CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

More than a hundred years have elapsed since the publication of the first notable achievement in Indian English Fiction -- Bankimchandra's Rajmohan's Wife -- in a Calcutta weekly. But by a strange quirk of fate, "the bonafides of the writer in English are continually impugned" in our country even today (Rajan, qtd. in Kachru 64). Critical opinions sometimes describe the Indian English writer as a "second class citizen" or as a "poor relation" (Vatsyayan, qtd. in Naik, A History 287). Some critics have even made fun of the Indian Writer in English by using Gordon Bottomley's famous phrase -- "Matthew Arnold in a Sari" -- or by equating them to dogs walking on their hind legs. In the present study, no attempt has been made to dispute any such critical opinion as the intention of the researcher has been far removed from such a task. The focus of the present inquiry has been to analyse the contemporary relevance of two of the talented writers whose works have not received adequate critical attention.

As could be seen in the foregoing chapters the thrust of the effort has been to view the creative works of the two novelists, identified for this study, not as mere oddities or curious literary hybrids of ethnography and social realism. Rather the aim has been to demonstrate how the two authors
knit together in their works, human experiences with convincing success. With this aim, the study attempted to probe beneath the surface of ephemeral themes to discover unifying patterns in them. Moreover by placing the themes themselves in the main line of Indian traditions, the study hoped to have a perception "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot 77).

In order to reveal the fullness of implication of the common themes and to give a certain orientation in the approach to Venkataramani and Nagarajan a critical analysis of the forces that were at work during their times was attempted in the first chapter itself. The introductory chapter reveals how the movements for social, cultural and political reforms operated during their era and how these released, potential as well as latent forces that moulded the imagination of the two writers.

The second chapter mainly focuses on the similarity of political and nationalist themes in the fiction of Venkataramani and Nagarajan. Since the ethos of the nation has become "inescapably political" as Narayan described and quoted elsewhere in this thesis, these themes are given the pride of place over the cultural and social themes.

It is but natural that any writer worth the name in the thirties and forties of the present century would find the most important political movement of the period, namely the national movement for freedom, as a potential and
creative area for inspiration. And quite understandably Gandhian doctrines engage the unwavering attention of both Venkataramani and Nagarajan. Though they have given considerable importance to these doctrines, the thematic similarities end there, as the same themes are viewed from two mutually opposite angles. Venkataramani's view of the freedom movement and Gandhian doctrines are tinged with romantic idealism which precludes him from any reassessment of the impact of those doctrines on society. Nagarajan, on the other hand, objectively assesses that impact. Though his personal veneration of Gandhiji is obvious to any discerning eye, Nagarajan has much distrust of some of the followers of Gandhiji and sees their cynical calculations and convenient patriotism with an unerring eye. This multivalent approach is in contrast to Venkataramani's one dimensional view.

It can also be seen that Venkataramani's fictional writings usurp a functional purpose as it is used to garner the resources of the nation to fight against the British. Critics like Ian Milligan becomes instinctively suspicious when art assumes a functional dimension. They are reluctant to confer the status of fiction on such "Utopias" or "Dystopias" as "the impulse to organize, classify and preach take precedence over the urge to record the diversity of the real" (89). But we cannot altogether ignore Venkataramani's sincerity of purpose. We are too close to that momentous age to judge its passions dispassionately. Venkataramani's idealism also provides us a landmark from which to measure
our own position and that is, in a way, what Nagarajan undertakes in his novels.

Nagarajan's approach towards Gandhian doctrines is drained of any idealism as his "writing self", faithfully follows Liddel's dictum and "does not fill buckets of water" even if "Rome were burning" (62). This vision of the educated observer clearly perceives the effects and defects of the movement that guided the nation's destiny for many decades. This multivalent approach to the same theme distinguishes Nagarajan from Venkataramani.

More or less, the same difference is discernible in their respective attitudes towards other nationalist themes like 'self-reliance' 'Swadeshi' and rural reconstruction. Venkataramani's fiction betrays an urgency when dealing with such themes but Nagarajan refuses to be swayed by them. Similarly, Venkataramani's avid enthusiasm to reanimate the past glory, and find in that glory certain solutions to the vexing problems of his generation, is something remote from Nagarajan's concepts. Nagarajan's aesthetic consciousness uses the palpability of the past to provide a certain mood and texture for his fiction.

The themes related to politics and nationalism, apart from constituting an inherent part of both writers' lively response to the life around them, give us also a comprehensive vision of the forces that governed the destiny of the nation during the early decades of the present
century. Despite their apparent differences in perception, together they have succeeded in bringing out the idealistic and pragmatic, serious and flippant, tragic and even comic aspects of a great movement which has few parallels in world history. In that sense, it may not be far from truth, to claim that their works are mutually complementary.

The immediate relevance of their fiction has also to be stressed. While Venkataramani's idealistic perception painfully reminds us of that which is so much wanting, of that which we have lost during the last fifty years of our independence, Nagarajan tells us how we have bartered away those values for our selfish ends and how the gloom and cynicism that are marked features of our national ethos today had its origins well before independence itself. This apocalyptic vision of Athawar House and Chronicles shows the genius of these novels.

In the course of this chapter we came across certain opinions of Indian English criticism with which the researcher tends to disagree. Raizada's glossing over the obvious stylistic defects of Venkataramani's Kandan and Sarma's attempt to give too much significance to the years mentioned in Athawar House can be cited as examples. The aim of pointing out these opinions and disagreeing with them is not to belittle in any way the significant contributions of these critics to Indian English critical studies but simply to place the novels themselves in their proper perspective.
Both Venkataramani and Nagarajan sustain their varying perceptions when they expose the cultural consciousness of their era also. Venkataramani's worship of Cauveri fixes him at the very root of Tamil traditions which refuse to see the river as mere flowing water. The veneration of the river and the sand dunes that adorn its banks are related to his guiding principle of 'back to Nature'. Only by reclining on the sand dunes can man think of the eternal problems of life and get a glimpse of the Great Truths. Thus the river offers Venkataramani something permanent in the flux of life.

Venkataramani's thought process is such that he does not give much importance to either temples or the numerous festivals associated with them. These essentially man-made artifices of culture, for him, are only secondary to Mother Nature's gift — the rivers. Moreover temples play no part, great or small, in rural reconstruction and in his philosophy which gives more credit to work than worship, temples and festivals necessarily have only a secondary role when compared to dams and bunds which usher in agricultural prosperity.

Nagarajan's fiction presents us a picture almost contrary to what has been presented by Venkataramani. For the Kedaram intelligentsia, rivers and the myths associated with them are relics of the dead past. The pilgrim centres that thrive on its banks breed only bogus swamis or priests prone to generate disputes on non-issues. The sand dunes on
The banks of Nilaventi are fit only for political meetings and when gods come for a "picnic" there, the sense of pollution becomes overbearing. But temples and festivals provide an external framework to the cultural life of the people and hence are more significant than rivers.

As for the theme of East-West cultural relationship, both novelists are refreshingly free from any partisan attitude. They adopt, more often than not, a cosmopolitan outlook based on the 'Vedic' concept—"Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere". In Venkataramani, East and West represent two value systems which can benefit a great deal by mutual understanding and goodwill. He consciously avoids giving an ethnic dimension to East and West as he makes some Indians represent Western values more faithfully than the Westerners themselves. Venkataramani's gradual movement is towards a cultural synthesis.

However, Nagarajan does not strain much to make "the twain meet", as Forster had attempted in A Passage to India. It is better not "to connect". Each according to his 'dharma' is the guiding principle of his fiction. But in some of his short stories Nagarajan reveals the inherent incompatibilities of the two cultures.

When dealing with renunciation-motif the novelists adopt markedly opposite positions. Venkataramani sees ascetics as "jivan mukthas" and as selfless humanitarians. But the only godman in Nagarajan's novels is a social pest and a
pimp, anchored in a world of deceit and fraud. Similarly, Venkataramani employs many recondite experiences such as faith in dreams, fantasies, beliefs and superstitions in his fiction mainly as embellishments. As they are not integrated into the texture of his fiction they remain mainly as undigested pieces and discarding them would very much enhance the readability of his novels. On the other hand, Nagarajan skillfully employs them to provide an old-world charm to his novels. They also offer us an initial point from where to measure the progress made by the society towards a new awareness.

Thus the cultural aspects that figure in the fictional writings of Venkataramani and Nagarajan animate the thought processes of the novelists and provide a pattern to the novels. Venkataramani's overemphasis on Nature's gifts is in tune with his basic philosophy, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Nagarajan's approach to the cultural symbols is that of an observer and therefore is suited to the temperament of his characters who are mostly casual or even cynical.

In this chapter also, we saw some attempts by reputed critics to simplify the complex patterns of the novels. For example, Meenakshi Mukherjee tends to view the cultural clash in Murugan, as one between "pre-industrial modes of life and mechanisation" (Twice Born 65) Though these two aspects are present in the novel the clash of cultures is, by no means, limited to that. In fact, the present study views the clash as
between two systems of philosophy itself. Thus the terms 'East' and 'West' have to be used in the widest possible sense to depict the clash in *Murugan*. Yet another view that has been disputed in this chapter is that of Kai Nicholson, who has stated that "the Anglicised Indian is an innovation of the post-independence era". This view is questionable as we come across many "Anglicised Indians" like Kedari and Markandam whose motto in life is 'success at any cost' and who consider virtue itself as a weakness. They share many values which are generally associated with the Western materialistic philosophy and therefore come under the category of "Anglicised Indians".

The contemporaneity of Venkataramani's and Nagarajan's attitude to culture is too obvious to need any special mention. The cultural aspects they mention are those that had provided a continuity to Hindu culture over many centuries and hence, are by and large relevant even in the changing world of the present day.

In the fourth and fifth chapters the focus of attention has been primarily on social issues that have provided ideas and attitudes to both the novelists, to follow or to react against. Dehumanizing social institutions, like caste system, governed, as in the case of many other writers of that age, the thematic predilections of Venkataramani and Nagarajan. Therefore social movements for the emancipation of the Untouchables and the rise of anti-Brahminism are issues that
Venkataramani gives us a fairly detailed account of the miserable life of the Untouchables in his *Kandam*. He shows them as victims of the tyranny of the landlord and of their addiction to intoxicants. But this theme does not assume much significance in Nagarajan's novels, primarily because of the novelist's perception of the society in transition. Thus thematically itself we find certain differences here. However in their effort to mitigate the sufferings of this section of Hindu society, the inherent humanism in them triumphs. They see the Untouchable's addiction to liquor as the main flaw in his character. But instead of advocating total prohibition they advocate a policy of moderation whereby in slow degrees this unfortunate section can be weaned away from their addiction. Both the novelists realize that a social evil cannot be cured by legal remedies.

The rise of the non-Brahmin intermediary castes is seen as a phenomenon of tremendous social significance by both the novelists. Both see them as the potential leaders of the Hindu society. Venkataramani effects the shift of power from the Brahmins to non-Brahmins subtly in his novels. In *Murugan* economic power changes hands while in *Kandam* the political leadership also lies with the non-Brahmins. But Nagarajan's *Chronicles* shows only the gradual shift in the political power from Brahmins to non-Brahmins and he is not much concerned about the economic repercussions of the issue.
Venkataramani and Nagarajan show equal concern for the fall of Brahmins as a force, and they hold intrinsic as well as extrinsic forces, responsible for this. Venkataramani sees Brahmins disconcertingly remote from their traditional moorings, spending their lives as cooks, clerks and civil servants. The only respectable Brahmins in his fiction follow the traditional path of the 'gurus', as ascetics guiding the less fortunate in the society. The extrinsic forces leading to the downfall are rapid urbanisation, agricultural indebtedness and so on. Thus it is a many sided force that pulls the Brahmins down from their exalted place in the society. Nagarajan does not give much credit to such extrinsic social and economic forces in his fiction. He sees congenital infirmities as the main reason for the downfall of the Brahmins. The immoral lives some of them lead, their tendency to tie themselves up in endless metaphysical abstractions and the fissiparous forces that originate from such tendencies have all combined together to ruin the Brahmins.

Overdependence on concepts like caste are used as fictional material by Venkataramani and Nagarajan to point out the basically fragmentary nature of the society. Many underlying tensions in the novels have their origins from such tendencies, and the on-going social tensions provide a basic matrix to the novels. A society riven by factions and fighting against itself, apart from providing a rich mine for fictional material, is also an area of concern for social
reformers. For creative artists, who possess a scarcely concealed urge for social reform, caste divisions offer a fertile ground for the imagination to work on. This pattern is perceptible in the works of Venkataramani and to some extent in Nagarajan.

The novelists' approach to the dehumanizing caste system has a contemporary relevance, in that accidents of birth such as caste, more than an individual's merits, determine his status in Hindu society even today. The process of levelling down which got momentum in the 1930s is still continuing as a movement and anti-Brahminism is by no means a dead horse in the place of its birth.

The Indian woman's search for a new identity, as different from what the dead customs and obsolete practices had thrust upon her, is viewed with utmost sympathy by both novelists. The particularly alarming plight of the girl child, her uneven fight to acquire education and lead an independent life, the problems the Hindu women face in their married life are all elaborately dealt with by Venkataramani and Nagarajan in their individual modes.

Though both the novelists unequivocally favour an enlightened approach towards girl's education, Venkataramani appears not much concerned with the practical difficulties a girl may encounter, in the process of acquiring education. He pays more attention to the beneficent results of a good education than to the uncongenial conditions girls encounter.
in a male dominated society. Venkataramani's categorical statements on the whole issue, unaccompanied by any effort to pause and ponder, provide him the halo of a propagandist rather than of a patient social reformer. But on the other hand, the unwavering attention of Nagarajan is on the practical aspects of girl's education in an utterly antipathetic society.

Venkataramani appears to have thought very little on social problems like dowry and child marriage. The novelist's attitude to these twin social evils is piecemeal rather than comprehensive as he shows a readiness to accept customs which are sanctified by practice. But Nagarajan's approach is far more comprehensive. He is a forceful critic of the system which puts unsuspecting children into the dragnet of wedded life. Any how, both the novelists, by concentrating on the plight of poor parents, show that they are first and foremost humanists. Their humanism provides a larger dimension to an essentially social issue.

The institution of marriage, provides, above everything else, a pattern to Nagarajan's moral vision and shows that the casualness he displays in his attitude to social issues is very deceptive. The novelist discusses the whole gamut of man-woman relationships objectively without falling a prey to the temptations of social progressivism. Many of his views may even appear to be instances of male chauvinism, especially when he allows his men characters who
are dissatisfied in their married life to seek pleasure outside, while denying the same privilege to his women characters.

Towards many such ethical tangles Nagarajan adopts an intransigent attitude as he, unlike Venkataramani, is more conscious of the limits where prose fiction must stop. Therefore, though he is aware of the hypocrisies practised by the patriarchal social system, he never openly challenges the commitments imposed by myths on Indian womanhood. Consequently his art becomes sometimes deliberately ambiguous as we have seen in Athawar House and Chronicles.

Nagarajan visualizes a society which must necessarily be kinetic, in which the problems of man-woman relationship are solved through a process of constant adjustment. Blind adherence to ancient texts is seen as detrimental to the development of a healthy social system. This serious moral vision provides a pattern to his novels.

From Venkataramani's novels, no such sustained moral vision can be deduced. He sees extrinsic forces such as agricultural indebtedness, rapid urbanization and even destiny as the root causes of marital disharmony. Hence his views on marriage remain merely as dispersed meditations.

During the course of the discussion the researcher has come across certain critical opinions, such as the one by R.S. Singh who views Sona as a "revolutionary", with which it is difficult to agree as such opinions do not fit into the
ethos of the novel. Again Uma Parameswaran's praising of the physical faithfulness of Kamakshi in *Athawar House* also falls into the category of opinions ill-fitting with the general ethos of the novel. Such generalizations result from looking at the novel in isolation, detached from the corpus of Nagarajan's fiction.

The contemporaneity of the social problems dealt with in Venkataramani's and Nagarajan's fiction needs hardly be stressed as they are found to be more relevant now than ever before. Problems like dowry, it has to be admitted, has assumed alarming proportions in the increasingly Philistine society of today and has led several people to resort to inhuman practices like female infanticide, which were of course unknown during the time of Venkataramani and Nagarajan. Such inhuman practices originate directly from the social evil of the dowry system.

The sixth chapter, wherein the orientation was towards a stylistic and technical approach, attempted to bring out certain basic differences in the two authors. Though they dealt with more or less the same themes, there is a wide gap in their achievements mainly because of their different approaches to technical issues.

The main defect we see in Venkataramani's style is in his use of dialogues for characterisation. On many occasions the dialogues do not suit the character or the situation. Moreover all the characters employ their author's ornate and
metaphorical style. This blurs the sharp edges needed for realistic portrayals. Again, observation of artistic verisimilitude in characterisation is viewed with scant regard. These faults of Venkataramani's style damage the total effect of his novels.

Yet another structural flaw we observe in Venkataramani is his tendency to resort to frequent moralizing. In both Murugan and Kandan, towards the climax the author abandons the main line of the plot and digresses to disseminate his private and individual philosophy. However valid such philosophy may be, the novelistic medium cannot retain or tolerate it. Ironically if such digressions are removed, both the novels become immensely readable. Kandan, especially till the very end, retains a tempo which is destroyed by a quite unnecessary digression into philosophical musings.

These defects are not seen in Nagarajan who scrupulously maintains an artistic objectivity. The dialogues employed in his novels fit in with both character and situation. Each character is developed with meticulous care and the holistic approach towards characterisation is a creditable achievement of Nagarajan.

There is nothing very much remarkable in the method of narration in Venkataramani who adopts the omniscient and subjective point of view. But Nagarajan's technique in Chronicles is worth a deep study as he adopts the point of
view of the omniscient narrator and develops an ironic gap between him and the reader much like Henry James. This achievement is as creditable as of Raja Rao's in *Kanthapura*.

The overall impression we gather from a study of Venkataramani's style is that, had he been slightly more attentive, he would have compelled more critical attention and could have easily become a leading figure of Indian English Fiction. Even as the novels stand today, some good editorial pruning and slight modifications would make them immensely readable. On the other hand, the technical innovations of Nagarajan are commendable. Had his output been more substantial he would have won a rank as equal to the great trio of Indian English Fiction.

Thus any discerning critic can see how these two writers were very dissimilar in temperament and approach to social and ethical issues confronting a society which has been experiencing cataclysmic changes. With remarkable insights they gave expression to what they experienced as artists though they may not have the range, vision and commitment of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand or Raja Rao.

Venkataramani's attention was not confined to literary pursuits alone as he was an active participant in India's fight for freedom. He was a seer, political activist and a literary artist. Moreover he has also to face all the difficulties and disadvantages of a good precursor. The major defect of Venkataramani's fictional world is the
dominance of a pervasive optimism clothed in unalloyed idealism. He seems to have been carried away by his commitment to idealism of both the dreamer and the seer.

Nagarajan's fictional world and achievement more or less reflect the attitude of the man Nagarajan, a brilliant visionary who adopted a casual outlook to life. The study reveals the heights he would have achieved had he taken creative writing seriously.

In conclusion, it can be argued with conviction and a fair amount of accuracy that Venkataramani and Nagarajan, who for various reasons did not attract the attention of both the critics and the reading public, deserve appreciation and reassessment on the basis of what their fiction offers. Despite the stylistic oddities displayed by Venkataramani and the limited output of Nagarajan, both these writers, besides appearing to be complementary, emerge as writeres of assurance and beauty, and as talented chroniclers of Indian society in transition.