

Chapter 3

Short Stories and Sketches

Venkataramani, in the sketches “The Indian Beggar,” “On Fishermen,” and “My Little Arunalam,” in his *Paper Boats*, presents ordinary Indians, the nature of their life and their importance to society. Whether a beggar, a fisherman or a pariah, everyone has his role to play in Indian society. Venkataramani insists that they should not be marginalized but need to be given due importance.

Commenting on the Indian beggar, Ramaswamy says, “Charity is impersonal in the west. In our country, it has been very personal”

(38).

“The Hindu Temple,” “The Hindu Pilgrim” and “The Jagath Guru” show the pious and religious side of Indians. Venkataramani describes the Hindu temple in detail and explains how and why people go on a pilgrimage and who their spiritual leader is. He shows how superior Indians are with regard to religion. He projects this feature as their national identity.

In “My Grand Mother,” “My Neighbour” and “Saraswati’s Marriage,” Venkataramani portrays the unique joint family system of India, the plight of the government servant and the customs and ceremonies observed in Indian Hindu marriages. The typical Indian family and its functions are portrayed in this collection of stories and sketches, thereby celebrating the Indian way of life. The

entertainment part of village life is presented in “Village Cricket.”

Ramaswamy says,

Paper Boats could have become a disparate collection of sketches by a writer not too far removed in time from college juvenalia. In fact, it displays considerable maturity of outlook. It could be fairly said that *Kandan, the Patriot* is already foreshadowed in this the first of Venkatarmani’s books. (40)

Paper Boats is a collection of essays originally published in different newspapers. “The Indian Beggar” and “On Fishermen” and “The Hindu Temple” were published in *East and West* in 1913 and 1914 respectively. In his comment on “The Hindu Temple,” A.C.Benson wrote to Venkataramani, “I cannot help feeling that a number of similar sketches on Indian Life and Customs would be of great service to us here in England” (*Paper Boats*, preface x). This letter motivated Venkataramani to write more essays similar to “The Hindu Temple” and also induced him to collect and publish them in book form.

In her foreword to *Paper Boats*, Annie Besant says, “The booklet makes vis live in the village, and share in its life. The writer is a complete master of English, simple, dainty, with a sense of humour, steeped in the sweetness of affection, running through the living descriptions” (xiv).

The contents of *Paper Boats* are: “The Indian Beggar,” “On Fishermen,” “Village Cricket,” “The Hindu Temple,” “My Little Arunalam,” “The Hindu Pilgrim,” “My Grandmother,” “My Neighbour,” “The Jagath Guru” and “Saraswati’s Marriage.”

In the essay “The Indian Beggar,” Venkataramani says that the Indian beggar is the most interesting person, when compared with others. He describes the Indian beggar thus:

Of all the numerous progeny of poverty, he is the eldest born. Thus entitled to the virtue of the good law of *primo geniture*, he has inherited the vast estate of the world’s wretchedness. He is a wayward and wandering fellow. He is a melancholy being. He trembles like a tear-drop on the lotus-leaf of life. But he would dance with rainbow joy, if but touched with the sunbeam of a silver coin. He is a vivacious creature, keenly alive to the sensational properties of sunshine, to the sound of a transferable piece of copper. His is the most absorbing of vocations. Never resting, ever hoping, he is nothing but for his faith and resourcefulness—even in the darkest hour. (*Paper Boats* 1-2)

After describing the Indian beggar in general, Venkataramani classifies Indian beggars as (1) The Beggar with the Bowl, (2) The Beggar with the Monkey and the Dog, (3) The Beggar with the Snake,

(4) The Gypsy Beggar, (5) The Beggar with the Bull, (6) The Musical Mendicant, and, (7) The Nocturnal Beggar and describes them individually in detail.

The Beggar with the Bowl uses any one of the traditional methods. It may be a “pertinacious humility” or “cunning cajoling.” He also develops other qualities like oration and singing of tolerable melodies. The beggar of this type is mostly an orphan (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 3).

The Beggar with the Monkey and the Dog is “truly the demagogue of the polity of beggars.” He knows how to collect money from the crowd. He touches the pockets of the elders by fascinating the children. He delights the crowd with his antics. The monkey and the dog are added attractions and draw more spectators. He has nomadic instincts and never stays in one place for more than five years (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 5-6).

The Beggar with the Snake is the grimmest fellow. The snake is a half dead thing. He handles the slimy creature with perfect unconcern. The cobra is the variety generally exhibited. It dances to the music of his *magudi*—the snake-charmer’s pipe (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 7).

The Gypsy Beggar is an erratic segment of his race and prophesies the future of other people. “His glib predictions are cunningly coined phrases of certain universal currency, got out of a

memory which is a rich storehouse of such jewelled wampum. He is a very clever and amiable student of human nature, remarkable for his intuitive powers.” He is also the most resourceful of the clans of the Indian beggars (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 10).

The Beggar with the Bull uses some royal methods of begging. “The bull is trained to do tricks to the accompaniment of a jarring frictional note on a drum of fair size.” He collects old clothes and mends the rags and converts them into coin to get his nectar of life—toddy or arrack (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 12).

The Musical Mendicant is treated best among the valiant Indian beggars. He sings “either a ballad from folklore or a devotional offering in praise of the Almighty, or if the pretty almsgiving hands kindle him, a love-song in the sweetest metre.” Usually the Musical Mendicant is either a boy or girl “just breaking into adolescence” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 15).

The Nocturnal Beggar “sallies forth after sunset in quest of prey.” People are generous at night time because they are about to retire to sleep and their minds are calmed by the philosophic query, “Who knows whether we may live yet another day to mend our soul. Sleep may be death.” He lives peacefully and likes to rest on the outskirts of the village under a banyan tree. No one disturbs his way of life. He is also happy with his way of life and never tries to change his pattern of life (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 18).

Venkataramani concludes the essay by saying, “In India valiant begging has ever been a tender plant, nurtured with great and loving care. The stream of charity has ever strengthened its roots.” Beggars of any type are a nuisance to society and even the government wants to ban begging. But Venkataramani looks at the other side of the coin. He says that beggars nurture the generous impulse of the people and that their generosity humanises them (*Paper Boats* 19).

The fishermen of the Tamil land are named *Sembadavans*. They are the most ancient anglers. According to Venkataramani, they are greater than their English counterparts. “My *Sembadavan* is a fisherman by the sovereign right of birth, with the irrevocable legacy of a sure rod and a wide ocean.” He dislikes fresh water, as he knows well that oysters never live in fresh or shallow water (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 21).

The fishermen are known for their hard work. But, on land, they occupy the last rung in the social ladder. Venkataramani comments on the caste system and urges that it should be reconsidered and hopes that the time is not far off when the cast system would be phenomenon of the past. “The sea and the shore are still the Alpha and Omega, of their existence.” They are not yet influenced by the European civilization. They still stick to their ancient moorings. The only thing that disturbs their life is the weather conditions, since it can bother their life (*Paper Boats* 24).

Their life style is simple. They are satisfied with living in huts near the shore. The *Sembadavan* goes to his work before dawn and toils in the sea till dusk with unpromised fortune (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 25).

He is not worried about poverty. He accepts it with great courage so that he becomes a model to others. Venkataramani says: “He ends as he begins, without a sigh.” The fisherman’s wife takes care of the entire work of the family as he is mostly out and toils at sea. The *Sembadavan* looks weather-beaten but he is physically strong. “He accepts calmly fair and foul weather alike, on the land and the sea” [*Paper Boats* 27].

He has only two entertainments, one being the annual temple festival and the other marriage. The propitiated deity is the Mari Amman. He is honoured by being chosen to carry the decorated idols on the streets as he is broad-shouldered and well built (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 27-28).

Their marriage is a joyous event in their life. The bridegroom’s family proposes and the other may accept or reject the proposal. After four days of merriment, they once again set out to sea to carry out their work (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 30).

Their way of governing their tribes is a form of “timocracy.” They never go to court to solve their disputes. The elected leader of the tribe provides solutions to their problems and the defaulters are

fined heavily and the amount is used for constructive purposes. They can predict the weather correctly. They can tell whether there will be storm or rain. Venkataramani calls them “living barometers” (*Paper Boats* 31).

At the beginning of the essay “Village Cricket,” Venkataramani states that the Indian village cricket is a cousin of the English game. But he hastens to assert that that it is of ancient origin:

The Aryan genius the world over is the same, but its tropical variation is interesting in my sun-tanned Province. Village cricket is a well-preserved piece of antiquity. It is a prehistoric survival. It is older than the Chola dynasty of kings. Age has not destroyed it. It has the heart of youth and the soul of life. (*Paper Boats* 34)

The bat and the ball are indigenous. They are made out of the things available near the village. An areca nut is turned into the nucleus of the ball. It is dressed up with crude rags and is well bound with twisted aloe-fibre. The bat is nothing but a “log of Puvaraehan.” It is two feet long and of respectable weight (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 35).

Venkataramani describes how the villagers play village cricket. The bat itself is the wicket stump. A pile of bricks supports it. This cricket does not follow any rule as its English counterpart. Everyone can be a player as well as a spectator. The young and the old, the rich

and the poor mingle together and enjoy the game. When the ball is hit by the man, “The crowd of players and spectators give chase to the ball—for every one is a player and a spectator—and the most successful, in the madding confusion and nervous joy, hastens to the honoured post of the bowler.” But in his haste the bowler always misses the wicket and the same batsman continues to play (*Paper Boats* 38).

When the batsman hits the ball hard, he may sometimes hit it into a bush. Everyone searches for the ball. The one who finds the ball becomes the batsman. Therefore Venkataramani humourously says, “Herein lies the weakness of my cricketer—the danger of the bush and not of bowler.” The author ends by hailing village cricket as the “slice of Life” of the villagers (*Paper Boats* 40).

In the essay “The Hindu Temple” Venkataramani describes the importance of the Hindu temple:

It is the inspirer of the qualities inherent in the Hindu. It is the corner-stone of his orthodoxy, the bedrock of his piety, the sanctifying source of his sacred ash. It is the centre of his spiritual illumination. It is ever the dream of his hopes and the hope of his dreams. (*Paper Boats* 41)

When the temple is in ruins, the son-less rich take charge of repairing the temple with a hope that they may be blessed with a child. They can carve their names there. The Hindu temple is built not

only for piety: “An idea of service to humanity, of liberation from suffering, is the key-note of every temple—a conception of Home and Service purified into an idol and varied with multitudinous faces. Round this, the decorative instinct in man builds the temple” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 42-43).

In any temple the pagoda or the *gopuram* is the center of the boundary walls on all the four sides. It is a rectangular pile of storied building, lofty, “ever-ascending like the over-soul of a Vedantin.” In temples the space is divided into rooms and corridors and in the centre is a main deity, the *Lingam*, fixed on a pedestal and, nearby, *Ambal*—the divine consort of the Lord—and a row of minor gods arranged in rows along the colonnades (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 43-45).

Lord Ganesha is always at the entrance of the temple, welcoming the devotees. He is a favourite of many, particularly students. A day is devoted in a year when people celebrate him with a clay model and with festive rejoicing (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 45-46),

The bull or *Nandhi* is given importance in a temple by humming to him the devotional message of parting. Only after his nod, one is supposed to leave the temple. In any Hindu temple Chandikesvarar or “the perverse and obstinate Being,” is not offered anything but, as a

mark of acknowledgment, the devotees clap their hands before him (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 47).

More attention is paid to Swami and Ambal. They are decorated daily. The idols are humanised while worshipping. The idols take bath daily and they are dressed up with silk and garlands. Their eyes and forehead are decorated with gold or silver. The priest regularly provides breakfast and supper to the idols (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 49-50).

Every temple has a tank, which has healing properties. A regular bath for forty-five days will cure any disease of both mind and body. The tank has steps on all the four sides. Above all, the tank provides water to the entire village (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 50).

The car festival is noteworthy in any Hindu temple. It symbolizes “the stateliest projection of the soul of the Hindu mind.” All men are equal before it and, only with their support, the car rolls on the streets. The annual festival is celebrated with much devotion and on a grand scale. Local traders are attracted and all the people are in a festive mood. Not only the people of that particular village, but also people from different places are attracted. The annual revenue of the temple is developed from the offering made by the people. It may vary from one thousand to lakhs (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 51 -54).

In “My Little Arunalam” Venkataramani expresses his love for the downtrodden in many ways. This is a trait found in most of his writings. Arunalam belongs to the *pariah* caste. He was born on a very auspicious day devoted to “Annamalai” of Thiruannamalai. So he was named after this God. He is the eldest son of his parents. The *paracheri* is happy that Nochi is blessed with a son. Venkataramani says, “The arduous mantle of his forefathers has already fallen on him, and even at birth he is anointed to the duties of hard and honest citizenship on the field.” The moment he crawls he has to face the problem of living. From seven to ten he will take care of cattle with the stick of the cowherd. The animals learn to obey him. Arunalam takes care of the cattle till the evening. Then they are sent to the cowshed. When he grows up he becomes a coveted adult labourer. He enjoys his work in the field. The narrator says, “Arunalam is the secret of my agricultural prosperity” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 56-61).

In “The Hindu Pilgrim” the Hindu pilgrim is sketched thus:

The Hindu Pilgrim is a sight of imperishable memory. He shines in a crowd like a grain of gold in sand. His is a spiritual movement of our race. He is a step and an experiment in the realization of our ideal. Tradition has moulded him as never wind and rain polished an erratic boulder. He is ever on the march to the kingdom of God. (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 64)

He never stays in one place. He wanders from Benares to Rameshwar and again from Rameshwar to Benares, taking bath in all the sacred waters spread all over India. He is more bothered about his soul than his physic. “The secret of his life is his soul, which he always holds in patience. Faith is the first article of his creed, and the Hindu Pilgrim is a born believer” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 65).

He never bothers about others’ rebuke but he shows only devotion to God. When one engages in metaphysical talk with him he reveals himself, the secrets of his yoga method. “He realizes himself in self-effacement, in meditation and social service” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 66).

Venkataramani. divides the Hindu pilgrim into two classes. They are the perpetual and the periodic pilgrims. The first type is always in search of God from Cape Comorin to Harid war. He never takes rest. He moves from one place to another, witnessing the difference in the culture, tradition, architecture and the location. The location varies from hill-top to plains, from river’s edge to the ocean fringe. His only point is the Hindu temple. Through these outer differences he tries to understand himself or tries to find his inner self. Once God is revealed to him, he no more wanders from place to place, but settles himself in a calm and serene place where Nature is calm and charming. He sets his ashram thus far away from the crowd. As his needs are very few he is very peaceful in his place. He is from a very modest family. “He

is the outcome of the crises in the fortunes of his former worldly career” (*Paper Boats* 68-69).

The second type of pilgrim, the periodic pilgrim, has a respectable family and fame. He takes pilgrimage either for the purpose of expiation or for the acquisition of extra religious merit. He is actively engaged in worldly affairs. As life requires one to be prudent, he indulges in “sins of omission and commission.” When he takes his pilgrimage to Benares or Rameshwar he tries to wash away his sins and face the world with new faith and fame (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 69-71).

There is a vast difference between the perpetual and the periodic pilgrims. The second type is interested in God as well as worldly enjoyment. He takes his wife and children along with him. He also takes poor relatives with him so that they will be helpful in times of need. By undertaking such a journey the family are knit together, forgetting disputes and worries. If one travels to Rameshwar, the holiest of holy places, where one finds shallow seawater without waves, one is filled with the sense of the Divine and the universal. The Hindu pilgrim accepts life as it comes. He has faced many tempests, tides and angry waves. He faces them boldly with the help of his devotion to God and conquers all these in his life (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 71 -72).

In “My Grandmother” the narrator’s grandmother is the head of a joint family. She controls the entire family, which has a dozen adult members. Venkataramani points out that “Time has removed from the plane of life all her contemporaries. But age has not soured her temper” (*Paper Boats* 73).

Nothing escapes her eye. “She is the patron of orthodoxy and the red rag of the social reformer.” She wakes up “earlier than morning dew” and also wakes up others “earlier than the twilight of dawn.” Even the naughty grandson obeys her command (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 75).

She preserves the entire family like “Adishesha who keeps stable our rather unsteady planet.” She never invites anything new. She always wants her family to drive slowly. She opposes anything unwanted by the family immediately (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 75).

“She has the secret of long life and enduring vigour of mind.” Three generations have sprung from her. She nourishes her daughters to suit any family with a good character, as they will be married into different families. The sons are brought up with “iron discipline.” The daughters-in-law, who are brought up in different families with different tastes, are tamed and grafted to keep the family intact and in serenity (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 77).

She always receives a dual reception. Everyone has affection for her and at the same time resists her supremacy. She “changes every friction into light and every cry into a song. And with each conquest her rule is made more secure and better integrated” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 78).

The ancestral house speaks of its tradition and pride. The narrator’s grandmother’s grandfather constructed the house, when the family was very wealthy. Venkataramani’s description of the house is picturesque: “With palmyra rafters and bamboo poles, with its indigenous beams and pillars, with its spacious courtyards and never-ending corridors and windowless rooms, the ancestral home of the joint family is the very quintessence of rural life.” The backyard of the house has a vegetable garden, which supplies the necessary vegetables for the daily needs of the family. No one, even of the younger generation, dares to change the construction of the house [*Paper Boats* 80].

The family consists of the grandmother, brothers, sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law, sons and grandsons, living and moving together. The young learn from the elders, and the elders from the young. “Backwards and forwards flies the shuttle in the loom. Together they weave the living mantle of God.” The Hindu joint family is a “Rishi-made school” from the cradle to the grave. The elders leave

their experience to the younger ones so that they can face the world better (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 81).

For poor relatives, the Hindu joint family is a haven because they care not only for the members of the family but also for the unfortunate relatives. The poor relatives are always cared for by the elders. So everyone loves the narrator's grandmother.

The Hindu joint family:

is the age-long exponent of Socialism on a family basis. It is the model of coordinated work. The functioning is perfect. The health is excellent. Its keynote is self-restraint and discipline. Its qualities are the very virtues of evolution. It has the evergreen spaciousness of a banyan tree and the impressiveness of a spiral monument. It is the heart of Hindu culture and the coping-stone of its civilization. (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 82)

But now this joint family system is dying and its fragrance alone lives in the minds of men.

In "My Neighbour" Venkataramani portrays the narrator's neighbour. His neighbour is a Sub-Registrar of Assurances. Earlier, he was a clerk, earning Rs. 15 per month. His senior, Dorai Winterbotham, was about to retire. So his neighbour worked day and night in order to get a good name from his senior, so that when, he left

office Winterbotham might bless him with a promotion. His neighbour's dream came true. On the eve of the Dorai's retirement, the neighbour was made a Sub-Registrar of Assurances (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 84-85).

He is known for his patience, industry and loyalty to the British raj. The District Collector pities him and promotes him to Deputy Tahsil. Pichu Sastri attains the dream job of many. Venkataramani describes the powers of a Deputy Tahsil thus: "His powers are wider than the House of Parliament [sic], and his rule is more conclusive than that of the great Mogul. For he is the symbol of the ruling power, the might of Britain and strength of European civilization" (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 86-87).

All his forefathers were only purohits or priests, well versed in religious rituals and mantras. Sastri is the only man in his family to occupy such an important position under the British raj.

Sastri is sprung of a humble Brahmin family. He was the thirteenth son of his mother and the only one who survived. As his name suggests, he is the alms given by God to the family. He attained the title of *Sastri* by the philosophic or sacrificial work of his grandparents. He has developed charm and attraction, which are very helpful in his profession. But he never practised the ancestral vocation. He ran away from home when he was very young, because his mother caned him for telling a lie. He escaped by train and

managed to charm a rich man, who arranged for his formal education (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 87-90).

Everyone respects him and greets him with obeisance wherever he goes on official business. Persons approaching him on official matters even pray to God so as to receive a soft treatment from him. But at home, his wife Mrs. Pitchu towers over him and governs him in domestic affairs. She considers him to be a mere moneymaking machine and a lender of fortunes (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 91).

In Indian culture the woman of the family is valued highly. People think that the husband's fortune in life is based on the wife's horoscope. Venkataramani through the narrator, admits that Pitchu's fortune too is dependent on his wife's horoscope: "She has the better horoscope. Otherwise the obscure clerk, which her husband was at the time of his wedding, would never have become the Deputy Tahsil" (*Paper Boats* 91).

Mrs. Pitchu hails from a small agricultural family. She knows how to manage domestic affairs. Pitchu cannot even dictate the menu of a day as she considers it an intrusion into her jurisdiction. She always keeps him starving as it will heal his chronic dyspepsia. Therefore he always prefers to be on camp, and on camp every meal is a feast to him. Here the author humourously compares him to a camel, which stores food for the future (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 92-93).

Pitchu's aged mother craves only for the final torch from her son:

She prays to her family God, with unceasing voice, that her son may live long enough to light with his own hand her funeral pyre and perform for her the last ceremonies of a son for her final emancipation. The mother affectionately condones the neglect of her son and prays only for "the handful of fire" as the greatest tribute a son can offer his mother. (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 94- 90)

As Pitchu turns old, he cannot concentrate on his work. He finds life unhappy. His sons and grandsons always demand the comforts of modern life and for every comfort they have to spend money, for which Pitchu has to work more (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 96).

In the dusk of his career he has little interest in anything. He has started loving solitude and developed interest in the Bhagavad Gita. One day before his retirement, he disappears and never returns after his usual walk. His mother dies of aching for her son. The funeral starts. A man in yellow robes comes in and prays. At last, the pining mother receives the final fire from her son. Pitchu is no more a man of the world. He renounces worldly life and joins an "ashram" and wears yellow robes and is free of Mrs. Pitchu and her race (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 98).

Venkataramani was closely associated with the Jagath Guru. He used to meet him often and seek his blessings. In “The Jagath Guru” Venkataramani introduces his Guru to the reader thus:

Our Adi Jagath Guru, or our first world Teacher, is the great Sankara. He was the saviour of Hinduism at a critical moment of religious unrest, and its most virile and combative exponent. We reckon him an *avatar*, with an exceedingly intellectual and practical mission in an age of all-round decadence. He is our greatest thinker. His memory is more sacred to us than the Ganges, or even the sages who laid the foundations of the Hindu Polity.

(Paper Boats 99)

He has done such wonderful deeds that, even after twelve centuries, his institution still flourishes and does its duty as prescribed by the Guru.

The *Kamakoti Peetam* was first set up at Conjeevaram, one of the noblest of ancient cities, in the seventh century AD and prospered for over a thousand years. But, due to disturbances like the incursions of the East India Company, the Moguls and the Marathas, the *Kamakoti Peetam* was shifted from Conjeevaram to Kumbakonam at the invitation of the Tanjore kings (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 100).

The meaning of the word *Kamakoti Peetam* is “the throne of the End of Desires. ... It seeks emancipation only through knowledge which comes of varied experience and enjoyment according to the rules of Dharma.” Venkataramani praises the *Kamkodi Peetam* as a full-blooded gospel. It bridges the void between heaven and earth. It provides solutions to the world’s problems. The tradition of the *Peetam* is preserved by the Guru’s successors (*Paper Boats* 101).

The person who ascends the *Peetam* should be a Brahmin by birth and a brahmachaiya. He is ordained by his predecessor-in-office usually, when the latter is usually in his last dying moments. He becomes the Achaiyaswami (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 102-03).

After the succession, the first five years are spent in training and education. The education is aided by the best Sanskrit pandits of South India. He engages in meditation. The training is so great that if any one approaches him with a problem, he can find a solution immediately. “Such is the original strength and purity of the great Sankara, that no successor of his, these twelve centuries and more, has ever been unworthy of this unique spiritual dynasty of world teachers” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 103).

The routine life of the Acharyaswami is one of “the plainest living and the highest thinking.” He wakes up very early in the morning and bathes in flowing water. Then he performs his ceremony in the prescribed form and again takes bath and does the

Chandramouliswer puja with flowers, herbs and the rarest spices of the world. The devotees are gathered then and the puja is done to the accompaniment of devotional songs. He takes a single meal a day and, after that, he meets people of different places and status. The Acharyaswami is well versed in all the problems of the world. “Such is the acquisitive power of the meditative mind, he knows everything—from the Imperial craft of British statesmanship to the travail agonies of Soviet Russia, from the scientific method of agriculture in modern Japan to the most trivial sartorial amenities of the day at Paris” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 105-06).

The afternoon is mostly spent with a variety of men. He always welcomes discussion and engages himself in intellectual combat with the graduate or with the orthodox pandit. The evening is full of prayers and meditation. Then he retires for sleep with a cup of milk and a few fruits (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 106).

Whenever his inner self calls him to go out to kindle the religious consciousness of people and spread the power of the *Peetam*, he leaves his place in an antique palanquin with pomp and show. He visits all the holy places and dips himself in holy waters. “He evokes the religious zeal of the people, and ash-emblazoned orthodoxy, dressed in flawless Aryan style, is in full evidence around.” The visit of the Acharyaswami is always celebrated by suspending all the routine work and even the work of agriculture. All the people of the village are

at the feet of the Acharyaswami and they offer money at his feet. The minimum amount is usually one hundred and eight as it has a special place in Hindu culture. Even the Gayatri mantra is chanted one hundred and eight times. But the super-number is one thousand and eight. The rich offer one thousand and eight gold or silver coins and others one hundred and eight and he accepts it and it is spent on sanitation and education of the public (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 108-09).

Though he hails from a Brahmin family, he “transcends the distinctions of caste and creed.” Every man is treated equally before him. Anyone who receives the *abhishekam* water from him receives a cure for the “ills of body and soul.” The Acharya “has surrendered everything at a tender age, youth, wealth and all the civic pleasures, for the service of man and the continuance of a mission.” Everyone is attached passionately to this great Jagath Guru. Wherever he is “the lamp of life and knowledge” burns steadily and purely (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 110).

“Saraswati’s Marriage” is an interesting as well as an instructive story. Saraswati is now twelve, the ripe age for girls to get married during the pre-Independence period. Therefore her parents start looking for a suitable groom. Sarasu is the darling of her parents and the village people wait eagerly for her husband (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 111).

Panchapagesan, a triple first class in B.A., with the vision of a judgeship, joins the Law College. He looks for a girl from a popular vakil family so that his dream job will come easy. But fate has decided otherwise. Therefore his horoscope is now in the hands of Sarasu's father. But Sarasu's mother is not for him. She judges anyone only by his or her present job. She does not accept the chance of his becoming a judge. Instead she is interested in her cousin, who is an aristocrat with a hundred *velis* (a measurement of land) of land and with good prospects. But Sarasu's father does not yield to her wish. He insists on Panchu as he knows the prospects of the vakil profession from what he heard from his grandmother and from what he himself has been. The astrologers support his idea. They have said that Panchu is blessed with many Raja-yogas. So they decide to get Sarasu married to Panchu (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 112-13).

Venkataramani describes in detail every aspect of a Hindu marriage. In those days, the girls had to get married as early as twelve. Otherwise they had to face social odium. The date and *lagna* (an astrological term) and the auspicious hour of the marriage are decided upon. A lucky day for the groom, according to the horoscope, is fixed. In Panchu's case it is Friday (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 115).

The groom's friends and relatives gather on the previous evening for the *Nichayathambolam* (betrothal) ceremony. The next day,

the day of the marriage, Panchu is engaged in various ceremonies like *Puradhesam*, wherein the groom walks up and down, playing the part of a vedic brahmacharya, when a maiden is offered and he accepts the offer and enters the bride's home. Both the bride and the groom are lifted on the shoulders of their maternal uncle and exchange garlands three times and utter marriage vows. The narrator says, "Our marriage is a feast of ritual, and the *mantras* tell in resonant Sanskrit an impressive story of love making." After their marriage their first duty is to kindle the *Homan Agni* in consecration of their wedlock (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 116-17).

The courtyard is full of relatives of different age groups. Each group has its own joy and humour and enjoys the situation. The narrator describes sarcastically the *purohits* who recite the *mantras*. They are somewhat detached and just recite the *mantras*, and addi here and there a vernacular touch so that they can get more money from those who conduct the marriage (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 118).

The next ceremony is the *Sankalpam*, that is, naming the date, month, year, place and purpose of the function:

The sacramental part of the ceremony is now reached and Panchu is quite earnest. A string of cotton thread, yellowed in saffron, holds together handsome gold piaics curiously engraved with simple line symbols of marriage

vows. This is known as *Thirumangalyam*, or the “Emblem of Sweet Concord.” (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 119-20)

The knotting of the *Thirumangalyam* is accompanied by vibrant and elated music. Then the groom touches the feet of bride, which are placed on a piece of granite, which symbolizes their steadfast love. This is called *Saptapadi*. With this the religious ceremonies are over (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 120).

The marriage celebrations continue for four days. This is more of a family and social get together and both families get to know each other well. It is filled with feast and enjoyment. Then the couple is “called upon for *Nalangu*, where each softly touches the other on the pretext of smearing sandal paste or turmeric or offering betels.” In the evening of the fourth day, both the bride and the groom are taken in palanquins in a procession through the streets of the village. The relatives make sure that they do not talk to each other. On the fifth day, the groom goes to his own place, leaving the bride in her house. He takes her away only after a month (Venkataramani, *Paper Boats* 121).

Venkataramani finally asserts that this ceremony of marriage is very ancient and that one never forgets it in one’s life and proceeds to distil the meaning of the Hindu marriage thus:

Its impressive ritual is inlaid with meaning, and serves to smooth the rugged course of love. Its social functions, by

their very spirit of saintly moderation, temper and educate the young, who marry first and then begin to love. The course of ascent is laid with knowledge and caution, and the parental hand guides the married couple through. ... It is the one thing which has least felt the change and impact of Time. We preserve it with a religiousness we do not own to our own gods. (*Paper Boats* 122-23)

In his preface to *Jatadharan and Other Stories*, Venkataramani says: “These are sketches rather than short stories, more like wild creepers or jungle growth” (vii). One can find both short stories and sketches in this collection. The stories and sketches were published earlier in different magazines and newspapers between 1915 and 1925.

“Indumati” appeared in the *Literary Journal*; “Destiny” appeared under a different title in the *Indian Express Annual*; “In Quest of Power” and “Jatadharan’s Marriage” appeared in the *Madras Mail*; “Jatadharan” and “Illumination” appeared in the *Hindu*; “The Collision” and “The Bride Waits” appeared in the *Triveni*, and “A Fractured Arm” appeared in the *Short Story* (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan*, preface viii)

In *Jatadharan and Other Stories* the main motif is service to the rural people by way of teaching. Whatever the profession or the status

of the main characters may be, they eventually turn to be teachers and work for the uplift of the poor and the village people so as to effect rural development.

Jatadharan of “Jatadharan, the Pial Teacher,” who is a successful college student, becomes a pial teacher at Kakalani. In “A Fractured Arm,” Kittu, though an incomplete Intermediate, by chance becomes a primary school teacher and works for the uplift of villagers. In “Collision,” a Station Master, Ramanujam, loses his job due to the carelessness of his pointsman. He finds solace in starting a school at Akkur for the young.

In “Destiny,” Muthu is the adopted son of a rich aunt. He gives away all his wealth for *annadhana* and for rural development in his village. When, at the end, Muthu is put in jail, at last he finds “complete self-expression and a final abode for his temperament, which ached with tenderness for the suffering poor” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 85). Ganapathi, Muthu’s friend, has successfully completed his college education and is a lawyer by profession. He abandons his practice in quest of “the truth of life and for knowledge of its real values” and joins Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom struggle.

“Indumati” is the only sketch which is based on historical events and projects Englishmen as good natured and as caring for Indians.

In “The Bride Waits” and “Illumination” C.Subramania Sastri and Sundaram are affected mentally by their respective jobs. Sastri working in the Salt and Abkari Department, cannot pay full attention to his family. Most of his lifetime is spent in a malarial district or Moolakkadu, where one can find no peace of mind and no monetary benefit. The plight of the government official is pictured very clearly in both the stories. The difference is that, in “The Bride Waits,” Sastri’s wife is the major cause of his sufferings, while, in “Illumination,” Sundaram’s wife is his major source of solace and happiness.

The evils in the system of education are brought out through the character of Muthu in “Destiny.” Muthu resembles Padma in *Kandan, the Patriot*. Both share the same idea of the system of education in British India.

In this collection all the government servants resign their jobs and work for their own people.

In “Jatadharan’s Marriage,” Venkataramani contrasts the rich and the poor metaphorically as the colonizer and the colonized. The poor/ colonized suffer from an inferiority complex. Though they possess inherent merit, when faced with the rich, the poor fail to understand their own merit. The poor are marginalized. The rich exploit them. Jatadharan’s mother asks, “What do you care for the worried lot of poor people like me?” (Venkataramani, Jatadharan 19)

In “Destiny,” Muthu and his father are contrasted. Muthu’s father is after power and wealth, which ultimately ruins him and his family. Venkataramani constantly underlines in his writings that fidelity to the British government ruins Indian families. He highlights the plight of Indian government officials under the British raj. They cannot pay much attention to their domestic responsibilities. If they do so by availing themselves of leave, they are punished by way of transfer to a remote place.

“Jatadharan, the Pial Teacher” tells the story of Jatadharan, the ideal pial teacher, who was “born in the stormy days of the Great Indian Mutiny which resulted in the transfer of India from the Company to the Crown.” As he was born in a time of transition, his life was also marked by many changes (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 1).

Jatadharan has his school and college education at Kumbakonam. He excels in his studies and he is a pet to his masters. Their (Porter’s and Gopal Rao’s) devotion to teaching kindles in him “the divine passion for the work of a teacher.” Everyone, including his college mates, hail “the splendid success of Jatadharan in the B.A.. a triple first class and the Presidency first in English and Mathematics, with the offer of a nice job in the government Secretariat at Madras” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 13).

After his university examination he returns to his native Kakalani. The village environment and the people impress him a lot and he sees in what pitiable condition the village people are: “The children were wasting their precious youth in the poorest and the rawest of rustic games” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 11). Jatadharan undergoes a profound change:

An illumination, a divine message came to him. God had whispered into his ears the real mission of his life. Next morning he summoned all the children to his house and the pial hummed like a beehive. It became a place of pilgrimage to the young for nearly fifty years. And Jatadharan became my ideal pial schoolmaster.

(Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 12)

He serves his village for fifty years, teaching young people. But he bemoans: “My pock-marked face, my unmarried life, and my honest hard labour which has not produced another like me from among my own pupils all alike trace their higher cause to the great cosmic twist of the stars at the hour of my birth” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 14).

However, he is happy with what he is and he derives “a true peace, an inward joy, a sense of *shanti* that nothing else could . . . And he dies as Sanyasi and his Samadhi rests on a fine eminence of

sand-dunes on the banks of the lower Cauvery (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 14-15).

Indians believe strongly that their life is predestined and they are here only to perform their duty so that they can live in peace in the other world. Jatadharan's grandfather, a well-versed astronomer, prophesied, "my boy, though fit to become a High Court Judge or a Collector will be content to be a poor pious pial teacher. The Moon shines sadly and alone in cancer and receives no benefic aspect" (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 5). He also said that there would be small-pox at his house and a death after the birth of his grandson, which came true subsequently.

"Jatadharan and His Marriage" portrays the rustic life of Kakalani, where a mixture of the rich and the poor live. The poor people like Seshi, Jatadharan's mother, live a simple life of hard work. She lives in the false hope that her suffering will be over if her son is married to a rich girl and if he settles in a government job. But everything is shattered by her son's blunt refusal of marriage and a government job (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 28). Jatadharan says:

"Marry a rich and beautiful heiress, never, mother, impossible. And become a Collector—even more impossible. I would rather become a pial-teacher here, mother. Look at our village: there are thirty girls and twenty boys—all roam at large like calves and know

neither to read nor to write. This pial, mother, looks so beautiful, fresh, and clean that I would gladly set up a pial school here and make it truly more beautiful.

(Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 28)

His mother calls it “a strange and ruinous idea.” But his idea of becoming a pial-teacher strengthens due to his love-failure and his refusal to marry any other girl.

Vishali, though she hates her neighbour Seshi, has an eye on her son as he is an eligible bachelor with a college education and a good future, who can be a good match for her sister Jaya. She openly tells Seshi, “there isn’t another boy at Kakalani who is anywhere near the B.A. class. You are rightly proud of your boy; and you get a horoscope a week for his marriage from vakils and Collectors, Magistrates and Mirasdars—and you merrily fix a price on your boy that goes rising ten per cent a week” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 20).

But against the wishes of everyone Jatadharan refuses to marry Jaya and starts a school on his own pial on the very same day fixed for that marriage. And he is quite happy about his decision.

“In Quest of Power” depicts the dilemma of a young writer who wants to attain fame in life. The story is set in a village. The people staunchly believe that a *Sadhu* can predict the future of any man. The narrator himself says, “Nothing moves a literary aspirant so much as

a chance of knowing his future.” So he accepts the invitation from his cousin to meet the *Sadhu* and hurries to reach the place in time. The *Sadhu* also predicts a fine future for him (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 39).

A fine meal is served to more than one hundred people in view of the visit of the Sage. Irulesan, a *veda* by caste, is attracted to the spot upon seeing “the plentiful crumbs and refuse of the feast.” He begs for alms. But everyone is indifferent. The narrator alone shows a glance of pity, which the trained eyes of Irulesan understand and he approaches him with an appeal. He persuades the narrator to accept his gift in exchange for money:

“O Swami, I’ll help you in the high mission of your life. Your shining face and calm eyes tell me of a great future for you though you are now in distress. I’ll make you the master of a great secret. I’ll give you as your constant companion and friend, a favourite prince of the underworld, sturdy and loyal, to obey your behests at a moment’s notice, and satisfy your needs and pleasures even from the ends of the earth. The *jin* will fetch you a damsel fairer than a water-nymph or an Ariel, and build you a palace nobler than ducal mansions, quicker than the wink of an eye.” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 41)

Irulesan receives Rs.5 from the narrator and gives him a “little ape-like creature,” which looks like a monkey-child. He also tells him what he should do to achieve his dream. The listener does not believe the fantastic tale but first pities the creature which has been so far the captive of the *veda*.

Once the narrator gets it, “the whole affair seemed even to me a hoax in the day light of reason. Even if true, had I the nerve to stand it to the end? Now the village will laugh at me, a student, trying in stealth to catch a devil instead of studying prescribed books” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 49). So he sets it free in the adjoining wood and is really happy about his act. When he returns home the postman hands him a letter, which has accepted his story and has sent a cheque on the Westminster Bank. This is his first conquest and the predictions of both the *Sadhu* and Irulesan have come true (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 52).

“Collision” is similar to a chapter in *Kandan, the Patriot*, where there is a train accident at a wayside station, caused by Mudaliar. In the novel Sundaram, the Station Master, is dismissed and he becomes a freedom fighter. In “Collision,” Ramanujam, the Station Master, loses his job and becomes a pial teacher. Ramanujam and Lakshmi are blessed with a boy only when he becomes a pial teacher and renders service to the people of his country.

In the very beginning of the story “Destiny,” Venkataramani describes the character of Muthu thus:

Muthu is a pearl of a boy. He is a freak of nature—not a cripple, not a genius, but a born philanthropist and a public worker. Muthu is like a flower in a crannied wall, a pearl in the oyster, a pure spring amidst clefts of rock. Muthu is the cleansing agent of his generation—on his martyrdom rest the redemption of the race.

(Jatadharan 77)

Muthu’s mother dies of neglect and lack of nursing ten days after his birth. His father does not care either for his wife or for his son. “He deserted the homely certainties of wedlock for the charms and excitement of stolen pleasures” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 78).

Venkataramani clearly shows what kind of native can be successful in his career under the British raj through Muthu’s father:

Fine in presence, unflinching in courage, soft, wily and attractive of speech, with the accent of a saint and the gleaming eyes of a sensualist, ever apologetic in tone and intriguing, in mind and mood, Muthu’s father was easily meant for distinction in the police world blessed with the full resources of the British Raj. *(Jatadharan 78)*

As Muthu’s father does not care for him, his mother’s sister, a wealthy childless lady, takes care of him. But, from the very

beginning, he does not show much interest in books but displays a liking for his fellow pupils and teachers. He is very generous and, even as a child, he distributes freely sweets and biscuits to his friends. He is a hero among his friends (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 80).

Though he dislikes school and studying, he subscribes to the *Bande Mataram*. He does not read it alone, but opens a free reading room. He convenes a huge meeting on the banks of the river Cauvery and initiates a boycott movement. Thus he shows his interest in the freedom movement and in the betterment of other people even in his school days. For doing all this he uses his aunt's money liberally (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 80-81).

His aunt, who is well experienced in the world's affairs, cautions him: "She told him how much of money he was flinging away on a very forgetful juvenile world which could not return him a pie when he himself was in need." Her words come true as he finally ends up as No.912, Civil Jail, Trichirnopoly (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 81-86).

The school headmaster finds him a rebel and a menace to the discipline which has to be maintained in any school (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 81). When his aunt asks about his quitting the school, Muthu, speaking for Venkataramani, says:

'School education as we have it now is a waste, dear mother. It makes teachers tyrants and students slaves, li. is a soul killer. It benefits none but the bricklayer and the

contractor. Life is broad and varied. Nature is real and ever ready with gifts. The true learner learns only from Life and Nature, and never from paid teachers and textbooks.’ (*Jatadharan* 84)

After quitting the school Muthu goes to his village and engages in useful work for the villagers. He dredges old irrigation channels, digs new ones, helps the people in keeping their streets clean and tidy, plants coconut trees in public places, constructs a rest house for pilgrims and improves and cleans the village tanks. Everyone applauds his work and promises to contribute their share for public work after the harvest. But they never pay. They make only false promises. Therefore he loses all the money which his aunt gave him. He also writes, publishes and distributes to the villagers books on sanitation and agriculture. For all these he borrows money from others. After his aunt’s death he gives away her fifty *velis* of land for *annadhana*. When his creditors demand their money, he ends up in the Trichy Civil Jail. But Muthu is happy about what he is and never regrets what he has done (*Venkataramani, Jatadharan* 89-92).

Muthu’s friend Ganapathi completes his schooling and starts practising as a *vakil* in Madras. But he finds the call of the Mahatma to be more important than practising his profession in Madras. As a result of this he too is in jail when Muthu writes to him from the Trichy jail. Both of them are supposed to be released on the same date

(Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 93-94). Ganapathi suggests to Muthu in his letter that they should work together and continue their service for the uplift of the rural people.

“Indumati” is the only story which has a few historical characters and which shows an Englishman, Lt. Col. Flint, as a good man, helping a deserted and imprisoned woman, namely Indumati.

The story is set in the fortress of Kumbli Naick. Kumbli Naick pursues and tries to capture Lt. Col. Flint in order to help Tippu Sultan. But a prisoner of Naick’s, Indumati, helps him to cross a river and they find a safe place to save their lives from Naick’s group. Lt. Col. Flint later finds Indumati’s husband and he is made the *Killedar* of the fort of Wandiwash (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 95-106).

In “The Bride Waits” C. Subramania Sastri is a Sub-Inspector in the Salt and Abkari Department. After a penal term of five years in the “malarial district” of Cuddapah and Kurnool, he is transferred to the fertile Salavedu Range of Arni Circle. Palmyra yields on a generous scale in the Salavedu range and can provide “extras” to the Sub-Inspector (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 107-08).

His education has refined his thinking and he is not interested in the “Little arts of Life” which his wife Visalakshi advises him to practise. She says, “You have to stoop a little even if you want to pick up a flower from the earth. You should learn these little arts of

life . . . But he is hesitant to practise it in his government job
(Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 112).

She insists on his finding a groom for their daughter Pattu immediately. But he is against the idea of getting his daughter married at the early age of twelve. His wife Visalakshi is adamant and compels him to take leave at a crucial time and search for a groom for Pattu (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 112-15).

As a social reformer he asks his wife, “Why, dear, you are becoming quite unreasonable about Pattu. Where is the need for hurry? Let her grow a little more into a perfect girl full of health and strength, and a mind that has grown to know itself and the glory of marriage” (Venkataramani., *Jatadharan* 118).

He has spent nearly five hundred rupees in search of a suita. Me groom. “The daytime was used laboriously for the collection and scrutiny of horoscopes, and no two astrologers said the same thing. How could they in such a sublime subject and with so many stars speaking such a jargon!” He returns home without a groom. To add (o his sorrow, his brother hands him a transfer order to Moolakkadu Range, Polur Circle, “full of deadly malaria and mosquitoes” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 123-26).

In “A Fractured Arm” S.T. Krishnasamy is good at studies in his early school days. But, after his marriage, he loses interest in studies and even fails in the Intermediate examination. Kittu has inherited his

grandmother's misanthropic nature. Therefore he hates his wife, Kamalam, who is a traditional housewife, following the rules and regulations laid down by the husband and the mother-in-law, passively accepting the physical and mental torture meted out by her husband and her mother-in-law (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 127).

The Government of India, under the pressure of the Congress agitation, plans to start primary schools in many villages. Kittu becomes a teacher at Paramati for twelve rupees a month.

Venkataramani clearly pictures what will happen to the school children if a misanthrope is appointed teacher. Kittu behaves very brutally to the "young tender and sensitive lads" and they tremble at the mere sight of their teacher. The parents do not care about their children suffering as they feel that "The mischievous imps were well impounded for the day and domestic peace was insured" (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 132).

Kittu even loses interest in teaching and becomes more and more irregular in attendance. He spends his time at home and enjoys torturing his wife. On a particular day, Kittu and his grandmother join together and torture Kamalam. Out of rage and, as she cannot bear their behaviour, Kamalam jumps into a well. The village people gather and criticize Kittu. At the same time, the President of the Taluk Board comes on a casual visit to the school and finds that the school

is locked. He comes to know about Kittu. So Kittu is dismissed (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 132-37).

To escape from the shame Kittu flees to Madras where people may not know his background. There he tries his hand at many professions but fails in all. At last he decides to become a driver. But he meets with an accident and fractures his arm (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 137-38).

His wife Kamalam nurses him for more than three weeks at the hospital. Her tenderness and love change him. He starts loving people around him. He even apologizes to Kamalam for his past behaviour. They go back to the village and change the school from the “stuffy prison” to the “deep shade of the banyan tree in front of the village temple on the eternal banks of the Cauveyi.” They admit girls also to their school. Kittu promises Kamalam that he will never take a cane in his hand to maintain discipline. Later they are blessed with a boy child (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 137-42).

“Illumination,” quite unusually for Venkataramani, is located in Madras and particularly at Mylapore. Sundaram rejects many government jobs and decides to become a lawyer. For seven long years he has been a junior and “devilling” in the office. But he finds that all his toil is wasted and yields no fruit. “The seven years of his professional career had been marked by hard work, diligence and a supple readiness to adjust himself to all the needs of a complex and

precarious profession” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 146).

He finds solace in the presence of his wife Sundari. Whenever he is in distress, Sundari sings devotional songs to him. “Sundaram wondered in his lounge why these snatches of song composed him while the most intricate flights of his rational mind never solved the riddle of life, never gave him peace” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 147).

In all the other stories, women characters are portrayed only as meek and faithful wives. But here Sundaram tries to find solutions for his problems through his wife’s words. He also accepts counsel from her. Sundari tries to provide solutions to his problems by saying, “You can never know the truths of life with the help of the mind, as the ancients say, but only with the eye of faith Peace comes not from probing, nor from protests, not from preaching, but from surrender and work done with detachment and in a spirit of dedication” (Venkataramani, *Jatadharan* 155).