CHAPTER II

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In Rajan's *Too Long in the West*, the American professor who has to guide Nalini's studies in Columbia University tells her, "My dear girl ... before you can really learn anything, you must first learn how to learn. Your mind isn't a sponge, mopping up information. It ought to be a kind of light, shining into the facts and revealing their pattern. Look after your intelligence and learn to use it responsibly. It's the little core of difference that makes you yourself. If you didn't own it, then everything else would own you."¹ The professor's advice to Nalini contains in an embryonic form the thematic complex of Rajan's two novels. The usual response to *The Dark Dancer* and *Too Long in the West* has been in terms of the critical cliches like the East-west encounter, the problem of identity, the discovery of the self, and the multifaceted reality dramatized as a tension generated by conflicting value systems. A careful scrutinization of the novels seems to suggest that Rajan's protagonists are preoccupied with the problematic

of learning, which is a responsible activity. In the passage just cited, the crucial word appears to be the verb "learn." The entire activity of learning consists in one having a firm hold on one's intelligence. How meaningful the idea "If you didn't own it, then everything else would own you" is can be elucidated by focusing attention on the organization of the two novels.

The Dark Dancer and Too Long in the West are foregrounded in South-Indian culture, which has a few special traits. The influence of Western manners and morals hasn't penetrated deeply into South-Indian society. By no stretch of imagination could it be called cosmopolitan. The Dark Dancer dramatizes the journey of a South-Indian Brahmin from irresponsible use of intelligence to an awareness of intellectual responsibility. The fictional device that makes the journey possible is the institution of "arranged marriage." In Too Long in the West, this device takes the form of a parody which brings home the significance of the idea of using intelligence responsibly.

In The Dark Dancer, Krishnan's evolution to self-hood is facilitated by the communal clashes that devastated the country just before and after Independence. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges,
and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* converge on the turbulent times, one of the plot items in Rajan's novel. Even a superficial reading of these novels would make it obvious that the Hindu-Muslim conflict in Rajan's novel is just a plot-device and not the core of it.

The most crucial event in the narrative is the priest's inability to bless Krishnan and Cynthia when they visit Lord Krishna's temple in Mutthra. Although Krishnan tries to avoid his intellectual confusion by saying that "Wherever a Brahmin is, there is a temple," the confusion almost amounts to a spiritual/nervous breakdown. He tells Cynthia,

> "Rejection by the family, by other people, by society, is one thing. One expects it automatically and is prepared to meet it. But this was so much deeper. It was so deep that I had forgotten my defenses."

When Cynthia taunts him that he has been too religious to take things lightly, he says,

> "It's not religion. It's just something deeper than society or the family. You take it for

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3 Ibid., p. 169.
The passages just cited unmistakably demonstrate the sense of loss that oppresses Krishnan. If we make a short review of his career up to this point, a few clues will emerge and help us in noticing the integration of the self, the family, and society in The Dark Dancer. Krishnan's homecoming has the significance one normally notices in any fiction that tries to dramatize the feelings of one who was away from home for a long time. It is a re-entry into a society dominated by traditional forms of family reunions. His parents and his uncles expect him to contribute to the stability and security of their home. Arrangements are set afoot to convert him into a bridegroom, so that he can become an integral part of the family. The family has its ancestral house in the Nungambakam area of Madras, where festivals like Deepavali are celebrated with pomp. His marriage with Kamala, an arranged marriage, doesn't create any sense of belonging in Krishnan's mind. From start to finish, Kamala's compsure,
detachment, and the traditional attitude of a Hindu wife do not make any appreciable impression on him. He feels that "She would not change him. She would accept him. She would leave him nothing but himself, no mask, no pretense, no illusion. Without harshness, perhaps without love also, she would lead him to the precipice of belonging, the point of no return and no escape." In the passage cited above, the emphasis seems to be on the traditional Hindu marriage view, according to which the bride simply accepts the groom. This idea is reinforced by the following passage:

A servant had opened the twice-bolted wooden gate, and the car drove slowly into the portico, the tyres crunching on the loose gravel. Krishnan's father greeted them almost perfunctorily. His mother embraced them, but a little abstractedly, as if her emotions were elsewhere. For them the climax was over. Now the consequences had to be measured and sifted, a structure of responsibilities modified, a new member integrated into the tight, almost ruthless hierarchy of the family. Had it really been Krishnan and Kamala that mattered? Or was it their marriage, satisfying Father's resolve to maneuver his son into his proper station, satisfying Mother's inarticulate

5The Dark Dancer, p. 19.
longing for prestige, Kruger's lust for antiquity and the common hunger for significant spectacle? The multicolored cloth of festivity was gone now and there remained only the pretexts on which it hung. (Emphasis added)

The above crucial passage brings to a central focus the multiple plot-lines that reach their culmination in Kamala's death. Krishnan and Kamala have to be incorporated into the "ruthless hierarchy of the family." The family seems to value status, position, spectacle, and festivity. The bride and the bridegroom appear to be pawns that could be manoeuvred on the marital chess-board. The newly married couple have more awareness of their position and privilege in the family hierarchy and less awareness of what they are to each other. This inference appears to be plausible if we analyse his attitude to and participation in the non-cooperation movement. Krishnan doesn't repose any confidence in non-violent resistance to the police brutality. When Vijayaraghavan is thrashed by the police, Krishnan loses his temper and gives a hard hit to a policeman. As the narrator comments, "Krishnan felt the liberation dwelling in him also. It was the natural way to change a problem--the hammer of force and

6 *The Dark Dancer*, p. 31.
not the mirror of protest." The hammer and the mirror images are so crucial as to clinch the issue between Westernized Krishnan and traditional Kamala. Though she does not criticize her husband for his lack of confidence in the ethic of non-violence, she makes him realize his lapse by her suggestive silence. We notice towards the end of this episode a sense of frustration and failure in Krishnan, as the following passage suggests:

He wasn't happy but he was more at peace with himself as he looked at the bare walls and up at the high white ceiling, with the suspended fan spinning slowly from it. The rebellion had failed. Others had paid for it with their lives, but his own life would flow down the prescribed course unaltered. Indeed, measured by the consequences, there had been no rebellion. It was a mirage, an imagined exclamation mark. Undoubtedly Kruger would have called it Maya. But the family, the career, the forward look, all that was reality could never be brought to admit it. (Emphasis added)

The passage just cited is not only interesting but significant, in the sense that it suggests the ambivalence

7 The Dark Dancer, p. 41.
8 Ibid., p. 51.
that takes a deep root in Krishnan's mind. The implicit contrast between rebellion, reality, and Maya recurs throughout the text with varying degrees of emphasis. The major symbols in the novel—the dance of Siva and the temple—seem to explicate the concepts of rebellion, reality, and Maya.

The Hindu traditional marriage is not based on the principle of equality of sexes, but is rooted in the idea of acceptance. We may say that once a wife is always a wife. When Krishnan and Kamala shift to New Delhi, because of Krishnan's appointment as an officer in the Central Secretariat, a situation arises which brings "rebellion," "reality," and "Maya" into the foreground. Krishnan's relationship with Cynthia and his consequent alienation from Kamala may be analysed from this point of view. Krishnan's growing fascination for Cynthia may be profitably construed as an act of rebellion against the ruthless hierarchy of the family. The following dialogue between the two drives home the point:

"Don't worry," she reassured him. "You can be as rude as you like. It just shows how badly your subconscious wants me."

He couldn't help smiling but he had to remind her. "Aren't you forgetting that Kamala is my wife?"
She got to the crux of it with her usual directness. "Why did you marry her?"
"In order to get married."
"If I weren't so perceptive, I would call that an unintelligent answer."
"If you were perceptive, you would realize that it wasn't meant to be intelligent. It was supposed to be adequate."

The above dialogue may suggest that the text spins the hackneyed form of a love-triangle. But what is significant in terms of the total meaning of the text is the contrast between intelligence and adequacy. Krishnan seems to think that the Hindu view of acceptance as the basis of marriage is inadequate. He confirms his views in an oblique way when he tells Cynthia, "Somewhere, somehow my life has got to grow up, it has to live with the problems of my soil and people. Kamala's Indian, intensely so, not simply in what she knows and does, but deep down, in ways that I can only sense and don't even want to understand." It can't be hastily concluded that Krishnan says this either to be fair to his wife or to cajole Cynthia. In this context, we are reminded of the advice the American professor gives to Nalini, which has been

9*The Dark Dancer*, p. 80.

10Ibid., p. 81.
cited earlier: Human mind "isn't a sponge, mopping up information. It ought to be a kind of light, shining into the facts and revealing their pattern." Krishnan's frequent observations on Aquinas, Sankara, temples, and Nataraja and the Cosmic Dance indicate that his mind is just a sponge, mopping up information, and not a light that could evaluate and illuminate that information. When he says that "Wherever a Brahmin is, there is a temple," it only presents "the hammer of force and not the mirror of protest." While the hammer signifies what is adequate, the mirror suggests what is intelligent.

The Krishnan-Cynthia relationship, which forms an integral part of Chapter V of the text, has an appropriate caption, "The Rebellion." We have discussed earlier the significance of rebellion by emphasizing the crucial role of the hammer image. To think that "From accepting the family's decisions he passes on to accepting Cynthia's decisions, which is easy, because she has a stronger will, until Krishnan

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11Too Long in the West, p. 48.
12The Dark Dancer, p. 167.
13Ibid., p. 41.
suddenly realises the mistake of his choice is a value judgment that overlooks Krishnan's inherent bent towards rebellion, signified by the hammer image. A careful scrutiny of the text seems to suggest that Krishnan strives to make the spiritual and the sensual worlds extensions of each other. When he looks into the "grave eyes" of the priest in Mutthra temple, he realizes that the kind of extension he wants to achieve has its own shortcomings. When Cynthia's demands on his privacy become more aggressive, he tells her, "you've no right... to ask for a total commitment. When I lost her I abandoned some of myself. It was much more than I thought. It wasn't simply what I left with her, but so many other loyalties and attachments--to her world, her society and mine too, which just can't be re-created on our island" (emphasis added).

In the passage quoted above, the phrase "a total commitment" is in perfect accord with Krishnan's intrinsic loyalty to the concept of rebellion. He seems to have an

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15 *The Dark Dancer*, p. 166.

16 Ibid., p. 175.
innate aversion to anything that amounts to a total commitment. The island image, on the other hand, seems to convey the idea that he is slowly graduating from the hammer of force to the mirror of protest. The "grave eyes" of the priest is an analogue of the mirror image.

From the foregoing analysis, we may conclude that Krishnan is not able to reconcile himself to the idea of a total commitment. As has been suggested earlier, he is eager to do what is adequate but not what is intellectually satisfactory. A crisis-ridden atmosphere may stimulate one's intelligence, especially of a person who scoffs at commitment. His return to Kamala, who is serving the refugees in Shantihpur, may be interpreted as an intelligent decision prompted by his failure to make the spiritual world an extension of the sensual. He seems to get rid of the notion that a Brahmin's "reasoning processes are extremely complex." His journey to Shantihpur is motivated by the conviction that he would receive a cordial welcome, because he is aware of Kamala's total commitment to the values she cherishes. He returns to Kamala not to seek her forgiveness but to see his own image reflected in her eyes. The following passage

17 *The Dark Dancer*, p. 201.
implicitly suggests that Kamala is the mirror in which Krishnan beholds what he is in himself:

He let his silence speak to her first, since she was a child of darkness, her quietness spun out of it, her eyes with that softened serenity of the moon emerging into a rain-washed sky. He needed no words to tell her he had come back, and she gave in to his returning, accepting all of him, the hot face, the torn clothes, the blood-crusted bandage, the body he had become, without asking for its history. She did not chide him with any explicit reproof, did not mention, however matter-of-factly, the stark conditions he had forced her into, did not even indulge herself in that sudden accession of happiness which might have made clear how much he had denied her.¹⁸

The image "the moon emerging into the rain-washed sky," in the above passage, unmistakably suggests that a Brahmin's thought processes are not necessarily complex. It is precisely in this context that the text's central images find a happy integration. The Dark Dancer and the Dance do not lead the self away from the family and society but fuse them with reality at a higher level. On the occasion of Krishnan's marriage with Kamala, a concert is arranged, in which, as a

¹⁸The Dark Dancer, p. 206.
lady sings of Siva dancing in the great temple of Chidambaram, Krishnan's theory of adequacy intervenes to distort the perennial significance of the Cosmic Dance. "He wondered how strong the disciplined surface was, a man's life foreseen with all the precision of ages, stretched taut as the skin which the drummer's fingers caressed, over the energy of the dark, jubilant waters." But when he encounters the image of Nataraja of Chidambaram in Kamala's tent at Shantihpur, the response is different and intelligence oriented. The symbolic expressivity of Nataraja "was not the catharsis of art—there was no purgation, no refinement, no transmutation of the strength of darkness. It was as if one were raised into the mystery's center, into the transformation of the god's eye, as if the destruction shimmering on the leaping muscles, sucking down the thin wail of the dying man, was not a barbarism to be subdued, a violence to be disciplined, but a jubilation that absorbed the flesh, the rivers and the peaks of comprehension being but one hair of the unanswered stillness" (emphasis added). The "unanswered stillness," as Krishnan seems to realize after the death of Kamala, is also signifi-

19 The Dark Dancer, p. 29.

20 Ibid., p. 225.
catory of the temple. There emerges a clear image of the temple as Krishnan immerses the ashes of Kamala in the Ganges:

The urn was emptied, the ashes cast out upon the gentle current and the world focused again, the sorrow and the elation, all those whom desire had jostled down the steps, to be healed, to be blessed, to wash away the dead, the weight of error, gathered together in superstition and fear, in charlatanry and the throngs of the truth, in the temple's silence and the clanging of carnivals, the deep sincerity mingling with gaudiness, so that each was the condition in which the other found itself.21 (Emphasis added)

The above passage subtly fuses the basic symbols and, at the same time, gives them a metaphysical resonance in which the assertion that "Wherever a Brahmin is, there is a temple"22 is reversed so as to mean that wherever a temple is, there is a Brahmin. As Swami Chidbhavananda points out, "The temple that the Hindu has conceived and constructed is a replica of the divine possibilities in man."23

21 The Dark Dancer, p. 298.
22 Ibid., p. 167.
The word "Brahmin" acquires a multiple meaning—one in whom tumult and silence, intelligence and imagination, and commitment and detachment acquire a refined amalgamation. Krishnan's home-coming, his parents' anxiety to see him married to an eligible bride, his marriage with Kamala, his separation from her, his relationship with Cynthia and the breakdown of that relationship, his return to Shantihpur to join Kamala, her re-acceptance, her death, which seems to bring apparent peace to the riot-torn Shantihpur, and his ultimate acceptance of Lord Krishna's message in the Gita constitute the plot of the novel. As the plot evolves, the reader notices the social and the metaphysical perspectives by gradually absorbing the symbolic significance of the temple and the dance of Nataraja. Krishnan and Kamala come from a traditional family in which ritual plays an important part. In the Hindu family tradition, ritual is like a bridge to a higher kind of reality. It is the spirit with which rituals are performed that is more important than rituals themselves. But at the same time it cannot be said that rituals by themselves are meaningless. It is here that the image of Nataraja earns that kind of symbolic spread which makes it ubiquitous in the text. Harrex has cogently argued, in his book The Fire and the Offering, that The Dark Dancer convincingly demonstrates the author's mature under-
standing and assimilation of the perennial theme of Eliot's *Four Quartets*.\(^{24}\) No doubt, words like "beginning," "end," "still-point," "stillness," and "center" recur in Rajan's text too often to go unnoticed. It is a critical commonplace of Eliot scholarship that the poet tried to acquire for the self the timeless in time. The thrust of *The Dark Dancer*, on the other hand, seems to forge itself on the theme of action, or what in Hindu thought is known as Karma. This seems to be borne out by the image of Nataraja. Celebrated orientalists like Ananda Coomaraswami have meticulously explicated the metaphysical specificities and the semantics of the image. But one has to take into consideration its meaning and suggestion from the text under review. Siva and Parvathi (Siva and Sakti) constitute what is popularly known as the Cosmic Family. The Dark Dancer—Nataraja—signifies the alteration of joy and terror, which are not fused but which are supposed to co-exist. Kamala's stay in Shantihpur makes her learn the significance of co-existing with joy and terror. Because Shantihpur is torn by the communal riots that came in the wake of the Partition, she realizes the profound meaning of terror in its physical and

metaphysical manifestations. She is dedicated and committed to the service of suffering humanity, which brings joy amidst terror. Although she appears to be terrified by the Hindus who pursue the Muslim girl, her sense of dedication and the joy that accompanies it make her stand in their way. The very fact that they stab her to death may be taken as a kind of release from tumult and terror to the realm of joy.

Krishnan, who has been a spectator to the disastrous and violent communal broil, feels that "he saw Kamala not simply standing fast but thrusting erectly, passionately, forward, seeming almost to float against the knife. He was shocked by her beauty, her inwardness suddenly stripped bare, the unwavering and almost eerie arrogance, as if for the first time she was meeting her true lover."25 The words "erectly," "passionately," "beauty," "inwardness," "unwavering," and "true lover" seem to authenticate the observations made earlier. This impression is reinforced by the chapter "The Dark Dancer," especially by the following passage:

She put her hand in his and led him out, swinging his hand with an animation that might have seemed almost childlike if her constant seriousness had not qualified it. But this

25 The Dark Dancer, pp. 273-274.
time her seriousness was different. Her face was not pulled together by the concerns and questions which her reaching out to others must have collected or even by the will to overshadow despondency. It had relaxed into a serenity, friendly and yet aloof, as if something within her had been settled but as if, also, the happiness that the settlement had brought her had already been given to something else. Her lips, finely chiseled, always fastidious, now seemed almost sculptural in their chastity. Her eyes remained lustrous, but under the softness he was aware of a brilliance which was not just the reflection of the starry, enveloping night. She walked with her diminutive shoulders squared a little, as if a strength in her had been touched into life, the circlet of white flowers floating in her hair's blackness, she walked with a blossoming, a queenliness almost of dignity, and there was no question that she was now at peace.  

The passage cited above comes just before the final disaster, which takes Kamala's life. The words "childlike," "serenity," "chiseled," "sculptural," "softness," "brilliance," "night," "blackness," "queenliness," and "dignity" energize the passage, giving it almost a dancing rhythm. The childlike quality of Kamala is qualified by her constant serious-

26The Dark Dancer, p. 271.
ness. Her face shows friendliness, yet it remains aloof. The suggestion that "she walked with a blossoming, a queenliness almost of dignity" connects the passage with the idea of the Cosmic Dance. This inference is possible because the image of Nataraja has so many layers of meaning, some of which could be seen in the passage under review. Even here the opposites are not fused, they remain as they are. This seems to be a characteristic of most modernist texts, which employ poetic or symbolic language to communicate the co-existence of opposites. Hermann Hesse wrote that "If he were a musician... he could without difficulty write a two-part melody in which the two lines of notes and sounds would complement, combat, determine and correspond to each other, which would at every point be mutually and reciprocally related in the most vital and intimate way: and yet any one able to read music would always be able to see and hear each separate note along with its contrary and complementary note, its brother, its enemy, its antipode."27 The Dark Dancer seems to have been organized on the basis of Hermann Hesse's theory. The self is an harmony with and

in rebellion against the family, and society is turbulent and peaceful. To put it in another way, from start to finish, Krishnan is attached and detached, participates and withdraws, is hopeful and despondent. Towards the end of the novel, he thinks of the following advice of Lord Krishna to Arjuna:

He who seeks freedom
Thrusts fear aside,
Thrusts aside anger
And puts off desire:
Truly that man
Is made free forever.
When thus he knows me
The end, the author
Of every offering
And all austerity,
Lord of the worlds
And the friend of all men
O son of Kunti
Shall he not enter
The peace of my presence?\(^{28}\)

He takes the advice "not as a strange meaning, a light in a desolate sky, but as a condition to which his life could work, even through the repetitions and frustrations."\(^{29}\) The key phrase in this context appears to be "a


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 308.
condition to which his life could work." As has been said earlier, the focus in *The Dark Dancer* appears to be on action. Krishnan's awareness of the significance of action evolves from what is adequate to what is possible, to what is necessary and responsible, and, ultimately, to what appears to be commensurate with the demands of the self, the family and society, as signified by the dance of Nataraja, for which Kamala becomes a symbolic analogue, because her outward and inward self-expression is significatory of what the Dark Dancer is and means, in the sense that there is equilibrium in the midst of oscillation, and harmony behind the seeming discord.

After Kamala's death, Krishnan's parents try to persuade him to marry again. His mother opens the newspaper and casually goes through the column of marriage advertisements. She finds something interesting and reads it aloud to the members present:

"A Vadama girl has no objection to a widower. She's a Bachelor of Arts, in public finance and European history. But she sings well and plays the *veena* also."\(^\text{30}\)

The above passage is an apt preface to Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, p. 300.
second novel, *Too Long in the West*. The two novels in a way converge on the institution of arranged marriage. *The Dark Dancer* brings to the fore some of the perennial issues that haven't found or are likely to find any settlement in a developing traditional country like India. As has been stated in the first chapter, journey to the West or journey to the East may not be interpreted as a confrontation of cultures. The journey is meaningful in that one's sojourn in an alien country may serve the purpose of authenticating not the alien values but the values of the culture to which one is born. This significant idea is given a symphonic orchestration in *The Dark Dancer*. The social and the personal embarrassments of the institution of arranged marriage are dramatized in *Too Long in the West* by employing parody as the organizing principle of the narrative.

Sambasivan, a lecturer by profession, tries to play the role of a benevolent despot in Mudalur, a remote village in South India. He invests most of his savings to create an autonomous and self-sufficient community in the village. He invariably spends his summer vacation there, trying to improve his residence, which he calls Hillview. He has a son and a daughter, Gopal and Nalini. He sends Nalini to Columbia University for her advanced studies, in spite of his wife's
strong protests. We are not told in which subject Nalini receives special instruction in Columbia. On the eve of her return from America, he issues the following matrimonial advertisement in The Hindu:

"Vadama girl, educated yet domesticated. Fair of face, ravishing of form. Unprecedented paragon will marry whoever deserves her."\(^{31}\)

Even before Nalini arrives at Mudalur, a few bridegrooms who think that they deserve her flock to the place. Satyamurti arrives first, from Kumbakonam, and announces himself to Sambasivan's family as "truth-teller."\(^{32}\) On her way home, Nalini meets another suitor who calls himself Kalyanasundaram, which means "beautiful marriage."\(^{33}\) He is a specialist in arranged marriages. His motives are not frivolous. He is engaged in acquiring knowledge about arranged marriages. As he says, his ambition is to acquire "Knowledge to fight the arranged marriage, to expose it in all its revolting nakedness, its threats, its bribes and its pitiful desperations. Knowledge with which to destroy this malignant canker which is eating out the heart of Hindu society."\(^{34}\) The next suitor

\(^{31}\) Too Long in the West, p. 23.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 28.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 55
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 57.
is Viswakarman. He is a journalist, and says, "I am not simply a reporter but a master of style. In fact I am a master of many styles. When I was a child I wrote like Middleton Murry. I have successfully imitated all the Nobel Prize winners. I am now maturing from early to late Eliot." The last suitor, Kubera, is engaged in the trade of cosmetics. He tells Nalini, "I knew I was responsible for something in your beauty. From the moment I came into this room I had that faint, unmistakable feeling of achievement. Without Kubera such hair could not exist. With me it can call to every woman from every dressing-table through the length and breadth of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Madagascar. Not just as a dream, but as a living possibility, a sleek, velvety, glowing loveliness of darkness." The last to join the company of suitors is Ernest, who has come to India as a representative of the World Health Organization, engaged in checking the growth of malaria in India. Nalini knew him in America and feels delighted to see him in India.

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have tried to show how the institution of arranged marriage is dramatized in

35 Too Long in the West, p. 74.

36 Ibid., p. 91.
terms a swayamvara, a traditional institution which prevailed in ancient India. In this context one thinks of the swayamvaras of Draupadi, Damayanti, and a host of other princesses. In the novel under consideration, all the five suitors are interviewed by Nalini. Since the interview is based on the principle of a parody, we may suggest that Sambasivan, Nalini's father, plays the role of an ancient king who would give away his daughter to the most deserving of the suitors. But the point that one should not miss is the status of Nalini within the narrative framework discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. According to the text, she stayed in America for three years. Would it be possible to say that she lived in the West too long? It is here that the ironic foregrounding seems appropriate. On her way home to Mudalur in a bullock-cart,

... she thought of Draupadi and of a splendid young man bending a Gandiva bow. But the thought did not reassure her. She was realistic about her face and didn't expect it to launch a thousand ships; but it would have been flattering to daydream in the Western tradition, to have a valorous knight-errant flaunt her emblem and challenge all to combat on her behalf. Far more flattering certainly than being pawned like poor Draupadi at a dice game, merely to satisfy a warrior's code of conduct. 37 (Emphasis added)

37 Too Long in the West, p. 66.
In the passage just cited, the phrase "a warrior's code of conduct" seems to suggest the ironic placement of the Eastern and the Western traditions of the institution of courtly love. What saves the situation for Nalini is the passion of Raman, a barber's son, who becomes a rebel, to overthrow the despotism of Sambasivan. When Raman gathers most of the villagers and surrounds Sambasivan's fort (Hillview), a serious situation develops. He accuses the despot and his family of violating the moral purity and the environmental perfection of Mudalur by having liaison with a foreigner. Ernest's jeep and D.D.T become symbols of evil. Kubera's expedition to the mountain on the outskirts of the village to gather the magic mangoes ends in disaster, because of a heavy storm. Exposure to the winds and rain affects the health of Guruswami, one of the participants in the expedition. Raman takes advantage of this and tries to rouse the villagers to attack Sambasivan and his family. The crowd insists, along with Raman, that Nalini should immediately choose her partner in order to vindicate herself. Nalini visits Guruswami and, after saying a few good words, tells him that Mudalur is not a place where things get too serious. What happens here deserves a sensible ending. In fact the sensible ending to her swayamvara takes
the form of her placing the garland round Raman's neck. While the crowd applauds her decision, Raman loses his temper and threatens Nalini that later she would regret her decision. But she tells him, in what appears to be the most revealing passage, "My dear, deluded, insufferable future husband, as usual you've no idea what you're talking about. You haven't been in the land of the idle rich. But I've been there for three years, living recklessly on my poor father's fortune. I've cooked more than a thousand meals. I've stitched and laundered my own clothes. I've scrubbed the floor twice every week. I've put out the garbage. I've even cleaned the toilet. Have you done any of that with your working-class hands?" (Emphasis added).38

"Too long in the West" has not in any way contributed to enhance Nalini's sense of the affluent society. Even in the affluent society, somebody has to do the domestic chores like cooking, stitching, scrubbing, and cleaning. What seems to have changed is Nalini's imaginative and mental horizon. Her stay abroad has made her acquire supreme confidence in herself so as to make her say to her mother, "I can look after myself."39

38 Too Long in the West, pp.186-187.
39 Ibid., p. 79.
As Wayne C. Booth says, "every parody refers at every point to historical knowledge that is in a sense 'outside itself'—that is, previous literary works—and thus to more or less probable genres." While using the idea of a swayamvara, a plot device in many ancient and medieval Hindu epics and romances, the narrator doesn't forget that its use as a plot device in a fictional work makes it a parody, thereby giving him a chance to make that fiction an incisive social comment. No doubt, Too Long in the West may be taken as a scathing criticism of the institution of arranged marriage. But what is more significant is the subtle ironic suggestion of the title Too Long in the West. When Nalini tells Kalyanasundaram that she stayed in America for three years, he comments as follows:

It's far too long .... we're independent now. We've different attitudes and different standards. We're Indians, not mimics of the whiteman. We've changed and you've changed, but in the wrong direction. You won't fit in. You've joined the lost generation, out of place everywhere and acceptable nowhere. You'll always be an exile and an alien, a self-created foreigner, a refugee from yourself. You can't belong.

You'll live in two worlds and fall between two stools. (Emphasis added)

The passage under review acts as a thematic link between the two novels we have just discussed. In terms of the Indian social landscape, the re-entry of an Indian who has stayed too long in the West may not be an alienation or loss of one's traditional moorings. Krishnan and Nalini, in spite of the ordeals they face, seem to retain what they have inherited. As members of Hindu society, their journey to the West and their return to the East do signify the inviolability of the self that has its roots in the social and the familial milieu that have become part and parcel of themselves.

\[41\] Too Long in the West, p. 55.