Chapter III

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Words and phrases like 'culture' or 'cultural sensibility' create an immediate difficulty for the critic and student of literature as no art can remain committed to a single inflexible definition of culture. Moreover the term 'culture' itself has been endowed with multiple meanings by its votaries. For example, Matthew Arnold, in Culture and Anarchy defines culture as "the passion for sweetness and light" (69) and includes in its purview a wide spectrum of human activities such as the habits, manners and literature of a people, "the things which give them pleasure" and "the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds" (52). On the other hand, Clyde Kluckhom defines culture simply as "the distinctive way of life of a group of people, their complete design for living" (qtd.in Raban 90). Paul Sharrad, whose ideas on culture, as he himself admits, are based on Gregory Bateson's Steps Towards an Ecology of Mind, Clifford Geertz's The Interpretation of Culture' and Edward T.Hall's Beyond Culture, defines it as "a conceptual framework whereby we make sense of the world and define our place in it, both as individuals and members of human groups" (4).

The task of the student of literature becomes complicated because of these plethora of definitions. Since a conclusive view of culture is difficult to evolve, all
significant aspects, related in any way to culture, that appear in the fictional writings of the two authors are considered for the present study. It includes art and architecture, beliefs, superstitions, fantasy, rituals, traditions and festivals and so on. The study commences with an analysis of the cult of river-worship that finds a prominent place in both Venkataramani and Nagarajan.

The rivers of India express the residuary nature of the Hindu culture more than any other single natural phenomenon. Amritlal Nagar in a 'Meet the Author' programme organized by the Sahitya Akademi narrates an incident where he saw a clerk bathing under a public tap reciting the prayer, "Ganga, Sindhu, Saraswathi, Jamuna, Sindhu, Saraswathi ...." Nagar asks "how could this man capture the spirit of the whole of India in one mug of water? How can he ever find the water of all religious rivers mixed in this tap water? ..." and arrives at the conclusion that in India "such a University of Truth and Tradition had been created that brought the whole of the earth and the sky together" (97). And the rivers of India and the millions of Indians who worship them stand testimony to this synthesis. Thus it is in no way surprising that all the major Indian English writers like Raja Rao, Narayan and Desani have exploited the passion of the average Indian to give ritualistic significance to flowing water; be it Ganga, Jamuna, Cauveri, Sarayu or Nilaveri.

The same passion for rivers is seen in the novels of
Venkataramani and Nagarajan. In fact, the music of flowing Cauveri is never far away from the creative art of both these novelists. But very often in their approaches to this cultural entity both the novelists adopt different perspectives. Most often Venkataramani treats rivers as spatio-temporal realities; as more than mere running water. They assume an individual personality of their own and thereby remain humanized. But Nagarajan, except in his description of Ganga in *Athawar House* and in his travelogue *Cauveri from Source to Sea*, deals with them as spatial realities only.

In the first novel of Venkataramani *Murugan, the Tiller*, the river Cauveri is treated as a temporal as well as spatial reality. The river is not merely spatial for the women of the village of Alavanti. As they take bath in it the river enjoys it, like a secret lover. This passionate lover plays all kinds of "tricks and games with the loose ends of the long saris" (48). But the women with their deft hands "both encourage and check the amorous extravagance of the river and keep it within decent limits" (50). The sexual connotations here are obvious but Venkataramani does not proceed much in that tenor.

The same Cauveri which is a sportive lover in one scene can become a catastrophic natural force ripping lives apart and creating alarm in the minds of men. The unpredictable Cauveri becomes a furious and disastrous flood during the
monsoon and submerges the fully-ripe fields of Ramu. It wipes away Ramu's dreams of leading a life as a farmer. But the flood itself holds no terror or despair for the tiller, Murugan, because he knows that it had replenished the waste soil with inches of silt. The town-bred Ramu has no such belief in the rejuvenating power of the river.

However, for Ramu also the river is not merely flowing water. Cauveri offers him salvation; he becomes 'Jivan Muktha' 'free from the bonds of life' - after he washes his feet in her water. Thus the water of Cauveri is not just a spatial reality but has significance at a spiritual level too. When Ramu washes his feet in its water the novelist tells us that a "Sanyasin spirit seized him, a passionless ardour for service" (126). This ardour for disinterested service wins for him greater laurels in life; far greater than he could ever hope for had he passed his B.A. and went on to become a lawyer like his friend Kedari. Thus here the river acts as a life-giver, a renewer of the springs of hidden power in every human being.

There are altogether four chapters entitled 'A River Scene at Alavanti' in the novel. When we come to the third river scene, none of the early boisterousness is left in the life of Alavanti or in the life of her people. The village itself is terror-stricken after the caste-riots when age-old ties were forgotten. The "imposing array of the police and the magistracy" (196) has taken away its soul. Though the
Cauveri still flows a majestic river, thereby synthesizing in her the various facets of life like birth, death and rebirth which form the eternal cycle of Hindu life, Alavanti has become a vast scene of desolation. Many of her best sons and daughters have fled to various cities to earn their livelihood. Even Ramu has sold all his lands and left the village to work as a camp clerk for the English Collector. The river scene also has become melancholic. "The once lively bathing group had thinned to half a dozen indifferents, and even they had not the old spirit for merry conversation on the river side" (325). Though the desolation here can in no way be compared to the horrors of Raja Rao's Kanthapura, the overwhelming sense of waste and gloom is inescapable here too.

What we note in these four episodes is the close affinity between man and nature, symbolized through Cauveri, and how the Cauveri, running sometimes playfully, at other times ominously or even sluggishly, nevertheless has a lasting influence on the lives of the populace on its banks. Its presence is both temporal and spatial affecting the rhythm and pattern of human life. It is ubiquitous more than the temple or any other cultural entities. Venkataramani displays this intricate and intense relationship without resorting to any metaphysical cogitations as in Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope.

The kind of expertise and intimate knowledge the author
had of the river Cauveri, is missing in his picturisation of the other rivers, of which there are quite a few in the same novel. He refers to Pennar "running through the wilds of Cuddapah" (Murugan 102), Palar -- "an eccentric and wild river which takes its course in the steep hills of Nandidrug and drains a portion of the Mysore Plateau" (Murugan 233) and to the 'Arni' river "chattering her way with little songs for the hills and the plains" (Murugan 296). What is lacking in these descriptions is a spontaneity and naturalness that is seen in the descriptions of Cauveri. These rivers remain merely as spatial entities to be exploited for man's well-being. The spiritual and ritualistic dimensions that we feel in the presence of Cauveri are conspicuous by their absence.

For Kaveripatnam Sidhantha Iyer Venkataramani, Kaveri [Cauveri] was not only part of his name but part of his personality too. Recollecting his school days at Mayavaram, a leading town in the eastern part of Tanjore District, Venkataramani writes that Mayavaram "was a happy change of place" with "the eddy-eyed, rolling river Cauveri ..." which gave him "a new freedom and joy and made me a lover of nature with interest in man" (qtd. in Ramaswamy 16). Such an affinity Venkataramani cannot claim with any other rivers. That is why his descriptions of other rivers seem laboured and replete with bookish phrases and cliches. In a way, Venkataramani's failure in this particular case underlines the importance of writing within one's range which Liddel stresses in his Treatise on Novel.
This partiality for Cauveri is a central determining factor in Venkataramani's other writings also. In several short stories in *Jatadharan and Other Stories*, Cauveri, is omniscient. In *On the Sand-Dunes*, "the scene is the cluster of sand-dunes near Venkataramani's home in Kaveripatnam, backgrounded by the confluence of the sacred Cauveri and the Bay of Bengal" (Iyengar, Foreword). Almost in every part of this prose-poem Cauveri is present. Venkataramani's favourite theme here is the essential loneliness of the artist which he expresses again and again using a river metaphor. "The river has the sea. The flower has the bee. But I am alone and unfriended on these sand dunes pining for things that will never be mine" (4). Similarly in *A Day with Sambu* also, Venkataramani praises the river in the second chapter entitled "The River". "It is the most living and the most rhythmic thing in Nature" (8) ' "The river is a sacred thing in our lives ..." (10) - such are his sentiments on the river. Apart from these, Venkataramani compares human life itself to a river: "the life of a river has a strange likeness to our own" (10). From its birth in the distant hills to its peaceful death when it meets the ever-lasting sea, every facet of it is described in human terms.

Perhaps no other writer in South Indian English fiction had written so much about the river as Venkataramani had done. But of all the rivers, Cauveri was his lifelong
passion. His main character, Ramu, says in Murugan, "There is a deep and rhythmic pleasure in the Cauveri which no other moving water ever gives me" (192). Thus of all the rivers, Venkataramani loved Cauveri better since he only knew her intimately. For him as to Kambar, the great Tamil poet: "The Cauveri is the best of rivers". 9

If, as it is stated earlier, for Venkataramani the river is a temporal and spatial reality giving a rhythm and pattern to human life, for Nagarajan, most often, the river is a spatial reality except when it moves in Time and Space as in the travelogue Cauveri from Source to Sea. In Athawar House, the river, is viewed primarily as a geographical entity which the Athawars nonetheless adore and are reluctant to part with. Aunt Tholasi objects to the shifting of the Athawar family from Syamalapuri to Kedaram because she cannot have her daily bath in the river Cauveri but she is finally prompted by the other members of the family and they all settle down in Kedaram away from the sacred Cauveri.

This does not mean that the river-motif has been relegated to the background. In fact it comes back with a vengeance in the second half of the novel when the Athawars

A courtesan, Silambi wanted Kambar to write a poem praising her and as she cannot pay the full amount demanded by the poet, who was most miserly by nature, he wrote only three lines: "The Cauveri is the best of rivers / The Chola is the best of Kings / The Coromandel is the best of countries". This episode is colourfully described by Nagarajan in Cauveri from Source to Sea (92) and it shows how for Tamil poets from the ancient times the Cauveri was a passion.
go on a pilgrimage to Benares on the banks of the Holy Ganga. Aunt Tholasi and Saku Bai, Vaman's wife, break into prayers at the sight of the majestic Ganga. A bath in the river, for aunt Tholasi is "like entering the very presence of God Vishnu, sitting with his consort Lakshmi on the celestial abode in Vaikunta" (Athawar 128). It is the realization of the life's ambition for her.

However Benares has its evil influences too. The Athawars are easily trapped by the fake swami -- Munda Kadirvelu Swami, and this incident shows how man has corrupted even his pilgrim centres. This is a view shared by Raja Rao too. The holy city of Benares which is the centre of pilgrimages "is depicted as a kind of Vanity Fair" in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (Sharrad 82) and in *Kanthapura* too, Bhatta goes to Kashi where "for even a hymn and hiccup you get a rupee" (259). Nagarajan by pointing out the unenviable aspects of the pilgrim centre and the river on which it thrives is in a way counter balancing the earlier lyrical enthusiasm of the two women towards the holy river. The river, for the two women is an eternal presence, but for others like Vaman, it is merely a place where one can be duped into taking naked photographs with prostitutes. This strain of thought is nowhere to be seen in Venkataramani's numerous references to rivers and is peculiar only to Nagarajan.
Much of this cynicism is seen as such in Chronicles of Kedaram, where the river Nilaveni, daughter of the Ganga, flows "... meandering sleepily among the rice-fields..." (6). But the river sands is not religiously hallowed ground as it is used as a place of debate where secular issues predominate. The sand dunes here do not kindle any philosophical thoughts as in Venkataramani but rather materialistic thoughts as to the respective merits and demerits of leading politicians like Gandhiji and Nehru. Even when describing the 'Thai Pushyam' festival celebrated on the Nilaveni sands, where the Ganga traveling south "all the way from Benares by an underground channel" meets Nilaveni, the narrator's skepticism does not leave him (123). He blandly says that the priests knew the exact meeting place of the two rivers and the priests of Kedaram, quarrelling over trifles and going to court to settle their religious disputes, are by no means ideal divine emissaries. They are not different from Munda Kadirvelu Swami, who promising to make base metals into gold, tricks the Athawar, Vaman Rao. Koni says that he could hear only a gurgling sound "proceeding from underneath the alleged junction". (123) The word "alleged" makes the entire claim of the priests dubious.

Koni's irony, of course unknown to him, reaches new heights in the next scene where Nilaveni sands, the "hallowed ground" (123) is used not for any 'Vedic' rites but for a purely political meeting. And on the sacred 'Thai Pushyam' day the high castes of Kedaram sit together to decide who
should contest for what positions in the ensuing elections. Here the president of the meeting, P.P.T. Chari goes on drinking glasses of whisky and soda and Koni is worried that Chari is polluting "the atmosphere with fumes of alcohol" (126). Nothing can describe Nagarajan's cynicism better than the way Chari drinks quoting from the scriptures how the sage Bharadwaja entertained Bharata with liquor and intoning verses "suggestive of the Sama gana, the very words and music that had reverberated on the banks of the Narmada, the Indus, the Ganges and the Cauveri, before Buddha was born and Jesus Christ had been heard of" (126). Nagarajan is not attempting to make any new myths like Venkataramani; in fact he is breaking quite a few. Thus the myth-making ability of the rivers has no use for Nagarajan in his novels and short stories.

When we make such a comment we have to make allowances for the futile efforts of certain characters in his novels to retain the wonder of the rivers and to lead the lives of 'Vedic' Brahmins. Mention has already been made to aunt Tholasi Bai of Athawar House whose piety and devotion and worship of the river are not tainted by any material considerations. If aunt Tholasi's is the only case in Athawar House, in Chronicles we have two characters living in the periphery of what is called 'civilization' in Kedaram. They are Koni's father and mother. These two characters are idealized abstractions and significantly Nagarajan does not
give them even proper names or any other marks of individuality. Though they live in contemporary Kedaram, they do not belong to it. Their worship of the sacred Cauveri and their pilgrimage to Thalai Cauveri, the birthplace of the river, are events of rare charm, as they give us glimpses into certain values so miserably lacking in the valueless, amoral world of Kedaram. In the context of the novel, these two beings are anachronisms and their journey to see the birthplace of Cauveri, which in one sweep reminds us of so many such journeys like those of the Magi and of Lord Rama himself, is a still greater anachronism.

Koni gives us a detailed version of his parents' pilgrimage to Thalai Cauveri. Though they return from the trip battered and broken in health with high fever, they feel a heavenly joy because for them Cauveri is not just flowing water:

The Sahyadri mountains were a splendid God, the pilgrims a condensation of spiritual merit, the sky Indra's garment, all glowing with a divine light. To hear them talk, one would have supposed that it was not a gush of water which they had witnessed but a real physical birth of the baby Cauveri, from the loins of the almost physically apprehended divine mother, attended by sages and saints who had taken a holiday to be present at the nativity. (Chronicles 162)

But if there is any covert myth-making venture here, that is nullified by Koni's reaction that his parents have
nothing to do with the present-day realities. "Not one in the present generation, man or woman, would have rejoiced as they did. Our self-applause is for centuries scored in cricket or for winning beauty contests... Our present-day gods are tin and tinsel" (Chronicles 162). Thus Koni scuttles any covert attempt at myth-making. Koni himself knows that in the amoral world of Kedaram his parents are just relics of an ancient past and their singing of Cauveri's praise is a mere prattle of senile minds. The river and the sand dunes are fit only for public meetings and not for any 'Vedic' rituals. Even when the gods assemble there on "Thai Pushyam" day, "chowries" have to be kept waving" to cool the air and to keep off flies" (Chronicles 123). The sense of pollution is overbearing. The picture presented is of a river breeding flies and politicians on its banks and suffocated by fumes of alcohol. One is reminded of T.S. Eliot's famous line in The Waste Land - "The river sweats oil and tar". In this amoral polluted world, Koni's parents remain as faint beacon lights not to guide man to his lost values, for any didacticism is out of tune with the Nagarajan ethos, but just to remind him of what he has lost and what he has no hope of recovering ever.

If this is the picture of the river that is presented in the novels, in Nagarajan's Cauveri the picture is one of gay abandonment. Nagarajan seems to relish every moment of his proximity with Cauveri and he is clearly under its spell. In this book "Cauveri becomes", as Ujwala Patil writes,
"the symbol through which the spiritual life of the Hindu is clearly and persuasively expressed" (25). As Nagarajan floats down in his narrative along with the meandering course of the river, the towns and villages and temples on the banks kindle in him thoughts of yesteryears when the Great Cholas, Kambar, Sambandar, Thyiagaraja enriched its shores. The self same river had seen and heard Karikala, the Chola king, and even "argosies laden with merchandise from the Mediterranean littoral and the Aegean Sea "(Cauveri 95). Nagarajan's movement is both in time and in space and the entire book is an unforgettable experience. The familiar river is immersed into myths of romance. "Creative art", as Ananda Coomaraswamy reminds us, "is art that reveals beauty where we should have otherwise overlooked it..." (69).

In their approach to the cultural significance of the river and the role it plays in human life, Venkataramani and Nagarajan thus adopts divergent views. Venkataramani approaches the issue as one of spatio-temporal significance. River is not just flowing water, it has importance on the spiritual plane as it acts as a means for salvation. Cauveri is an omniscient presence, reflecting the various facets of life of the people on its shores. Venkataramani's approach can be summed up thus: "The river is perhaps the most poetic of god's creation and a rich symbol of man's life on this planet signifying its course, growth and final union with the sea" (Srinath 94). However in Nagarajan's fiction no such
pattern is perceptible. The river is for almost all the characters a mere natural phenomenon. On its banks, festivals and political meetings can be held; even alcoholic drinks may be consumed. The sceptics of Kedaram do not trust its myths which for them are merely relics of a distant past. If there are a few here and there who revere it, they are treated by the self-complacent society of Kedaram as remnants of a decadent past. But at the same time such people remind us of the eternal values from which the moderns have degenerated. Thus the river provides a criterion for value judgements.

Next in importance to the rivers are the numerous temples that adorn their banks. These temples provide a framework and a coherence to the cultural life of the nation. Moreover they are also hallowed with myths of antiquity that enable the writer to create an identity which according to Balachandra Rajan "is part of the essential business of an artist" (1). Thus the temples provide a sense of identity to the characters, and of the two novelists, Nagarajan, more than Venkataramani, exploits this potential fully in his novels.

About the attachment of the common man to his religion Nagarajan writes in Cauveri, "Religion in India more than anywhere else is deeply involved in the life of the people. It is, as anthropologists allow, as much part of life as is sex" (41). It is, therefore, not surprising that many of the characters in Nagarajan's novels live in close proximity to
the temples. In Athawar House for every new venture, the Devi must sanction her approval if possible by her 'friendly' bells. When Athawar Gopinath insists on buying a new house in Kedaram he faces objections from all quarters. But the pealing of the temple bells at the exact time when he mentioned the buying of the new house silences all the criticisms of the other members of the family. "If Syamaladevi wills it, then so be it!" concludes aunt Tholasi.

Similarly in Chronicles the narrator Koni grows ecstatic describing the temple: "In Kedaram, it is the temple which is the centre of life. It is the unchanging axis on which the life of the city revolves." (38). Koni, then, goes on to give us the various aspects in which the temple touches the lives of the people of Kedaram, "... Kedareswar enters your daily life with the milkman and does not leave it even when night falls .... For, when you have said your prayers and gone to bed, he is about, lest you sneeze and seek his aid" (38).

Not only in religious matters but also in secular ones, Koni very often invokes the aid of Kedareswar. "At child births, weddings, trading enterprises, even at our examinations his sustaining might was invoked" (41). When Koni went for the B A degree examination he had neglected two out of the four major poets. But says Koni: "Overnight, I prayed long and passionately to Kedareswar and, imagine my
surprise, when I found that the paper offered so many alternative questions, it was possible for me to score the required marks...." (41). It is noteworthy that Nagarajan's irony cuts in both ways making it extremely difficult to judge whether he is humanizing the deity or laughing at the naivety of the narrator. Whichever may be the intention it serves to show how blindly people believed in the omnipotence of Kedareswar.

However, such a deep attachment between man and temple is not visible in any of Venkataramani's novels. Though Venkataramani gives us a sketch - "The Hindu Temple" - in his Paper Boats, as a writer of fiction he rarely uses the motif. In this sketch after giving us some initial observations about the predominant cultural role the temple plays on the life of the people, Venkataramani gives a detailed view of its architectural workmanship. He also speaks about the deities that adorn the sanctum sanctorum in a rather light-hearted bantering tone. For example, he describes Ganesha, thus: "There is 'the Elephant-Lord Ganesha, rolling his trunk on his magnificent paunch, who bids you a magnificent welcome.... He is still a bachelor. He has hitched his ideas of matrimony to a star - possibly a comet. He is still on the look for a suitable bride" (45).

But in his fiction, Venkataramani does not give us detailed picture of any temple, though in the Cauveri delta there are no scarcity for temples. Only in Murugan, we can
see a temple providing a sort of rendezvous for a surreptitious meeting between Ramu and Sita as any kind of social talk between a married woman and another man would have been unthinkable in any other public place. That Ramu is a rare worshiper at temples and the temple itself is as deserted as ever is pointed out by the omniscient narrator himself. Ramu meets Sita here and she prostrates in front of him thanking him for bringing her husband back to her from the clutches of the dancing girls of the town. Incidentally, this is the only example wherein the temple is mentioned as a possible place for socialisation. All other meetings between people take place at the river ghats or on the sand dunes which is "Nature's softest bed for the philosophical thinker and the seeker after truth (Murugan 280). The world of Venkataramani's novels is secular; not religious. The temples of modern India for Ramu are the bunds which link hill-ranges creating artificial lakes and bringing prosperity to several villages. In this passion for rural reconstruction through agricultural prosperity, Ramu reminds us of the builder of modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru for whom too the great dams were temples.

In Venkataramani's second novel and in the short stories too, there is very little mention of temples. The railway station at Akkur or a humble toddy shop forms the focus of social life in Kandan. In Jatadharan it is the pial school that is focussed on as a probable bringer of salvation. Thus rural reconstruction through improved methods
of agriculture and teaching of the young through pial schools form the basis of Venkataramani's religion. It is worship through work.

"Life is possible", writes Anand Coomaraswamy, only when "the Creative mind ... retreating before its problem and inwardly collecting its forces dips at least for a moment into the source of life, in order there to wrest a little more strength... for the completion of its work" (46). Nagarajan's characters get 'this little more strength' from the temples and from places of pilgrimage. Venkataramani's characters get it on the sand dunes of rivers or beaches; hence the dominance of temples in Nagarajan's fictional writings and their almost total neglect in Venkataramani's writings.

The Hindu temple is also the centre of all festivals and rituals connected with the Hindu way of life. Speaking of the significance of rituals in religion, Northrop Frye comments that "most of the higher religions are equipped with a definitive total body of rituals suggestive ... of the entire range of potentially significant actions in human life (The Archetypes 429). Obviously, Hindu religion too has attached much significance to rituals and festivals and Nagarajan himself echoes the words of Frye in his Cauveri "What matters is that the temples were the centres of a vigorous community life, they made for social well-being, the common pursuit of the common good, a way of life which had a broad human face" (60).
In Nagarajan's novels we have many descriptions of such festivals held from time immemorial in the Cauveri delta. In *Chronicles* especially, Nagarajan gives us many such descriptions. Koni says:

Kedarnath's temple is rich in festivals. It is the scene of a perpetual holiday. Every month has its distinctive festival; the full moon celebrations in April, Kedareswar's own wedding in June, an affair of full ten days and nights, the 'dusserah' in October, the river side gaiety when the star 'Pushyam' reigns in the heavens, while the sun is in Capricorn (38).

And irrespective of their religious affiliations all the people of Kedaram celebrate these festivals. Thus these festivals serve as a cementing force making people forget their religious dissensions at least for some time.

Thus festivals serve as a means of humanizing the brass or stone gods of the Hindu temples and make the presence of Gods a reality. By describing Andal's marriage with Varadaraja, Nagarajan makes the point doubly clear: "To look at the way the Ayyangars sang the praises of the Lord and shed tears of holy joy ... you would think that Andal's wedding was just then going on, and that if you did not look sharp, you would miss a vision of the Lord, in the act of tying the bridal knot" (39).
Venkataramani, unlike Nagarajan, does not give us any detailed picture of any festival, though the Cauveri country about which he writes has a number of them. But in his sketches in *Paper Boats* he gives a detailed picture of a Hindu temple and about its car festival. The car festival is seen as a united form of worship wherein even the untouchable can join in.

Yet another cultural aspect on which both the novelists have spent much of their time is the theme of East and West and the conflict or the synthesis, as the case may be, of cultures that inevitably proceeds from their proximity. "This cultural conflict", writes Meenakshi Mukherjee, "has for some reason always assumed a vital significance for the Indian novelist who writes in English" and she traces the evolution of this "inter-cultural tension" from an early novel *The Prince of Destiny* (1904) to J.M. Ganguly's *When East and West Meet* (1960) to prove that the motif 'has not exhausted itself' (*Twice Born* 64).

Of the two novelists, Venkataramani is more aware of the difference in values between the two systems than Nagarajan. This clash of values Venkataramani depicts with elaborate particulars in his novels and short stories. Moreover, he has carried the theme further into his non-fiction too. In *Murugan*, the clash of values assumes the shape of a clash between "the pre-industrial modes of life and mechanisation" according to Meenakshi Mukherjee
But these two phrases "the pre-industrial modes of life" and "mechanisation" do not adequately reveal the full potentiality of the cultural clash in the novel. The phrases also reduce the clash to the level of such clashes depicted in English literature written during the period of the Industrial Revolution, of which perhaps Goldsmith's *The Deseret Village* can be cited as the best example. For in Murugan the clash is between two modes of thinking itself represented in the novel respectively by Ramu and his friend Kedari. Their clash is a clash between idealism and pragmatism, between a life which is "passionless, painless, possessionless, hungerless, selfless, full and alive (288) and a life wasted like a wild river of unchecked ambition. It is also a clash between glorious inaction and selfish action. Thus the terms 'East' and 'West' have to be used in the widest possible sense when we write about Murugan.

Yet another consideration is that in the clash itself East and West are not represented respectively by the Indians and the English. The values that Ramu stands for are the values of Mrs. Cadell as well. Her husband laughs at her thus: "I fear, my dear, but for your complexion, you are almost a rank Hindu" (Murugan 101). Mrs. Cadell and her brother Rev. Craig stand for the values Ramu represents in the novel.

Personalities or cultural origins are immaterial, in the continuing clash between modes of thought, is made clear again and again by Venkataramani, for he makes two Indians -- Kedari and Markandam Iyer -- the representatives of western
culture in the novel. Both are men of action with unchecked ambition. Kedari's "ambitious nature knew no shores and mocked even the land-grit sea" (Murugan 222). Success for him is an end in itself and he wants to reach the top and remain there unhindered by any moral scruples. "Many must go under if one should go up. It is the unfeeling rule of life" (Murugan 223). This mad rush for power is something generally applied to the western materialistic philosophy and not to the East which admires, traditionally, the victories of pacifism and tranquillity. Markandam Iyer is nothing but a grown up version of Kedari and shares his values, though he is not as communicative or as flamboyant as the young man. Markandam tells Kedari towards the end of the novel, "You were to me a sort of mirror wherein I saw the ugliness of my own face. Your methods and deeds were like mine — success at any cost" (Murugan 321). These words of Markandam sum up the life of both these philistines.

Thus we see that in Venkataramani's scheme of things personalities or nationalities do not matter. His is a clash of values and in bringing together Ramu, Kedari, Markandam and the English characters like Mr. and Mrs. Cadell, Rev. Craig and Mr. Turner in Meenakshipuram settlement, Venkataramani is declaring his aim of cultural syntheses in no unmistakable terms.

Though the synthesis of East and West is hammered out towards the end of the novel, a discerning critic can easily
understand the facile nature of this synthesis. For in Venkataramani's novels we get some glimpses of the unbridgeable gap that lies between the two modes of life and two modes of thinking. Mr. Cadell, for example, expresses several times in the novel his views on East and West and Ramu himself feels that Mr. Cadell's inhumanities arise from his racial arrogance and awareness of the "Whiteman's burden". When his wife advises him to apologise to Ramu for scolding him unnecessarily Mr. Cadell exclaims: "Apologise in public to my own camp clerk! The official world would laugh at me" (Murugan 103). Again he continues, giving his reluctance a philosophical garb: "Prestige is the spark of official life, without which we should turn to cold ashes. You can't afford to admire your camp clerk in public. The administration would be at an end in a week..." (Murugan 103). Thus Mr. Cadell typifies the ordinary English official for whom the native has to be kept always as a subordinate. George Orwell's worst indictments were against such 'Sahiblog' in his Burmese Days - "A dull decent people, cherishing and fortifying their dullness behind a quarter of a million bayonets" (qtd. in Nicholson 171). And when Mr. Cadell, parrot-like repeats the

Cultural synthesis is a favourite theme of Venkataramani. In The Next Rung he writes about the necessity to search for the Great Truth thus: "But we should all strive for it both individually and collectively, individually with fullness, absorption, detachment and vision as the East has always done, and collectively with vigour, strenuousness and public sacrifice as the West has always shown in its quest" (74). Again he asks in On the Sand Dunes: "Has the West for the East no message or the East for the West none?" and answers "Yes, there is. The West to the East, the philosophy of work. And the East to the West the philosophy of leisure" (13).
Kipling-jargon "East is East and West is West" (Murugan 146-147) we are least surprised.

Even a character like Rev.G.Craig, Ramu's professor of Philosophy and English, who is shown as a great educationalist and as "a missionary who had no race or colour prejudice" (Murugan 142) is not devoid of certain ingrained notions about the standard behaviour of an average Indian. He remembers Ramu for a particular incident. Ramu paid back four hundred rupees he got from the college office by mistake. Rev.Craig praises him for this honesty. But Ramu feels that Craig's praising of a 'common piece of honesty' as something 'uncommon', is an injustice to Indians in general. "By your celebrating it like this, as if it were a rare thing for an Indian to do, you do the whole nation an injustice (Murugan 145). Rev.Craig for his part justifies his action as borne out of his experience and thus in this particular episode too we get a glimpse of the general mistrust of the Englishmen towards the Indians.

However without stopping here Venkataramani goes further to explain the roots of this misunderstanding through Ramu. He tells Mr.Cadell and Rev.Craig: "You encourage the mere intellectual....you characterise the morally minded as weak and unfit .... your civilization worships the intellect as an end in itself and not as a power subject to character or religion" (Murugan 145). Herein we get the crux of the problem and we can see that the clash is not merely one between "the pre-industrial modes of life and mechanisation"
as Meenakshi Mukherjee thinks (Twice Born 65). It is a clash between two modes of thought and living.

In Venkataramani's Kandan also the clash of values is visible though to a much lesser extent. Though the theme here, the political one, offers much wider scope for such a clash, Venkataramani does not take it as Raja Rao had done in Kanthapura. There are only very few characters who represent western values but even they change themselves before it is very late in the course of the novel. For example, though Rangan toys with the idea of continuing as an Assistant Collector, his love for Rajeswari Bai is too much to resist and he too joins the freedom struggle. Even Ponnan, who is a government-spy changes his affiliation before the climax of the novel. Thus the hero of the novel, Kandan, is left with no enemies to fight and his martyrdom in the police firing is caused by a bullet not intended for him. Thus, though there is much scope for developing a clash on the political level Venkataramani does not follow that stream.

In depicting the theme of East-West cultural tension Venkataramani deals more with values than with personalities. And it is noteworthy that the clash too is not only between two nations but also between two ideologies in which the Indians and the English, despite their different cultural backgrounds, frequently change sides. The clash is also between the Anglicised Indians and the Indians rooted in native culture. We have seen this in Murupan and to a lesser
extent in Kandan. Thus the claim of Kai Nicholson that "the Anglicised Indian" is an innovation of the post-independence era does not stand the test of reason (7).

But Venkataramani's concern with the varied value systems is ignored by Nagarajan in his novels though his short stories have a different story to tell. Nowhere in Athawar House we are aware of the separate cultural background from which the English characters originate. In Chronicles too apart from stray references to the 'Whiteman's burden' - and the term itself is used by Englishmen to laugh at themselves - there is very little evidence of any 'inter-cultural tension'.

When we consider Athawar House two main characters come to our mind. They are the Branksomes. These two represent all that is gentle and decent in the British cultural tradition. We must remember that the novel itself has Non-Co-operation movement as its background. Still Nagarajan does not indulge in any anti-British sentiments. He tells an interviewer: "I am too much of an Indian to be anti-British. A good Indian is as good as British. I am not at all anti-British" (Vasantha 51). The Branksomes are like foster-parents for Venkatramani of the novel. "Branksome", the omniscient author tells us, "held very definite views as to the right of Indians to run their country and liked to establish very intimate personal contacts with them" (Athawar 68). Mrs. Branksome also took "a real interest in the Indians" (Athawar 68). Branksome succeeds in preventing a
riot in Gandindi and exonerates Venkatramani whom Sergeant Pride accuses of throwing a stone at him.

In a way, the mistake committed by Sergeant Pride points to the precarious nature of the relationship between the Indians and the British. At the heat of the moment Sergeant Pride, though a good officer otherwise, does not mind pointing an accusing finger against an innocent boy. "Pride did not know where he had seen Venkatramani, but his face was familiar in a vague way and this seemed to the outraged sergeant good enough for the moment" (Athawar 96).

Any other Collector would have believed him but not Branksome, who knew Venkatramani intimately. The incident is not without its moral. In the heat of the moment when passions are aroused people forget their innate sense of values.

Hence no explicit clash of values, as we have seen in Venkataramani's novels, is present in Nagarajan's novel. The gradual, though very often imperceptible movement is towards a synthesis unmarked by any smug complacency or easy resolutions. The seer-like Anantarama Aiyar perceives such a synthesis thus: "They [the British] stick to their 'dharma'. We must stick to ours" (Athawar 242).

If "East is East and West is West" and if "the twain shall never meet", the author of Athawar House is content to leave them at that. He will not take any undue strain to arrange a rendezvous between the East and West. His basic
philosophy comes out from a brief episode in Athawar House. Kirby, an English Collector under whom Venkatramani had to work for some time, has a "thorough-going dislike of his Indian assistants" (239). Palit, the headquarters' sub-Collector who wants to maintain a smooth relationship with his superiors is cut up by Kirby's imperial attitudes. Venkatramani advises him: "I'm sure, the love of your own kind, of Sastri, Ispahani and Kutumbiah will suffice for you without your pining for the love of Octavius Jasper Mendelssohn Kirby" (239-40). When Palit gasps at these expanded initials of Kirby, Venkatramani coolly tells him that the "Maker did not intend him [Kirby] for the company of his fellowmen" (240). If Kirby wants to retain his splendid isolation let him do it. It is better not to try 'to connect' à la Forster. Each to his 'dharma' is the basic rule of Athawar House.

More or less the same principle holds true for the characters in Chronicles too. Here too the Englishmen are only part of an amorphous group and quite a few of them are outside the magic circle of 'empire-builders'. They are as undistinct and faceless as the numerous Indians that populate Kedarnam. They do not sit in "Kipling-haunted little clubs" listening and eagerly agreeing with Colonel Bodger's theory that the "bloody Nationalists should be boiled in oil" (Orwell, qtd. in Nicholson 172). If people like Katherine Mayo rarely peeps in they are not allowed to ruin the party.
Nearly half a dozen Englishmen appear in *Chronicles* - Cole, Kemble, Hartman, Donovan being some of them. None of them has any pathological hatred for the Indians. They dislike the British officialdom more than the Indian nationalists. Cole, the headmaster of the local school makes it amply clear to Koni and his friends that "missionaries and commercial folk would prefer rule by the Congress to rule by the I.C.S." (159). He has his reasons to give to the astounded Koni: "Your objection to us is that we are foreigners and Capitalists. The I.C.S. regard us as low life, padres and boxwallahs"(159).

Reference to this occidental variety of the caste system makes the myth of a monolithic British empire rather superficial. That the British empire is no evil empire and that the freedom struggle itself is no Armageddon are made clear in the *Chronicles*. Of course, the complacency of the Indians when freedom was in the horizon is understandable since for the generation of the 20s and 30s the atrocities perpetuated on the Indians after the collapse of the Sepoy mutiny were only a distant memory. They had begun to see the British empire riven by internal dissensions and precariously poised against the might of other European powers like Germany. Their concern was more about the internal dissensions among themselves -- between 'Vadagalais' and 'Thengalais', between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and between Hindus and Muslims.
Therefore, only one type of Englishman dominates the Chronicles. Mostly belonging to the category of civil servants this type does not give much credence to phrases like 'Whiteman's burden' or to writers like Kipling or prophets of doom like Katherine Mayo. In fact, they laugh at such inanities as 'Whiteman's burden': "it seems old Donovan used to say that the masses of garlands which Collectors used to wear were the real Whiteman's burden" (7). Moreover the Englishman's deemed mastery over his own language itself is a source of light-hearted banter for them. Duff Gardiner's "baffling Banffshire accent" (97) is laughed at by Kemble. Koni himself says that Duff Gardiner's "language bore no recognizable relation to English (96). Later on Koni's experience with Duff Gardiner reaches Gangadhar Suri's ears and he sums up the cultural tension succinctly. "If the English only spoke more distinctly, adapting their enunciation to the hearing of their Indian listeners much of the existing misunderstanding could be avoided" (98).

Undoubtedly, of all the English presented in Chronicles the character of Cole is drawn with utmost sympathy. Cole is pictured as a perfect gentleman. His sympathies are with the Congress and the Indians. As the headmaster of the local school, Cole reminds us of that memorable character, Mr.Fielding in E.M.Forster's A Passage to India. Cole participates in all the social activities of the locals in Kedaram and never believes in the exclusive privileges of the English race. He is even ready to offer advice if called for
in matters of politics. Cole has no reluctance to point out what he perceives to be truth. He admits that the Justice Party is "a masked battery of the Government of Madras" (Chronicles 158). He has no hesitation to point out that "communal peace in India" is "as undependable as the English weather" (Chronicles 142-143). Though Koni disagrees with Cole's view, Gangadhar Suri sees much merit in that statement. "There is a good deal in what he says. We are still, on the whole, an unsophisticated people, in many respects, immature and fall out over trifles. And that is grist to the foreigner's mill" (Chronicles 144).

Cole's sense of loyalty to his friends is something woefully lacking in several lawyers of Kedaram. These lawyers do not hesitate to sling mud on Vasu and Nirmala, though many of them know Vasu from his childhood. Cole flares up when Koni mentions to him the rumour of Vasu's affair with Nirmala. This defence of Vasu's reputation warms the heart of Koni who thinks that Cole "had a sense of loyalty which those much closer to Vasu lacked". (Chronicles 93). Thus Cole is presented as an ideal type of Englishman: He is urbane and loyal to his friends and the country in which he lives: He is not even a bit aware of any racial-superiority which many men believed there existed. Indeed in the ruling race of those days these qualities were rare. Koni, though temperamentally not a good judge of men and matters, on one occasion rightly commented: "It is not every
Englishman who is made in the mould of a Hume or Wedderburn or C.F.Andrews". 11

East-West cultural tension as such does not exist in Chronicles or in Athawar House - as a clash of values. Nagarajan reserves the theme of the clash of cultures to some short stories in Cold Rice. In this collection of stories written during various stages in the author's life, three - 'Non-Co-operation', 'Hyde Park Corner' and 'Circumstances Alter Cases' - deal with the racial tangle. In 'Non-Co-operation' the conflict is between two personalities each trying to assert his ideas on the other whereas in 'Hyde Park Corner' the conflict arises because of the different values ingrained in the characters. In the third story we see how a few individuals, with their thoughtless actions, can imperil the smooth racial relationships. These three stories give us a glimpse of how racial relationships operated in pre-independent India.

In 'Non-Co-operation', there is a veritable cold-war between the D.S.P. and the D.M. of Popalli. The D.S.P., Mohiuddin Rafi and the D.M., Brocklehurst do not like each other's temperament. Brocklehurst's general prejudice against Indians is made clear in the letter he writes to his

11 Obviously some of Nagarajan's personal liking for Hilton Brown has gone into the portrait of Cole. Cole's love of nature - hills and forests - is a trait which Hilton Brown possessed in plenty. Nagarajan acknowledges his indebtedness to Brown in the preface to Cauveri from Source to Sea (xv) and admits in an interview that the inspiration for the book came from Hilton Brown (Vasantha 54).
wife: "This is a dismal hell of the place, made over to Indian Officers, and things are naturally in a mess. I think I shall have to take off my shirt as well and clean things up a bit and I will show them how to do it" (Cold 45). Brocklehurst's inability to understand the Indians paves the way for a large chunk of his problems. He thinks Rafi a "conceited young puppy" while Rafi thinks Brocklehurst to be a "pompous old ass" (Cold 46). Soon it becomes a no-win situation for both. As Nagarajan points out towards the end of the story "It is an ill wind which blows nobody good" (Cold 55).

If it is a bureaucratic tussle and a personality clash that cause rupture in Poppalli, it is an entirely different type of conflict that we witness in 'Hyde Park Corner'. In this story, the conflict occurs at two different levels—one explicit and superficial and the other subtle. The story itself opens in Hyde park, London, where an Indian student, Bhadri wanders without any purpose whatsoever. As an Indian, it is obvious, that he carries his 'Indianness' even in an alien shore, for, the gaily decorated restaurants recall to his memory the dancing girls of Popalli. In the park he meets a public speaker who is for no compromise with Indian nationalists. For the speaker, India is an immoral country with plenty of dancing girls. But such comments elicit only contempt from the genial crowd. They think it 'jolly good' to live in a country full of dancing girls. For the speaker, these people appear as a group of heathens and unredeemed
sinners. But the common man of London knows that there is much immorality in the Hyde park itself and laugh at the speaker. This episode clearly shows that the average Englishman is not easily swayed by propaganda given out by the self-appointed guardians of morality.

When Bhadri comes out of the crowd, a woman accosts him. Thus, he is confronted with a vision of British immorality. However, unlike the speaker in Hyde park he does not display any puritanical obsession with immorality. He tries to understand the woman much to her annoyance. The woman, Betty, is surprised at her odd customer - "this Indian who talked to her as nobody had talked before? He was different from the rest" (Cold 66). Others just "paid for the pleasure and cast her aside like a crumpled flower" (Cold 67). The Indian sees in her another example of a sacrificing mother, who for the comforts of her fatherless children, is forced to lead an immoral life. Throughout the story we are aware of the stark contrast between the Hyde park speaker and the Indian. Subtly Nagarajan hints that the former might have stoned Betty for her immorality, while the latter not only understands her but also desists from any generalization as the former would have done in such circumstances. The Hyde park speaker condemns all Indians as immoral without ever being to India. Bhadri sees immorality in London but sees it as an isolated instance.

The short story thus operates at different levels. In no other story had Nagarajan discussed the differences in
values so exhaustively. Bhadri's parting gift of a silver piece to buy some presents to the woman's daughter carries the contrast to the very end of the story. The woman is totally puzzled. She hates patronage; throws away the money but another woman restores the money to her. Thus the story creates mixed feelings. The smug assertiveness of the superficial observer, the depths in the Indian character, which such observation can never penetrate, the puzzle that the 'odd' Indian behaviour generates in a western mind unaccustomed to and suspicious of anything uncommon -- all these are yoked together in a deceptively inconspicuous manner.

Nagarajan discusses the same misplaced puritanical concept of morality the missionaries had and the consequent ill feelings generated in the Indian minds in yet another short story 'Circumstances Alter Cases'. The story here is centred round a missionary couple from America - Mr. and Mrs. Marmaduke Odo who visit the princely state Mudrabone. The proper name given to this couple itself reveals the author's attitude to such missionaries. 12

Moreover, Nagarajan has no sympathy for the American couple, especially for Mrs. Odo. This is made clear from the descriptions. "Mr. Odo was a thin lean man, who seemed all

12 The proper noun 'Odo' has a close affinity to words like 'Odious', 'Odium' etc. The first name 'Marmaduke' indicates the pompous and arrogant nature of this couple.
goggles and Adam's apple; he seconded his wife in all that she said and it was evident that the mare was the better horse of the two". (Cold 132-133). The chief points in Mrs. Odo's character is "a fixed glare in her eyes and an acid smile on her lips" (Cold 133). She was "flat chested, bony and angular" (Cold 133).

Mr. and Mrs. Odo organise a public meeting with the help of Mr. Colt-Enderby in which she unleashes against the Indians a speech "liberally soaked in vinegar" (Cold 133). She says that Indians are "filthy, obscene and sex-obsessed and all that sort of thing" (Cold 133). It is hardly surprising that the speech evokes very strong passions and Seshadri Sarma, "the local speech-maker" answers with equal vigour. His speech is "vile, vicious and in inexecrable taste" (Cold 134). He says "that Mrs. Odo had no business to come to India slandering us. God meant her to stay in America and in America she should have stayed. Why, if it came to that, the English had no business in India, which was meant for the Indians" (Cold 135). "Public speaking", as the narrator reminds us "was like wine and went to his head". (Cold 135). Sarma never thinks of the friendly Culpepper-Johnsons and the kindly Swedes; he never thinks that he is wounding them also. Thus when passions are aroused people tend to forget the individuals.

It is gratifying to note that in the racial conflict that threatens to engulf Mudrabone there are certain level-headed individuals who refuse to be swayed by base instincts.
One is the Culpepper-Johnsons and the other is Peter Hodkins; characters who remind us of Mr. Branksome of Athawar House and Mr. Cole of Chronicles. They see clearly that the American lady is at the root of trouble and say so in the court. Mr. Johnson says in the court: "... people who lived in glass houses should not throw stones at other peoples' houses" (Cold 137).

The whole story reveals how fragile the racial situation in India was at that time. Nagarajan undoubtedly has Katherine Mayo in his mind when he pictured the character of Mrs. Marmaduke Odo. Incidentally, Mayo's book Mother India too, was published in America, the country of Mrs. Odo's origin. During the 30s, Mayo's book elicited violent reactions in India. "Mayo gave a devastating picture of Hindu social life and customs, emphasising their worst aspects without reference to the cultural content and without substantiating her contentions" (Rajagopal 87). The book evoked a very strong reaction among the reading public of India and even Mahatma Gandhi, usually unswayed by any criticism, was provoked to call it 'The Drain Inspector's Report' in an article in Young India (Rajagopal 88)\textsuperscript{13}

That Nagarajan was affected by Mayo's doctrines can be

\textsuperscript{13} Some other leaders like Satyamoorthy were more violent in their reactions. Satyamoorthy said: "If India was an independent nation we would have whiplashed Mayo" (qtd. in Moni 5): 'Chitti' P.K. Sundararajan thinks that Ramu's expounding of the Indian way of life in Murugan is a direct answer to Mayo's attack on Indians (qtd. in Moni 5).
seen from the references he makes to the book in Chronicles and in Cold Rice. In Chronicles speaking of Donovan, Koni says: "... Katherine Mayo's book (since forgotten) he considered it bilge" (5). Almost the same comment is made by Culpepper-Johnsons against Mrs. Odo's speech. He calls it "Gibberish" (Cold 134). Nagarajan's antipathy against Mayo is seen again in his one act play A Man of Principle where he passes a comment on her out of context (14). Therefore there is very little doubt as to the origin of the satirical portrait of Mrs. Marmaduke Odo.

But Mrs. Odo's characterisation is a very rare thing in the novels of both Nagarajan and Venkataramani. Though "the fair westerner or the westernised Indian woman plays the role of the evil allurer" in many Indian English fiction according to Meena Shirwadkar (2), both Nagarajan and Venkataramani show her generally as an epitome of all virtues. Mrs. Cadell of Murugan, is an example. She reads Sanskrit journals and religious books and is fascinated by the Indian way of life. Similarly Mrs. Branksome of Athawar House is presented as a very sensible lady. Both the novelists, thus, do not display any prejudice against the English women and Mrs. Odo's characterisation is an exception. Nagarajan sees her more as a missionary than as a woman is obvious from the description he gives of her personality.

Thus, when discussing East-West racial tensions, Venkataramani gives more credit to values than to personalities while Nagarajan gives emphasis to personalities.
in his novels and to values in his short stories. For Venkataramani, personalities do not matter as some of his characters, who are Indians, act as more English than the English themselves. Venkataramani hopes to achieve a synthesis of the cultures but contrives to reach that aim through created situations that do not evolve naturally from the sequence of thought in his novels. But Nagarajan does not aim at any such synthesis. Each according to his 'dharma' is the basic principle of Nagarajan's novels. Both Venkataramani and Nagarajan do not show crude racial prejudice against the English in their novels. The English characters are also presented sympathetically most often, and very few of them are 'empire-builders'.

In dealing with the theme of renunciation as an ideal path of salvation Venkataramani and Nagarajan show involvement and alienation respectively. Ascetics in Venkataramani's novels are heroes, aliens metaphorically, living like a lotus leaf in the pond. But the only ascetic in Nagarajan's novels is a villain drawing upon myth, folklore and superstition to swindle unsuspecting people.

However, an explicit recognition of the role of asceticism in Indian life is necessary to appreciate the treatment of the theme of renunciation which we see in the novels of Venkataramani and Nagarajan. "Renunciation", writes Meenakshi Mukherjee, "has always been an ideal life, be it renunciation of worldly good and possessions, or the
renunciation of selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage" (Twice Born 97). The average Indian also feels the need for a guru to direct him to the right path of salvation. The ascetic, as he has renounced the temptations of materialism is obviously more suited to this purpose. Significantly, towards the end of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswami decides to go to Travancore to meet his guru as he only can show him the right path: "No, not a god, but a guru is what I need" (408).

The dominant position the ascetics occupy in Indian society has proved a rich quarry for the Indian English novelists. As the saffron robe that an ascetic wears is looked upon by the common man, it has also sometimes degenerated into a convenient disguise for all types of disreputable persons. Thus this dual aspects of asceticism and counterfeit-asceticism have given the novelists rich material to work on. Iyengar states: "... like the Hindu widow, the 'sanyasi' too (as Guru, Guide, Swami, Fakir, Yogi, Mahatma) figures often in Indian fiction, sometimes as a beneficent, sometimes as a malevolent and sometimes as a merely ludicrous character" (Indian Writing 316).

In the light of the above categorizations let us look at the fictional writings of Venkataramani and Nagarajan. Venkataramani explores this area of experience with an uncanny conviction at the essential goodness of the 'swamis'. All the major characters in his novels and short stories -- Ramu, Kandan, Jatadharan, Muthu -- live more or less in
conformity with the expectations of ordinary people. This attitude may be an oversimplification but it is not something unexpected from an author who himself instituted two ashrams - Svetaranya Ashram and Markandeya Ashram - in his own lifetime. But Venkataramani's ascetics attain their goal through a slow, sometimes tortuous process; sainthood is not something they are born with but attained through hard labour.

In Murugan Ramu though born with a philosophical bent of mind becomes a 'Karmayogi': one who does his duty without any expectation of rewards, through a slow process. At one time, after his marriage with Janaki, he experiences pangs of jealousy at the rise of Kedari and at the adoration his wife shows to the latter. But slowly he conquers that and later on sells his worldly possessions to pay the debts his mother-in-law had incurred through reckless spending. Ramu has an ascetic's scant regard for money. Though he loves the land and river of his native place dearer than anything else in life, he renounces them.

Venkataramani, in the chapter appropriately titled "A Rebirth", narrates how a 'sanyasin spirit' seizes Ramu and liberates him. Venkataramani, in no unmistakable terms indicates that Ramu has become a regenerated soul. Ramu becomes an ascetic in some way assisted by circumstances. This transformation has very little in common with that of the other great sanyasi of Indian English fiction - Raju of
Narayan's *The Guide*. Sainthood is thrust upon Raju after a life of minor crimes and a jail sentence. But Ramu's life from the beginning has an idealistic trend in it which but only culminates in his attaining the stage of a 'Jivan-Muktha'.

Kandan and Muthu of "Destiny" are different types of ascetics. They represent individuals who have sacrificed an income and a comfortable life to fight for the liberation of the country. In both these characters the martyr-motif is reiterated with varying emphasis. These two characters come in the tradition of patriots like Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Sri Aurobindo who without any reluctance had abandoned lucrative careers to lead the mendicant's life of political agitators. In Kandan and Muthu, Venkataramani idealises the martyr-motif as he had earlier idealised the passion for duty or 'Karma' in Ramu.

For the martyrs what awaits is either martyrdom or a long prison life is made obvious by Venkataramani. Kandan dies for the country, Muthu spends a major part of his youth in prison. Throughout his life in Akkur amidst the Untouchables and drunkards, Kandan proves that he is a 'Jivan Muktha'. Even the villagers comprehend, though dimly, his greatness. "Kandan is a saint, a noble soul" says one of them (Kandan 14). And as the novel progresses this saintly nature of Kandan is understood by almost all the characters. Towards the end also the martyr-motif is restated thus: "Kandan has died a patriot-saint ... Kandan lives the
deathless life of a patriot, a martyr" (Kandan 257).

In Muthu's character too, renunciation is a dominant feature. His foster mother thus writes to him: "You have the spirit of the true sanyasin in you. Serve the world in yellow robes after my death" (Jatadharan 92). Thus Kandan and Muthu are acknowledged ascetics, extensions of the theme of renunciation into the social and political life. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, spirituality is so inextricably linked to the Indian psyche that all "great movements in India have begun with a new spiritual thought ..." (30). Gandhiji also concurred with this view and used to say that he was "not a saint turned politician but a politician aspiring to be a saint" (qtd. in Narasimhiah, Writers 21).

In Jatadharan we meet another type of saint whose aim is to educate the young ones of his village. The 'pial school' is his hermitage. Jatadharan shuns the pleasures of life though he had won laurels in the academic world and would have easily joined any career of his choice. But he wants to render his 'Karmic' burden into action at the very base of social life, as a pial teacher" (Jatadharan 14). Concluding this story, Venkataramani writes, "Jatadharan died only a few months ago, a 'sanyasi', a fitting end to a life of true and selfless labour" (Jatadharan 15).

From these portraits of Venkataramani's heroes we get a certain impression that the novelist is an obsessed prophet of idealised asceticism. Such a picture of asceticism would
have been hardly convincing in terms of psychological probability. But Venkataramani has also given us the other materialistic side of the saffron robe though such portraits are rare. Sundaram of Kandan and Mr. Pichu Sastri of "My Neighbour" in Paper Boats appear as the representatives of this rare aspect of frivolous asceticism. Both are not driven by any inner call towards a high life and their motives too are not at all altruistic. Sundaram, the novelist tells us, wandered all over India as a 'bogus young sadhu', "thanks to the beneficent railway system which winks at a free ride by all who are to smear their bodies with sacred ash" (Kandan 83). If it was a wander-lust that prompted Sundaram to garb himself in the saffron robe, it is a virago's incessant tongue-lashing that kindled a spirit of asceticism in Mr. Pichu Sastri. Unable to bear his wife's intolerant attitude Mr. Pichu Sastri becomes a 'sanyasi' clad "in yellow robes and consecrated to world service at Haridwar in the Himalayas, free of Mrs. Pichu and her race" (Paper 95-96).

Apart from Raja Rao, no other writer has dealt with the renunciation-motif so consistently in everything that he wrote as Venkataramani. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes of Raja Rao's novels thus: "In Raja Rao's novels one nearly always finds one such saint figure.... Even in Raja Rao's short stories one occasionally comes across this ideal figure under the name of 'Master'" (Twice Born 97-98). The same statement can be applied to Venkataramani with the same aptness. Such
an attitude to asceticism is hardly surprising given the temperament of Venkataramani and the respect he had for the great ascetics of South India like His Holiness, the Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and Sri Ramana Maharishi of Thiruvannamalai.

Thus nowhere in his novels or stories does Venkataramani betray any irony or skepticism in his attitude to ascetics. This tolerant attitude is in sharp contrast with Nagarajan's standpoint, which more often than not views the ascetic as a malevolent influence in society. They are seen as forces which tend to keep the society in a state of unstable equilibrium. Nagarajan too is a devoted follower of the Kanchi Paramacharya and the Mahatma but that does not inhibit him from seeing the potentiality for evil, the fake swamis have in an illiterate and orthodox society.

Let us consider the most dominant ascetic in Nagarajan's novels and short stories - Munda Kadirvelu Swami of Athawar House. The swami is anchored in a world of deceit and fraud. Some of the adjectives used to describe the swami show how the other characters in the novel estimate him. Saku calls him "a designing scoundrel" (229), and "a snake" (235); Anantakrishna calls him "a crafty rogue" (268) and the police constable says "that he would" stage a murder if it paid him to do so" (249).

The swami is a black-mailer, a pimp and a fraud. He is the only character in all of Nagarajan's novels and short
stories who is painted in such unredeemed black. Even the self-serving politician Vanchinatha Sastri of Chronicles has some graces in his nature. But Munda Kadirvelu Swami is nothing but a double-dyed villain. This 'holy man' is shown not only as immoral but also as the cause of immorality in others when he tries to persuade the dancing girl Lalitha to succumb to the base desires of the zamindar of Sendil. The Swami is seen as a regular cheat when he dupes the gullible Vaman with the promise of converting base metals into gold. Thus the Swami uses multifarious tactics — alchemy, astrology, quackery and even murder — to blackmail and threaten his victims. Even Desani's homo-sexual sannyasis — "sages of Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Bombay, and the Right Honorable the Sage of Delhi, the wholly worshipful of Mogalserai and his naked majesty number one, the sage of all India himself" (qtd. in Mukerjee, Twice Born 107) — are comparatively better specimens than Munda Kadirvelu Swami.

Anand's evil trio — the landlord, the money lender and the priest — comes alive in Nagarajan's Athawar House in the incarnations of the zamindar of Sendil, Atmaram Sait and Munda Kadirvelu Swami. The money-lender and the Swami act as procurers trying to entice the dancing girl Lalitha to succumb to the carnal desires of the old zamindar. Of the three, the Swami is the most despicable as his degeneration is to be viewed against the tenets of his professed religion.

N.Radhakrishnan points out another aspect of the Swami
episode in Athawar House. He writes: "It is a very significant thing that this [the Swami's attempt at blackmail] happens at Benares, the most holy place to the Hindus" (Indo-Anglian 130). In fact the corruption of Benares also is a minor theme in Nagarajan's Athawar House. Benares is infested with "Gangaputras", "the exclusive priesthood of the place". The novelist hints that it is extremely difficult to set oneself free from "these bawling bidders of custom" (118). Apparently there are more number of such bogus swamis among them than genuine ones like Nilakanta Dikshitar.

However, Damodar Rao has chosen to question the legitimacy of the fictional technique of Nagarajan in the swami-episode. He views it as "a major weakness of the novel" and comments that "Nagarajan seems to have fallen for the sensational here" (67). Though there is an unmistakable element of the bizarre in the episode with a 'Shakthi Puja' in the middle of the night, to condemn the episode as merely a "sensational" one is not to do justice to Nagarajan. The event is not superimposed but is introduced with a greater purpose. This incident, more than anything else, displays how the custodians of ascetic traditions have commercialised it and how when the members of a joint family move out of its orbit they become easy prey to the machinations of cheats and frauds. The theme of the priests losing all their dignity through what Meenakshi Mukherjee calls "the business of spiritualism" (Twice Born 29), is a favourite one with Nagarajan and he carries it forward to his next novel.
Chronicles where the two sects - 'Vadagalai' and 'Thengalai' - of Aiyangars become laughing stocks through prolonged court-litigations on a non-issue. Thus, while Venkataramani treats most of his ascetics and priests as paragons of excellence, as 'Jivan Mukthas' and 'Sthitha Prajnas', these two concepts are totally alien to Nagarajan.

Besides these overt cultural aspects, both novelists also refer to several superstitions and fantasies in their works. Venkataramani introduces altogether two dream-sequences in Murugan and Kandan. But the total impact of these sequences is rather dubious as they neither advance the story nor reveal anything new about the characters.

The first dream occurs in Murugan where Kedari's fall is foretold to his wife in a dream. In the dream, Kedari is cheered on by a mob to jump from a steep hill into a foaming river and he leaps down successfully. But when he tries to climb up the steep hill his competitors pull him down and he falls into a deep chasm with a terrible shriek. Obviously, the author is presenting Kedari's successful election victory and his fall because of Markandam's treachery. The symbolic presentation of Kedari's misfortune is quite unnecessary in the context of the novel and the whole sequence appears rather frivolous. In Kandan also a dream is introduced just before the martyrdom of Kandan. The novelist takes more than three pages (217-220) to decorate the dream with a spontaneity and imaginative richness. This dream of Kandan,
is about a giant who "stood from earth to heaven and seemed to bridge the sky with one stride" (217).

Undoubtedly, Venkataramani tries to form some sort of connections between the dream and the ensuing episode of Kandan's martyrdom. The giant strikes Kandan in the dream at a point very near his heart. The next day the bullet fired by the Malabar police also strikes him there. This connection between the dream and the reality is too superficial and tenuous to deserve any serious consideration. Hence the whole sequence remains psychologically unintelligible.

Jung uses the term "primordial experience" to discuss such disturbing visions of "monstrous and meaningless happenings" and adds: "... the primordial experiences rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomed abyss of what has not yet come" (178). Venkataramani's dream sequences in the two novels do not in any way "rend" the picture of the ordered world or give us any picture of "the unfathomed" abysses. In the absence of such a vision Venkataramani's dream scenes remain alienated from the main body of his fiction and any attempt at their interpretation, at its best, can be only a palpable surmise or a lucky guess.

Though dreams and fantasies have little estimable advantage as fictional resources for Nagarajan, he maintains an extraordinary interest in popular superstitions and

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beliefs. No intelligible exposition of these superstitions is ever attempted but such beliefs exist in Nagarajan's writings as part of the cultural milieu. In Athawar House, for example, in the first and second chapters we come across not less than fifteen such references. When one buys a new house, it must be, one which "has brought luck to its owners" (8); not only the house but even one's wife must bring luck (8); in curing sickness a doctor is not of much help and it is better to "throw the burden on Syamala Devi" or feed a thousand Brahmins of Benares (19). The list of such beliefs can be extended further. For example, if the temple bells happen to peal (10) or if a child sneezes (17) or if "the grandfather clock on the wall" strikes (19) or if a couple of donkeys bray (17) when one says something, it is immediately taken for granted that what the person states is true and good. Going through the first two chapters of Athawar House we feel that we are in an enchanted country which is full of strange noises, as Caliban felt of Prospero's enchanted island. Sometimes Nagarajan even overdoes such beliefs as can be seen from the following: "As he spoke, the child... sneezed twice. Almost at the same moment a couple of donkeys in the street brayed in concert" (17).

Yet another belief, that is used to create a certain texture and tone to the novel, is the belief in the curse of Ugrasena's wife. Though the present Athawar generation is presented as virtuous, Sakaram's transgressions notwithstanding, their ancestor Ugrasena was unlike them. He
transgressed quite freely and married a second time while he had a wife and children. His first wife, who was as chaste as Arundhati, was forced out of the house when "she happened to be big with child and the child was dead before it was born" (29). Unable to bear the agony, the distraught mother laid a curse on the Athawars that if ever any one them married a second time when the first wife was alive, the second should come to no good. The father of the present generation of Athawars too, disregarded the curse and married a second time. Of that marriage were born Sakaram and Susila. The Athawar family views the tragic lives of both Sakaram and Susila as a manifestation of the workings of the curse. All the members of the family live for ever under the looming shadow of the curse. Time and again, we are reminded of the curse, and at Sakaram's death most poignantly. Aunt Tholasi wails thus: "It is Ugrasena's wife's curse working itself out. Oh! God! have mercy upon my poor lambs" (289).

The intermittent references to superstitions, pujas and curses render a medieval charm to the novel. They are integrated into the pattern of the story and do not remain as undigested pieces, like Venkataramani's dream-sequences. Moreover, they illustrate how a family steeped in traditional beliefs, is slowly coming out of its cocoon to face the changing realities -- social, political as well as cultural-- of the emerging new world. As we go through Athawar House, this is the picture that emerges.
Damodar Rao speaks about the "slow maturing of change" in *Athawar House* and the "relatively long time for the new attitudes to shape and mature" (64). He makes this comment in the context of the prolonged treatment of Venkatramani-Sona relationship in the novel. But we can perceive the gradual transformation in attitudes, from an altogether different dimension, quite unrelated to mere domestic dilemmas. We can see it as a gradual change from blind conservatism to a more open and sympathetic understanding of relatively unpalatable truths. We can also see that references to superstitions and curses and omens gradually recede to the background as the novel progresses, and in the impending marriage of Venkatramani and Sona neither astrology nor horoscopes play any part. Nagarajan does not even mention the name of Venkatappa, the family astrologer, who was such a force in the beginning of the novel. Thus we can see that superstitions, curses and other rituals mentioned in Nagarajan's novels serve an artistic purpose. They acquaint us with the habitual narrowness of the Athawar world — an initial point from which the quest towards a new awareness begins.

Naturally, Nagarajan's second novel *Chronicles* treats superstitions and rituals with an aloofness and neutrality. The world of *Athawar House* has changed beyond recognition. Even Koni, the most orthodox of characters, reserves his best bantering tone to describe them. Kedareswar, the presiding deity, is a very "dependable" God, who is more of a force
in the secular world influencing university authorities to frame questions the answers of which his devotees, like Koni, are thorough with. Many other characters like Vasu, P.P.T.Chari are downright agnostics. For P.P.T.Chari, the priests are "prayer-mongers" (48), the "thiruvaimoli" [sacred hymns] is nothing but the "bleating of a blasted thing" (47) and the Ambal herself is like "a flapper out of Hollywood, tired of marrying the same old God year after year" (58).

Though superstitions, omens, and other beliefs are still prevalent, we see a society far liberated than the one in Athawar House. With persons like Vasu, P.P.T.Chari and Vanchinatha Sastri around, no character like Munda Kadirvelu Swami can enter the precincts of Kedaram. Women like Nirmala and Elà latha have taken up either social work or tennis at Kedar-im club. Men and women intermingle more freely though sometimes it raises scandals which the affected parties scornfully ignore. Thus the Kedaram-society we encounter in Chronicles is organised more on secular lines than on religious ones. We see the convergence of Western education and Hindu tradition in Chronicles.

Writing on the dogma -- "art is a weapon" -- Edmund Wilson says that Dante's The Divine Comedy and Shakespeare's History Plays like Henry IV and Henry V are also weapons in a sense: "... they are weapons in the more general struggle of European man emerging from the middle ages and striving to understand his world and himself" (205). In Nagarajan's
novels too, we can see art used as such a weapon, in that, he also picturises, in his own limited way, the emergence of the modern Indian from a world of superstition to a brave new world.

Thus, in this chapter we have seen how cultural landmarks animate the thought processes of the two novelists and provide a pattern to their novels and short stories. Venkataramani's over emphasis on Nature's gifts like the rivers and the sand dunes is in tune with his philosophy of going back to the village and rural reconstruction through hard work. Temples or festivals are not much significant for him as his philosophy is mostly work and not worship. Since he needs people with out selfish motives for such work, ascetics dominate his vision. In Nagarajan, the approach is that of an observer watching the motley procession of life casually. His characters are therefore mostly casual or sometimes even cynical in their attitudes to cultural symbols. The rich cultural past offers Nagarajan an initial point from which he can measure the degradation that has overtaken the society.

However, it has to be kept in mind that the novelists' propensity to deal with similar cultural motifs, ultimately, reflects the pervasive cultural awareness of their decade and demonstrates the faith people had on their cultural institutions and values.