of Brahman.

Atman, the Spirit of vision is never born and never dies. Before him there was nothing, and he is ONE for evermore. Never-born and eternal, beyond times gone or to come, he does not die when the body dies.
If the slayer thinks that he kills, and if the slain thinks that he dies, neither knows the way of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill; the Eternal in man cannot dies.

Concealed in the heart of all being is the Atman, the Spirit, the Self; smaller than the smallest atom, greater than the vast spaces. The man who surrenders his human will leave sorrows behind, and beholds the glory of the Atman by the grace of the Creator.

Resting, he wanders afar; sleeping, he goes everywhere. Who else but my Self can know that God of joy and of sorrows?

When the wise realize the omnipresent Spirit, who rests invisible in the visible and permanent in the impermanent, then they go beyond sorrow.” (Katha Upanishad. 59)

Likewise, the following passage from the Mandukya Upanishad gives an exclusive summary of the highest aspect of the self.

The fourth condition is Atman in his own pure state: the awakened life of supreme consciousness. It is neither outer nor inner consciousness, neither semi-consciousness nor unconsciousness. He is Atman, the Spirit himself, that cannot be seen or touched, that is above all distinction, beyond thought and ineffable. In the union with him is the supreme proof of his reality. He is the end of evolution and non-duality. He is peace and love. (Mandukya Upanishad, 83)

To enlarge one’s spiritual vision, the Bhagavadgita also known as the Gitopanishad, is the most “valuable aid for the understanding of the supreme ends of life” (Radhakrishnan, 7). In the Samkhya-yoga chapter of Bhagavadgita, Lord Krishna while instructing Arjuna, is suggestive of the subjugation of the senses and the elimination of all sensible distractions:

Shlokas (67-69) from the Bhagavadgita

The wind turns a ship
From its course upon the waters;
The wandering winds of the senses
Cast man’s mind adrift
And turn his better judgement from its course.
When a man can still the senses
I call him illumined.
The recollected mind is awake
In the knowledge of the Atman
Which is dark night to the ignorant;
The ignorant are awake in their sense-life.
Which they think is daylight:
To the seer it is darkness.

(The Bhagavad-Gita, Shlokas 67-69: 1951)

Thus, according to both the holy texts, the withdrawal from the deceptive world of senses and to be focused on the absolute reality called Brahma, the primordial ground and essential unity of all things, should be the summum bonum of life. And the aim of a mystic is to rise above the illusory (or the historical) world (Maya), achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Moksha) and attain the blissful state (Nirvana), in which the soul is completely reabsorbed into the Brahman. In fact according to one of the central tenets of Hinduism, the being of Brahman and that of the mystic is one and the same, and the attainment of enlightenment is nothing but simply the realization of non-duality of overcoming the illusory estrangement within.

Cuckold: A Reading

Kiran Nagarkar in his third major novel, Cuckold, exhibits both the historical and transhistorical dimensions of the human self. The novel is set in the 16th century Mewar in Rajasthan, ruled by the Rajputs. The text brilliantly depicts the major happenings of the period such as fundamentalist Islamic rule in Gujarat, weakening and declining of Delhi Sultanate under Ibrahim Lodi, the looming threat of Babur's advancement towards the Hindustan and at the same time, the struggle over succession for the throne within the Chittor Palace itself. At personal level the princess – Meera Bai, the Hindu mystical poetess of the Bhakti tradition, addressed as the little Saint in the text – the wife of the Maharaja Kumar, the protagonist, declares herself to be the spouse of the blue God, Lord Krishna and to the utter shock and frustration of the Maharaja Kumar, she refuses him to enter her bed and sleep with him. To find his lady and her love, in the capacity of a husband, the prince even goes to the extent of challenging the God. Being besotted with the desire to get the unrequired love of the little saint, the protagonist tends
to compromise with the original view of valor and honour system of Rajput tradition. In this regard Ranjana Sabu very aptly comments:

“....... the prince, however, finds himself alienated for living by the intrinsic spirit of these values and not subscribing to the outward trapping of machismo and bravado these have devolved to.”

(www.childbreeze.com/bookreviews/thecucokld.asp)

Finally finding himself rejected and dejected and considering the Lord Krishna as invincible, the prince has his merger with Lord Krishna, whom he earlier considered as his adversary. Thus, there suddenly registers a positive change and transformation in the consciousness of the Maharaja Kumar which finally leads to his union with Lord Krishna, his erstwhile adversary and a cuckold and thus “.....the protagonist’s inner light enables him to redeem his dignity” (Lukmani: 2004: xx). In this way the novel beautifully captures the life in an around the Maharaja Kumar and strikes a perfect balance between the brilliantly told history and intriguing love story of the individual and the Divine.

Nagarkar’s multifaceted and multilayered work Cuckold very intensely located in the cultural milieu of the 16th century Mewar, deals especially with Rajputana tale of intricate love and war. Historically marginalized and overshadowed character as compared to his legendary wife Meera Bai, the Maharaja Kumar, the hero and the anti-hero at the same time, gets foregrounded by the novelist. The action of novel takes place at many levels exploring extensively the historical, the philosophical, the psychological and the spiritual dimensions of the protagonist’s and other supporting character’s subjectivity. Thus, Cuckold is more than merely a historical novel.

It is the story of a love so overcharged that it had its being in a feverish, overwrought word hardly recognizable as our own. It is an expression of the nature of kinship and statecraft. It offers a fresh vision of sainthood. It questions sexual identities. It contains depictions, deftly drawn, of the confusion and mayhem of the battlefield. It is a panegyric to the power of music.

(Singh in Lukmani 2004: 156)

The novel opens with a very striking incident of cuckoldry. Here a young teenage wife named Sunehria is subjected to infidelity by her much older husband, a dhobi (washerman). In return,
the lady accuses her husband of impotency. The matter is brought by the husband in the ‘small causes court’ held on each Thursday and presided over by the Maharaja Kumar, for the punishment. The prince orders the dhobi to a brothel to prove his manliness and further orders him to produce a proof for his wife’s adulterous relation. Over the charge of unfaithfulness labeled by the dhobi against his wife, when they appear in the court again, the Maharaja Kumar ruminates: “who should know a faithless wife better than I? (p. 18). This very ordinary suit* of alleged unfaithfulness of dhobi’s wife, where the husband feels himself a victim of cuckoldry, has a very unsettling impact on the Maharaja Kumar, who in turn considers himself a bigger victim of his wife’s betrayal and unfaithfulness. For him nothing can be more painful and lonesome situation than when his wife declares herself to be involved with someone. And this someone is not other than the Lord Krishna himself. This is a very painful realization for the Prince that he has been made a cuckold by the very God whom he always considered his “confidant and preceptor. This blue God with the flute and the peacock feather stuck in the hand around his head”. (p.102)

Giving a vent to the painful feelings of the protagonist Maharaja Kumar, Nagarkar brilliantly writes in one of the epigraphs of the text: “We were the rarest of the couples. Even after years of marriage we were madly in love. I with her and she with somebody else.” (p.147)

In another epigraph Nagarkar comments further on the old age triangular relationship that involves man (the Maharaja Kumar) woman (the little Saint) and the lover (the philanderer Krishna):

It was the stuff of nautanki plays. Man, Woman And lover. Except that the last one was an almighty God. (89)

The Maharaja Kumar’s problems get compounded further when his uncontrollable wife, the little saint, wearing gaudy clothes in devotion to the Flautist, sings and dances publicly and stirring the religious sentiments of the common folks who gathered to watch her performances. This in turn, gave a chance to the royal family and court to condemn her behaviour and the prince was led to feel quite sheeepish with a sense of public humiliation. His rival, half brother, prince Vikramaditya leaves no occasion for jeering and mocking the Maharaja Kumar.

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What court are you talking about? This sad circus with three supernatural clowns and a spineless prince whose wife is a common nautanki girl? Look after your own affairs, heir-aspirant, instead of pretending to look after the business of the state. I have suggestion for you. That wife of yours, the whole city knows, dances for free. Why not become her pimp? That why you’ll have something more worthwhile to do with your time and you’ll even earn some money.

Finding the princess’ singing and dancing like nautch girl quite scandalous, she is labeled as a tawaif (whore). Even Rana Sanga’s favourite queen Karamvati and Vikramaditya’s mother does not spare the Maharaja Kumar when she finds him quite unmanly in not being able to control his wife’s deviant behaviour. ‘Are you man enough to keep her under control? Or do you want me to do it for you?’ (9)

Errant Princess’ public display and drama of her love for her lover Murlidhar is quite unbearable to the Maharaja Kumar as she flouts and defies all the norms and decorum meant for the wife of a ruling kshatriya husband. The princess’ uninhibited public performance of singing and dancing and mixing up with common masses unsettles not just the prince but his entire family. He says: ‘It does not upset just me, it upsets the whole family. My mother, the other queens, the princess and their wives it upsets Father.’ (148) Thus forced to exercise the authority of a husband, the prince tells her:

‘Do not sing. Is that understood? I will not have you sing under my roof.’
‘Why?’ She asked innocently or at least she did a fine imitation of innocence.
‘Because princesses don’t sing for the public, at least not in this house. Tawaifs do.’
‘It was only a bhajan.’
‘Rasikabai ends every mushaira of hers with a bhajan. Like you, she also gets an audience of a hundred or so to stand under the windows and balconies. Soon they’ll be throwing coins at your too.’ I had got carried away by my rhetoric. ‘But they won’t if I have anything to do with it. Today’s was your last concert, is that clear?’ (147-148)

The Greeneyed’s incomprehensible obsession with the peacock feathered one and her irresponsible behaviour renouncing all the duties of a wife, has agonized the Maharaja Kumar to the innermost core of his being. As a consequence, he is led to nurture a strong sense of hostility
towards his family deity, Sri Krishna, the erstwhile guide and comforter of the prince. He even thinks of heaping revenge upon Him.

We were finally face to face. Two mortal enemies. Correction. One mortal and the other divine and immortal. I was overtaken by such a strong wave of loathing, I wanted to strangle him till the last breath had gone out of him and then snap his neck.(171)

Jacqueline Singh has very aptly remarked:

On her part, Greeneyed has not only deprived her husband of herself but of his God as well. He who was his mentor, comforter and guide becomes in an instant an object of hatred, by symbol of loss.

(in Lukmani 2004: 167)

But there is hardly any change in the behaviour of the Princess. On the opposite, the Maharaja Kumar undergoes a sea change in his outlook towards his wife. The Princess becomes the little saint from a nautch girl. There is an infectious impact of her spiritual powers on the ordinary citizens of the Mewar. The Maharaja Kumar increasingly becomes more and more obsessed and besotted with the little saint and even undermines and ignores all the condemnations heaped upon him by the royal family for ignoring his duties as a statesman. The self-sacrificing Kaushalya, the Maharaja Kumar’s dai (wet nurse), royal counselor and wise advisor and even the one who enables him to see the reality around him more clearly, reminds the Maharaja Kumar of his obsession with his wife, seeing his utter withdrawal from his important worldly concerns. The prince himself later on expresses his gratitude and indebtedness to the selfless services rendered by Kaushalya since his childhood in rearing him up as a successful warrior and an efficient administrator. He says:

When I was fourteen, she made me borrow the Arthashastra from Father’s library and read out a couple of pages to her every day. While its significance and meaning escaped me to a great degree at that time, it was one of the most fruitful experiences of her life. Since she always went to the heart of the matter with a parable or a paradigm, she demonstrated Kautilya’s teachings to me with the real-life situations and crisis from Mewar’s own political events. (137)
Kaushalaya does not spare even the princess keeping in view the devastating effect of hers upon the prince. Seeing her duty to save the Maharaja Kumar from the malevolent influence of his wife, Kaushalaya warns and even threatens to kill the princess.

What are you doing to the Maharaja Kumar, Princess? What wasting disease have you visited upon him? Speak woman.

I don’t know what black magic you have worked upon him. Beware Princess …. whatever devious designs, and however, subtle, I will get you. Then God help you ….. if something should happen to the Maharaja Kumar, I will kill you. (74-75)

The prince finding his wife’s unbelievable love for the divine, is willing to take recourse to any means to possess her and to obtain her love. ’Anything, he was willing to do anything, to retrieve his wife from the forces that had robbed her of her will and set her on a path of collision with the whole of Mewar.’ He remains single-mindedly engrossed in the pursuit of Greeneyed and oblivious of all the cares and concerns showed by the Kith and Kins, including Kaushalya. The desperate Maharaja Kumar turns for help to a Shaman woman, Bhootani Mata, who claims to affect the course of events and has the power to transform herself into anything she wants. While possessed by the spirits and being in a state of trials, she is capable of predicting the future and answering questions of people. The Maharaja Kumar, though skeptical of the supernatural powers and the miracles, yet has “crossed the shifting line that separates the same from the unbalanced” (149) and whispers to Bhootani Mata, standing at the mouth of the cave at the steep side of the mountain ‘Mata, my wife will not cohabit with me. She says there is another in her life and she is his. I fear she is possessed for I have never seen her with another man. Please help me.’ (149)

Finding no response from Bhootani Mata, the Maharaja Kumar enters the deep cave to find the ghastly scene there.

He heard the sound of water falling off the edge of the earth and a distant screaming of voices in perpetual pain. He saw dismembered heads held up by the hair with the blood still dripping from them. He saw back feet stomping on the back of a demon lying of his stomach. He heard the sound of lips slurping blood, he saw the coitus of the earth and the sky, he heard the slow moaning of pleasure. There were
severed limbs writhing on the floor, a hand came down, picked up a leg, shoved it into a mouth without a face which started crunching on it. He opened his eyes. In front of him was a hollow cavern with a platform in the middle. A toothless and blind old crone was sitting naked on it. (151)

And she (Bhootani Mata) asks him further:

‘Is she possessed or are you possessed by her? How many days, weeks, months is it since you had any thought barring hers in your mind? I would say that it’s you who needs to be exorcised.’

There is further an exchange of questions and answers between the Maharaja Kumar and Bhootani Mata that include ‘if the prince would like to be a freeman forever’ and the last intriguing question, “how far are you (the prince) willing to go?” ... and the Maharaja Kumar’s answer “pretty far, I would think” ... And the reply of the Bhootani Mata was: “Go home, you fool. When you know the answer, I’ll be there”... and “The light at the entrance of the cave blinded him”. (152)

Feeling more embittered and vindictive towards his wife, the possessed Prince again approaches Bhootani Mata to exercise her magical power “to eliminate her (the Princess) but not without all the torture and suffering and pain that this world and every other if capable of. Do it Bhootani Mata, do it and give my soul peace”. (169) Like Doctor Faustus, the Maharaja Kumar is not unwilling to bargain with the darker forces, when he says:

I will make a covenant with the gods and devils. Any one you say .... I will embrace evil and the black arts. I will blacken my heart and of a dark night open the gates and invite a black pestilence upon her and her kind. Open your treasure trove of death’s heads and parasites, Bhootani Mata, of the numerous hordes of worms and weevils, maggots and termites and let them cover the earth and ear though the substance of the three worlds till there is.....neither god nor rakshasa, merely a ceaseless tumult and simmering proliferation of the creatures of the under-world. Let them eat through flesh and bone and crawl out of eye sockets and other orifices of the mouth and eats and nostrils and the anus till there’s nothing left for them but to devour each other. Let there be nothing, nothing, nothing. (169-170)

In the further course of the events of the novel, we find that despite the Maharaja Kumar’s resolve not to have a second wife, who would bless him with a son (heir), he is persuaded to do so. The neighbouring Malwa state’s Rajput Prime Minister, Medini Rai, offering his daughter
Sugandha to the Maharaja Kumar, says: ‘We know how devoted you are to the Princess from Merta but a saint is no substitute for a wife. My daughter is a loving girl, Sire. She would have brought cheer to any home, but Chittor has a special place in her heart. She worships you.....’ (459)

Giving reasons further why his daughter Sugandha will be more suitable and befitting life partner to the Maharaja Kumar than the first wife, Medini Rai says: “you will find a woman in your bed, one made of ordinary flesh and blood” (459). The prince solemnizes his second marriage. But to the utter disappointment of Sugandha, who despite her strong will to please the Maharaja Kumar, finds her husband saying, “I am convinced now that wedding nights don’t suit me” (460). Being “unable to cope up with the betrayal of his body” (463), the Maharaja Kumar describes his pain and indignity of being together with his newly wedded wife Sugandha.

She wanted me to do my husbandly duty by her. I was overtaken by the same desire I had seen in her eyes. I walked up to her and gently undressed her. I played with her till both she and I were fully aroused. She had closed her eyes and waited for me. She might as well have waited for me till she was dead. I could not perform.

I watched myself in horror as I shrank into myself. I was in an impotent rage. My world had lost its moorings. What was left of life if I could not depend on sheer, straightforward lust? There is no certainty more immediate than the hardness at the crotch. And now even that was taken away from me (463).

The Maharaja Kumar began to hate marriage and even Sugandha. Frustrated Sugandha soon comes to this realization that the conjugal bliss is not going to be in her share while remaining in the confines of the wedlock, and that too with an emotionally battered and impotent husband the Maharaja Kumar. Jacqueline Singh remarkably comments:

It does not take long for the restless Sugandha to search around elsewhere, and she does not have to look far. Vikramaditya is only to willing to oblige her and at the same time to indulge yet again to his appetite for humiliating his brother. He and Sugandha make public spectacle of their affair, going out of their way to flaunt their relationship. (in Lukmani 2004: 164-165)
The Maharaja Kumar reflects on Sugandha and Vikramaditya’s affair:

He (Vikramaditya) was never a private person and the thought of keeping a confidence was alien to him. The conquest of my wife, Sugandha, was not exactly a rear victory but it was ample ammunition against me, and he was certainly not about to underplay his victory or my lack of manliness. .... he was in great spirit and so was Sugandha.

Scandal seemed to suit my second wife. (498)

Having discovered that he “was cuckolded second time” (498), the Maharaja Kumar was not very ashamed about his dishonor and treated even the second faithless wife gently. He is rather glad that she is ‘having a good time’ (498). He rather “felt protective towards her” and “wanted to warn Sugandha that” his “brother’s fancy for a woman is even shorter. Besides, did she not understand that she was mere pawn in the devious hands of my second mother” (498).

No sooner does Sugandha have this realization that she is being used as a pawn to heap insult and humiliation upon her husband by the scheming paramour Vikramaditya and her mother-in-law Rani Karamwati, than she tries to have reconciliation with the Maharaja Kumar and gets back to him. Upon her discovery that Vikramaditya is thirsty for her husband’s blood and is a constant source of trouble for him, Sugandha does her best to caution the Maharaja Kumar and everything possible in her reach to save his life. A bit later, a controversy regarding the paternity of the foetus in her womb arises. The Maharaja Kumar asks: “it was my seed, or was Vikramaditya’s which was lodged in her, waiting to explode in her fallopian tube” (558). But before Sugandha gives birth to it, the premature child dies and she too. And the Maharaja Kumar is left with an extreme sense of grief, guilt and inconsolable pain over her wretched end:

“And I, what did I do? I bet I bled internally, my backbone and brains cracked with the sheer weight of my megalomaniac guilt. I had little doubt that it was I who was responsible for Sugandha’s condition. The betrayal of my member was just the beginning”. (558)

After the Sugandha episode, the Maharaja Kumar, however, gradually becomes more and more obsessed with the Greeneyed. He even submits to wearing his wife’s clothes in his nightly platy with his lady love. The princess in conversation with the Maharaja Kumar asks him to “stand still and put on this blouse”. (491) and “she took hold of his right hand and slipped his arm into the blouse and did the same with the left. ‘Turn around’, she tied the strings of the backless of
the choli and gave him a once-cover” (492). One by one the princess decks up the Maharaja Kumar with almost all the womanly decking items.

“First the black silk skirt with a soft Dhaka cotton lining, then the red and black bandhani blouse and finally a red chunni. He had to admit that she had an eye for colour. She brought out her jewellery box, parted his hair in the middle and pinned a gold chain in the divide so that the minakari pendant hung over his forehead. Now the glass bangles, black, red and gold to match the colours of his clothes”. (492)

The Maharaja Kumar being besotted with his wife was completely oblivious of overturning the gender expectations. In this connection, Kiran Nagarkar remarks:

His feet had begun to shrink and worse, he no longer minded the bangles on his arms. He had the distinct feeling that he had grown small and delicate. If he had been horrified at the thought of masquerading as a transvestite, why was he not incensed that his step had become light and his torso lissom? (495)

He wants to do away with all the artificial boundaries and barriers including the gender roles and expectations coming between him and the princess and “wanted to annihilate the separateness of their bodies and become one with her”. (496) His desperation to be one with his wife, however, seems coming to meet no end and the Maharaja Kumar finally decides to disguise himself as Lord Krishna. To give concrete shape to the Charade of the blue goč, he smears the indigo solution on to his body and puts a peacock feather in his headband. Having pretended to the blue God, he even “played the flute just like him, danced the dandiya and even turned into a woman just like him” (565). In this regard, the literary critic Jacqueline Singh very aptly comments:

“This new game appears to work. Time after time the Little Saint seems to be unaware of the charade. “Krishna Kanhaiyya, Krishna Kanhaiyya” she calls him. He feels his wife must surely know it is all make believe. He finally decides that he will never enter her bed again; yet he does for one last time. It is then that he comes to the painful realization that, “she didn’t love him, he didn’t figure in her night life. The person she held in her arms, talked to, played with and found new ways to love was not he but her lover and god. She was not aware of him, so he wasn’t even a lie.” In the rare self-knowledge at his command, he realizes that, “She had never seen through his game, it was he who had decided to deceive himself.....” (in Lukmani 2004: 168)
Towards the end of the novel, in some of the letters addressed to the Maharaja Kumar, the novelist highlights the increasing mania and fondness of the protagonist for his enigmatic wife and his constant dereliction of duties as a statesman. The Princess Leelawati, the grand-daughter of the Finance Minister of Mewar, who professes both to be the Maharaja Kumar’s friend and wife, writes in her letter to remind the looming threat of Babur’s attack and she appeals him (Maharaja Kumar) to defeat Padshah.

“You are in the direct line of kingship. Your wife’s lover is not your enemy. Babur is. The Moghul deserves all your wiliness, obstinacy, imagination innovation and most of all, flexibility. Hardly anyone, I’m certain, shares your views about how to tackle him. How are alone as you’ve always been. Which is why you must make sure that you persevere and overcome despite your foes at home and despite people who mean well but do not know how to secure the interests of Mewar.” (563)

She further requests the Maharaja Kumar to stop hankering after the little Saint and even her philandering Blue God.

No living creature can be more self-centered than saints. They are self-sufficient. There is no life beyond themselves. When they need you, they use you...

There has been enough self-deception. It is a time to put an end to it......

Let the princess be. Leave her to her God.

“There are, you used to tell me, two Flautists. The warrior and the lover. We need to study the warrior. Instead the Princess’s pursuit of her paramour has made the philanderer Blue God the paradigm of Mewar. This is sad. We are a warrior race, not a tribe of adulterers and gay blades dallying with maids in our sylvan dales.

It would be timely to remind the Mewari people that the Flautist’s greatest achievement is the Bhagavadgita. Its avowed purpose was to tell a warrior called Arjun to stop shilly-shallying, to take up arms and to fight the righteous battle. (563)

Watchful and well-wishing Kaushalya, who in her unsuccessful attempt to bring death to the little Saint, decides to leave Mewar considering herself a murderess, writes to Maharaja Kumar
reminding him the devastating influence she (the little Saint) has had over him and reducing him to nothing more than the laughing stock of Mewar.

The legend of the Little Saint will become greater with every passing year. The whole world loves a lover. Love and overheated poetry will make her immortal. As for you, Highness, if Queen Karmavati and Vikramaditya don’t get you, the Princess and her lover will. Either way, they’ll wipe out your memory. (599)

She further tells him that he is meant for greater things and has “the vision and willingness to beat all our enemies and become Maharaja of the whole India. To do all these, he needs break with his wife.”

In the light of all that has been said above, it can be said that the relentless and tenacious pursuit of love is the obsessive centre of the Maharaja Kumar’s subjectivity. However, there are many more dimensions of his being portrayed in the novel. Prof. Meenakshi Mukherjee, a distinguished Indian Literary critic, notes:

The Maharaja Kumar is represented as a thinking human being of many dimensions – one who recognizes his role in history, who is conscious of his princely duty to keep Mewar secure from enemies to all sides, who initiates innovative measures in public health, who risks certain strategic actions for the long term good of the state and is actually aware of his responsibility to the people in times of pestilence and other crises. (in Lukmani 2004: 30)

She further observes:

But Nagarkar focuses more on the Maharaja Kumar’s loneliness, his inward-looking, self-critical brooding nature which are at odds with the Rajput’s heroic code of honour. A Rajput prince who worries about wanton blood-letting and shrinks from motiveless violence cannot take gain the respect of his people. (in Lukmani 2004: 33)

The novelist “took up the task of trying to recreate the figure of the Maharaja Kumar who has been sidelined by history”. (Lukmani 2004: 139) and explored the psyche of the protagonist in relationship with various characters as elaborated above. The Maharaja Kumar’s individuality in many respects is very much situated in the world of the sixteenth century Mewar represented
faithfully in terms of political and social structure. He is very conscious of the sense of belonging to India and sense of continuity of life with his predecessors. The Maharaja Kumar says:

But I am the son of Mewar and a Guhilot Sisodia to boot. It’s the only family tree in Rajasthan that can be traced all the way back to the seventh or eighth century and through an unbroken chain of thirty or forty kings. We are a country of bards and minstrels and story-tellers and troubadours. They never tire of telling stories of the heroic exploits of any ancestors. Of Bappa Rawal, Rana Hameer, Choonda and Rana Kumbha. I think we breathe in less air than we inhale these stories. Our anecdotes are all history. The bed-time stories of our children are about these larger-than-life monarchs and warriors from the past. Our arteries and veins are clogged with them. Sometimes I think we have no present, only the past. (54)

Expressing his sense of indebtedness to a local river, which is very much part of his being and memory, he observes:

The Gambhiree is my mother and my memory. As she is Chittor’s mother and memory. They bathed me with her waters when I was born and, God willing, they will wash me with her before placing me on the pyre. She is privy to all my doings, my innermost thoughts and the dilemma that wracks my soul. (13-14)

Unlike his fellow Rajput’s and other members of his family, who prefer “a life of action for them is the one and only goal of life” (136), the novelist has endowed the protagonist with reflecting and questioning mind:

Received wisdom is a very good thing, it is after all the distillate of centuries of experience. But because someone says so or it has been so since as far back as memory can stretch, that doesn’t make it so. Re-examine. Question. Doubt. And if need be, but only if the advantages more than outweigh the ill-effects, don’t hesitate to swim against the tide. (109)

He is always realistic and rational about the value of human life and is always in favour of avoiding war as it brings unnecessary death. For him “...... the life of the most significant soldier is priceless”. (576)
The above given account should make it clear that the sources of his self and identity are very much anchored in the specificities of contemporary historic cultural discourses and his subjectivity to great extent is shaped by the social and material circumstances surrounding him.

**Mira: The Mystic**

“A prolific writer, a superb musician and dancer” (Lukmani 2004: 239), a legendary figure in history known as Meerabai (Note, This name does not figure in the text. She is addressed by different names such as the Greeneyed, the Little Saint and the Little Princess) is altogether different from her husband, the Maharaja Kumar. Giving up the life and duties of a wife, she becomes a Krishna Bhakat (devotee), whom she considers her husband. For her “there is but one male (fit to be her husband) and his name is the Flautist” (490) To the Little Saint, spiritual life is the only way to cope up with ills of the world such as pain, suffering, sickness and death. She finds the pursuit of the spiritual as natural as breathing. Commenting on the incentive to the spiritual mode of life, Makrand Pranjape writes in his book, “Man constantly hankers after lasting happiness, all the repeated gets sorrow. The spiritual life is seen as an out of this sorrow to lasting happiness.” (1988: 69) Her direct, unmediated and intuitive encounter with the ultimate, Lord Krishna, brings stupendous transformation and irreversible change into her persona. She no longer remains an ego-bound person to be affected by the petty worldly mores, conventions and beliefs. Her deviant behaviour of performing singing and dancing earns for her such derogatory remarks as a “faithless wife”, “nautch girl” (9), “tawaif” (32) and she is slandered as “slut”, “harlot” and even “royal whore” by Queen Karamvati. But she remains completely unruffled and untroubled by these derogatory remarks. She simply calls out to Krishna to save her honour.

They call me tart, harlot, whore
Slut, strumpet, fornicator,
Tell them, I beg you.
I beseech you, tell them.
Save my honour, beloved, save my honour.
Tell them who I am,
A god’s wife, nothing less.
(Are you ashamed of me,
Why have you kept me your dark secret?)
Tell them, I’m yours.
Legally married to you before the gods.
As the sun, moon and stars are my witness
Tell them, to my last breath,
I’m a true blue.
Save my honour, beloved, save my honour. (168)

The little Saint’s experience of the divine extends and expands her vision to such an extent that for her the conventional mode of human life and the worldly pursuits seem to be quite futile and meaningless. Mexican Philosopher, Maria Lucia Parra’s discerning comment regarding the mystic experience of the Greeneyed is quite relevant:

She surrenders herself completely to her god, Krishna and what she feels goes beyond any human bondage. Her submission, her obedience have nothing to do with any intellectual attitude. Her faith and her love are indestructible. Her heart rules her actions and holiness and love are the result. (in Lukmani 2004: 230)

The mystic experience of the ultimate reality is perceived as a private gift and Greeneyed is aware of that. Her love for Krishna is portrayed in a way very similar to the most intense human passion, and there’s no doubt about it, she will surrender to whatever he wants. She admires her husband and tries to please him, but her priority is her love for the God.

Being something beyond holiness, mysticism is not a state chosen by the individual. It is said that the person is chosen by the God. A saint is a spiritual model, whereas the mystic is possessed in flesh and soul by the divinity. (in Lukmani 2004: 230-31)

Greeneyed’s fragments of a poem addressed to Lord Krishna express the very intensity of her desire and set forth her mystical experience in unambiguous terms:

Get him on the double
Tell him it’s an emergency
The doctors have given up
I can’t bear it
I think I’m going to die
It’s a slipped disc
A shooting pain up the spine
A fire in the brain
A comet bursting in the kidneys.
Is he there (91-92)
These poems are suffused with deep yearning for Girdhar Gopal:

Ask him to come first  
I’m about to breathe my last  
Nothing serious really  
Just a routine heart attack (91-92)

The Little Saint’s consciousness is completely absorbed and occupied with the Lord Krishna. She is in every inch coloured in His colour.

Seen the Sun today?  
It’s gone peacock blue.  
Blue marigolds. Blue ravens, Blue grass.  
Must be a blue cataract in my eye, I said.  
Glanced, by chance at the calendar then.  
Watch it impatiently for 364 days of the year.  
Except today, of course  
Wish you a blue birthday, my love.  
(Can gods have birthdays,  
Thought they were without beginning or end.)  
Blue is the colour of my beloved.  
Blue is the colour of my universe. (167-168)

She being in a state of god-intoxication, the poetic lines given below reveal her intense spiritual quest for being united and merged with her beloved:

Tell them who I am,  
A god’s wife, nothing less.  
(Are you ashamed of me,  
Why have you kept me your dark secret?)  
Tell them, I’m yours  
Legally married to you before the gods.  
As the sun, moon and stars are my witness  
Tell them, to my last breath,  
I’m sure a true blue.  
Save my honour, beloved, save my honour. (168)

The above given poetic fragments are of great divine energy, emotional intensity and of ineffable bliss, beyond the comprehension of intellect and reason of a secular minded person. Her devotional songs are the manifestation of an awakening or transformation wrought by the intense emotional feeling of love. The little Saint’s chief way to self realization is through sincere love
and devotion and this consists of a sincere longing, complete surrender and supplication. The primacy of love is adopted by her as the principal means to self realization and for the release of enlightenment.

The Upanishadik mahavakya ‘Aham Brahmasmi’, that is, ‘I’m Brahman’ depicts the relation between Atman and Brahman. According to the statement the realized soul does not see its identity different and even separate from that of the infinite Supreme Being. The little Saint confirms her identity by seeing herself no other than Shri Krishna. As per her realization the same divinity prevails in both of them. She feels, “there is as much of the divine in me as in you ....... ‘I am that’: that which pervades, inspires and encompasses the universe” (568).

The little Saint’s experience of the non-duality between her and her beloved, Lord Krishna is remarked by the novelist very aptly: “The little Saints faith had made the final leap. She could change roles with the Flautist. She was the substance and the power and force that was God” (568). Unlike her other fellow beings including her husband, the Maharaja Kumar, who live their lives in utter worldly terms with a sense of attachment and craving, the little Saint, being a spiritually enlightened person, leads her life with altogether different vision and perspective:

Her whole life, the highs and the lows, the tantrums and the pleasure, everything was an offering as much to herself as to her god, she was the essence of the Flautist’s idea of a karmayogi, or rather, yogin for whom the life of action made life worth living. She engaged life as if there was no tomorrow. Perhaps moksha lies in not thinking about the afterlife. (494)

Claimed very often by religious believers that the mystics, fakirs (saints) and priests can perform miracles to help the people in times of their crisis. It is also believed that God gives such miraculous powers to his devotees. Every year thousands of people go on long journeys called pilgrimages to religious sites to receive the incentive of magical cure. Suffering from various fatal ailments, people go with their last hope of becoming well and some of them have even immediate positive effects.

The novelist has endowed the little Saint with an extraordinary, miraculous healing power. The Maharaja Kumar, consumed with desire to posses the princess, “pretended to the Blue God”.

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“He was inflamed and raw and in terrible pain” (566). In this regard the novelist remarks: “you can get under the skin of a woman and perhaps even become one with her. But slip inside a god and there’s the devil to pay”. (565) Finding his pain insufferable, the little Saint took his head in her lap and began miraculous nursing.

She opened her mouth and sucked and drew out the putrefaction from his wounds gently and the cold flame of her tongue soothed and sank over the length of his body bringing a momentary forgetfulness.

The fever abated and there was a respite in the gruesome itching...

‘Give me your fever’, she said, I’ll quench this raging fire and share all your pain and suffering and go out of my mind with joy, my Blue One’. (567)

Her miraculous treatment of the Maharaja Kumar, her complete withdrawal from the worldly things and perspectives and her complete absorption in the Blue God, confirm her status as a ‘little Saint’.

The aforesaid account of the highly objective and logical the Maharaja Kumar and the saintly and the spiritual the little Saint, should make it clear that there is a clash between the two different modes of lives and their subjectivities. There is an oppositional relationship between the rational and the irrational (or even non-rational) world views of the two. Maria Luisa Parra writes:

In Kiran Nagarkar’s Cuckold, the Maharaja Kumar, on the one hand, and his wife the Princess, who is sometimes referred to as Greeneyed, or the Little Saint, on the other, represent these two conflicting worlds. Through them, the reader is able to explore two modes of being: the rational dialectic one of the Maharaja Kumar and the imaginative, intuitive, spontaneous world of Greeneyed. Through them, the writer is able to create a fine tension between “reality” and “illusion”.

(Lukmani 2004: 223)

The above critic further remarks:

The Maharaja Kumar’s striking intelligence is balanced by Greeneyed’s dazzling personality. Her beauty, her talent for singing and dancing, her poetry and above all, her passion for Krishna, make her an enigmatic character. The Prince is intrigued, then infuriated, and
finally completely obsessed by his wife. The moment he meets Greeneyed, which is on his wedding day, his hither-to orderly vision of life is overturned. (Lukmani 2004: 229)

Maharaja Kumar’s rational subjectivity shaped and conditioned by the discourses of history and culture, finds unable to comprehend and understand its completely different ‘other’ i.e., the mystical devotion and unbelievable love for the divinity of the little saint. The prince being a skeptical of the supernatural and mystical, considers his wife to have gone crazy and abnormal and is “willing to do anything, to retrieve his wife from the forces that robbed her of her will and set her on a path of collision with the whole of Mewar”. (149)

No doubt the Maharaja Kumar himself worshipped Lord Krishna known as “Eklingiji” and was inspired by the Deity on many occasions in his life. Hinting towards the Maharaja Kumar’s relationship with Shri Krishna, the novelist writes: “He was my best friend. My confidant and preceptor. This Blue God with the flute and the peacock feather stuck in the band around his head”. (102) However, his faith in the divine stems not from his personal, first hand experience but from his cultural heritage. His Bhakti to Lord Krishna is more of tradition, convention and less emotional and passionate involvement. Such religious practices as “doing his Sandhya in the morning after he had his bath”, (103) putting red tilak on the forehead of the God, saying prayers and prostrating before Him before going to work, were no more than merely ritualistic performances. These religious practices did not really touch and transform him.

The Maharaja Kumar fails to understand that religion is something not to be grasped through reason and requires an unflinching faith in an authority which is not of this world. This thing is very much clear to the little Saint. She never subjects her faith into the Lord Krishna to doubt, her devotion is quite firm and unshaken. Unlike the Maharaja Kumar for whom religion is a matter of duty and reason, for the little Saint it is a matter of complete involvement and surrender to the Lord Krishna. Her body, her soul and her heart are involved in the Bhakti of the Shri Krishna. Maria Luisa Parra notes: “Hard as he (the Maharaja Kumar) tries, the world of his wife is alien to him, for his reason is always in the way to stop his attempts to enter it” (in Lukmani 2004: 235). Thus, we see the two completely different worlds – the historical and the mystical.
embody in the subjectivities of the Maharaja Kumar and the little Saint – conflict and clash with each other.

Kiran Nagarkar resolves and dissolves the conflict of the two opposite subjectivities – the historical and the spiritual – in the conclusion of the novel, which may sound startling and unpersuasive to some. There is a magical change and radical transformation registered in the consciousness of the protagonist, the Maharaja Kumar. A rival mode which had earlier taken the Maharaja Kumar’s subjectivity under its grip against Lord Krishna was transformed into its opposite, that is, the mode of Bhakti (wherein only the all – embracing love of Lord Krishna prevails). The jealous ‘rage of the Cuckold’ and the ‘rivalrous relationship’ is replaced by the thriving and revitalizing faith and devotion to Shri Krishna. In this regard, American literary cultural critics George Dardess and Peggy Rosenthal in their co-authored text “The Local and The Universal in the Novel of Kiran Nagarkar”, writes:

His victimage is transformed by an energy that comes from outside his and the novel’s world: an energy that only one other character besides himself – his wife, the Little Saint – is capable, not simply of noting, bit of (literally) embracing. It is the energy of Krishna. So here we have what we can call the spiritual answer to the problem of imitative desire which Nagarkar is posing in Cuckold. (in Lukmani 2004: 316)

Pursued by the six assassins of the Prince Vikramaditya; “The Maharaja Kumar ran to the temple of the Flautist at Basawa” (601). To settle his score with Krishna and believing Him to be dwelling in the statue of the temple, the Maharaja Kumar took his sword out of the scabbard to strike and roll the head on the floor. But suddenly he hears a voice:

‘How long will you nurse this enmity”? How long will you fight this personal war? And so, what purpose? Do you not know that you and I are one? My flute and song are on your lips. We love the same woman. Why, you fool, no power on earth can separate or divide us.

Now “the Prince was in two minds. Should he raise his hand and strike him dead? Or ….” but finally “he brought his double edged sword down, swift and hard just as he had imagined he would”... And as the sixth men were close enough to strike the Maharaja Kumar with their swords and kill him, a miracle took place to the utter surprise of the assassins:
It was then that the Flautist embraced the Maharaja Kumar. Terror and astonishment struck the six men. One minute the Maharaja Kumar was there, the next he had become invisible. Had they been dreaming? There was just the end of the Maharaja Kumar’s turban, the kesariya bana, showing outside the lower left edge of the Flautist’s chest.

(602-03)

Thus, finally we see, there takes place a fusion of the two worlds: the historical and the spiritual. The individual self has its ultimate merger with that the infinite and the Absolute. Maria Luisa Parra very aptly remarks again in this connection:

Some cultures are able to hold both modes of perceiving reality – the rational and the intuitive simultaneously. Kiran Nagarkar merges these two “realities” in the final fusion of the Maharaja Kumar and Lord Krishna. The startling conclusion of the novel (the fourth ending)* symbolizes the reunion of the two worlds, of two opposing perspectives that have confronted each other throughout the novel. (in Lukmani 2004: 236)