LOCAL LIFE DEPICTED IN THE NOVELS OF VAIKOM MUHAMMED BASHEER AND R. K. NARAYAN : A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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DECLARATION

I, P.P. Aboobacker, hereby declare that the thesis entitled 'Local Life Depicted in the Novels of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and R.K. Narayan: A Comparative Study', submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English,** is an original record of observations and bonafide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. T.V. Prakash,** and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled 'Local Life Depicted in the Novels of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and R.K. Narayan: A Comparative Study', submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and research carried out by **Mr. P.P.Aboobacker** under my guidance, and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma.

DR. T.V. PRAKASH

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PREFACE

I had been quite sceptical about the validity of the oft-repeated assertion that despite the regional and linguistic barriers, we Indians have a common culture, common disposition and common tastes. Hence when I thought of doing research I found it quite relevant and worthwhile to make a comparative study of the literary works of two prominent Indian writers. Through such a comparative study I hoped to compare the cultures of the two different Indian provinces to which the writers concerned belong.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and R.K. Narayan, whom I have chosen for the comparative study, tell the stories of Keralites and Tamil-Brahmins respectively. As my study progressed all my prejudices melted away. I was wonder-struck to note the incredible similarities existing between the communities of Basheer and Narayan. And with this study I am convinced that striking parallels may be drawn among all the regional and linguistic groups in India regarding their cultures and ways of life.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The phrase 'Unity in Diversity' may seem stale because we hear it being uttered quite often. But as far as India is concerned it is not at all an empty utterance; nor is it an equivocation. On the other hand, it is a stunning reality. It is perhaps the greatest distinction of the country.

India's population has now crossed the fantastic number of one hundred crores. There are more than eighty languages in the country. Its geographical structure contains almost all the varied and contrasting faces of the earth. Besides, it hosts innumerable regional and tribal cultures. Still it has a unified character resembling a string of variegated beads. And this unified character is one of the most striking aspects of what is called Indianness.

Most of the Indian languages have their own affluent literatures. These literatures are the signatures of the social and cultural lives of the regions concerned. When you go through these literatures you feel the pulsations and undercurrents of rustic and tribal cultures. Glimpses of the boundary ridges that demarcate the different regions and provinces are there. But beyond these lines of demarcation you find the perennial flow of the Indian main-stream that submerges all these lines of separation.

Sheer academic and bookish knowledge of human nature and psychology will never enable you to write novels and stories with life-like characters. If it were so, all the psychologists should have been men of letters as well. What is required here is a close observation of those who live around you. Keep your eyes and ears open to your society, absorb whatever is found striking to your imaginative mind, and then with your literary talent you can synthesise them into life-like stories. In other words, the stories you narrate and the characters you delineate should be quite familiar to you. In a sense they should be indigenous. Then only your writing will be original.

This way of depicting local life and character in literature is otherwise known as local colour writing or regional writing. A regional writer chooses a particular area and its inhabitants as the background and basis of his stories. The area or region thus chosen is most often provincial or rural. So the term 'Provincialism' can also be applied to local colour writing.

You find a detailed portrayal of the socio-cultural background, customs, dress and food habits, ways of thinking, domestic life and the like that are peculiar to the region or province concerned in a local colour fiction. Such novels are always realistic in nature. The common place

events of everyday life -- usually middle or lower class life -- are dealt with in these novels.

Writers like Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Mary Webb and Rudyard Kipling are some of the prominent British writers who have successfully exploited the possibilities of local colour writing. Wessex (South West England) was the area chosen by Thomas Hardy. In his novels, however, he has created an imaginary setting out of Wessex. Yorkshire served as the background for the Bronte sisters. George Eliot kept rooted to Warwickshire. Mary Webb's canvas was Shropshire. And Kipling opted an Indian background.

William Faulkner, the most prominent among American regional writers, concentrated on Deep South. Like Thomas hardy, Faulkner also has created a fictitious setting -- Yoknapatawpha -- in his novels. Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, Bret Harte, George Washington Cable are some of the other notable American writers who have depicted local life in their novels and short stories.

A good number of Indian writers, too, have concentrated on and succeeded in utilizing local colour writing. Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, the legendary writer of Malayalam literature and R.K. Narayan, the renowned Indo-Anglian writer are prominent among them. All of Narayan's works have a common background -- a small town known as Malgudi, which

is an invention of Narayan himself. In three of his novels, namely, Mucheettukalikkarante Makal, Aanavaariyum Ponkurisum and Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan Basheer, too, has portrayed an imaginary village called Sthalam.

This thesis aims at a comparative study of the novels of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and R.K. Narayan, with special emphasis on the local life depicted by the two writers. In his article "Tharathamya Sahithyam: Bharathiya Sameepanam" Dr. K. Ayyappa Panicker has highlighted the worth and significance of such a comparative study of the works of various Indian writers. According to Dr. Panicker, when you make a comparative study of the literary works produced in various Indian languages you get a clear picture not only of India's cultural differences but of the cultural unity as well. He asserts that one of the facts that you are convinced of from a comparative study of Indian literatures is how India's cultural variety strengthens her national unity. It is the unity based on variety, the oneness that can be understood and experienced through differences, and not the barren and mechanical uniformity that is thrust upon the people, that forms the throbbing vigour of Indian culture and literature (85).

Dr. M.A. Kareem, too, thinks more or less on the same line. In his book Tharathamya Sahithya Sameeksha Dr. Kareem has expressed the view that comparative study has great relevance in a country like India

that serves as the arena for so many languages. It helps you to understand the aspects of Indianness revealed through the various regional literatures. Dr. Kareem further points out that there are some fundamental differences between the comparative studies in Europe and those in India. In Europe every nation has its own single language; whereas in India there are a number of languages and innumerable clans. There are eleven Indo-Aryan languages with their own affluent literatures. Besides, there are four Dravidian languages. The impact of regional cultures creates differences even within each linguistic group. Still we have several similarities within these diversities (17).

Unfortunately Indians are still not much enthusiastic about making more and more comparative studies of their regional literatures. What dissuades Indians from such a task is the lack of faith in the greatness of their domestic literatures. A good number of the elite and sophisticated class in India are still anglophiles. And most of the Indian critics are functioning as radars directed towards the West. As Dr.N.E. Viswanatha Iyer has pointed out in his article "Tharathamya Paddanam Bharathathil" almost all the Indians who studied English got infected with the Western notion that their literatures are far greater than Indian literatures. Consequently Indian literatures began to be relegated to a secondary status, and mockingly called 'vernacular' (49-50).

Though Narayan has written in English, his novels depict the lives of middle-class Tamil Brahmins. As William Walsh has pointed out in his book R. K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation the poor, beggars and untouchables are also present in his novels as they appear in the life and consciousness of the middle-class (89). Most of Basheer's novels, on the other hand, narrate the stories of Keralites, especially of the orthodox rustic Muslims. Naturally one will expect entirely different and contradictory ways of life to be found in the works of these two writers. On a peripheral study of the works of Narayan and Basheer this prejudice may seem to be true. But a deeper study will reveal amazing and incredible similarities existing between the two peoples. And you will be made to agree with what Meenakshi Mukherjee says in her book The Twice Born Fiction:

> It must be admitted that Indian villages, in spite of the differences in language and the subtleties of social structure, provide a more common basic pattern recognisable all over India (207).

Chapter II

THE DOMESTIC SCENE

The domestic realm is where Man enjoys immense sense of freedom, gets rid of all kinds of inhibitions, and expresses his thoughts and feelings quite freely. You can assess a person's character quite well and easily from the role that he plays in the domestic scene. Great writers have always found depiction of the various facets of domestic life a fascinating as well as a challenging experience in their creative endeavour.

In his book Indian Literature in English William Walsh comments on R.K. Narayan's handling of Indian domestic life:

> The family, indeed, is the immediate context in which the novelist's sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and convictions with which family relationships are treated -- those of son and parents, and brother and brother in The Bachelor of Arts, of husband and wife, and father and daughter in The English Teacher, of father and son in The Financial Expert, of grand mother and grandson in Waiting for the Mahatma (74).

In three of his novels, namely, Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant, Childhood Friend and Pattumma's Goat Basheer also has given special attention to the portrayal of the various facets of Indian family relationships.

When you go through the words and deeds of the prominent mother-characters of Narayan and Basheer you will get convinced that they are all embodiments of maternal affection. They are ready to suffer any kind of hardship and make sacrifices for the well-being of their families. In Narayan's novels The English Teacher and The Bachelor of Arts there are two mother-characters with all these traits. The mother in The Bachelor of Arts is an awe-inspiring sight when she sits turning the prayer beads in her hand.

> As she turned the beads, her lips uttered the holy name of Sri Rama, part of her mind busied itself with thoughts of her husband, home, children, and relatives, and her eyes took in the delicate beauty of coconut trees waving against a starlit sky (12).

Her mornings are always busy.

> She had a variety of work to do in the mornings -- tackling the milkman, the vegetable seller, the oil-

> monger, and other tradespeople; directing the work of the cook and of the servants; gathering flower for the daily worship; and attending to all the eccentricities and wants of her husband and children (22).

Krishnan's mother in The English Teacher is the only female member of the house. So she has to shoulder the entire household affairs, of which she never utters even a single word of complaint. But her husband is much anguished at the self-sacrificing way of her running the household. Hence in a letter to their son he writes "with a faint suggestion of complaint that she was not looking after herself quite properly -- still keeping late hours for food -- the last to eat in the house and still reluctant to swallow the medicines given to her . . ." (99).

In his autobiographical novel Pattumma's Goat Basheer has depicted his mother as one of the main characters. Just like the mothers of Chandran and Krishnan she is also solely concerned with the welfare of her family. Even in old age she works hard, not for her own sake but for the benefit of her children and grandchildren.

> She is either sixty-seven or seventy-seven . . . she gets up at six o'clock (in the original book it has

> been said that she wakes up at four o'clock) in the morning. She then fetches the coconut leaves that have been steeped in the streams to make them pliable and plaits them. When this is done, she spreads them all out in the compound. This is so that they will be drying from the moment the sun rises. After seeing to that, she draws the water that is needed for the house. She comes carrying a large pot in each arm. She scolds Pattumma, Anumma, Aisomma and Kunjanumma; she makes a fair amount of noise; she is fully occupied with house work until ten o'clock at night (Me Grand Dad 142).

There are three more grown up women at home -- Anumma, Aisomma and Kunjanumma. But the old mother believes that "None of them knows a thing. They haven't learnt how to look after the house" (142-143). When Basheer suggests that she should hand over all the chores to those three younger women so that they can learn everything she confronts him with another argument: "Don't they all have children? Who is to look after them ?" (143).

It is true that she demands money from Basheer time and again. But she seldom uses it for her own personal needs. Quite often she gives

it straight away to her second son, Abdul Khadar, for "Isn't he the one who looks after all these dependents (of the house)? If it were not for him you'd see what would happen" (144).

Majeed's mother in Childhood Friend is a replica of the mother in Pattumma's Goat. She appears as a personification of maternal affection. After spending seven long years in various parts of India, Majid returns home empty-handed. It is a poverty-stricken house that receives him now. "Even the place they lived in was mortgaged. Majid's parents have become very old; his two sisters have grown up and passed the age when they should have been married" (Me Grand Dad 28-29). Hence his coming home as a pauper puts an additional burden on the family. Still his mother has no grudge against him. It is enough for her that he has returned.

> There was not enough to eat in the house! Bapa (father) would take to the market the rope that Majid's sisters made from the coconut fibre, sell it and buy something to bring back. Umma (mother) would give Majid a big part of it. Then she would say tenderly, 'My boy, you have lost weight since you got back. Do you know how I reared you? Because your colour wasn't good enough I made you drink a lot of milk mixed with powdered gold!' (29-30).

The very same mother has been portrayed again in the story "Mother" as keeping awake and awaiting her son every night. Invariably on all nights she cooks some rice and keeps it for him to eat. This son has gone to participate in the freedom-struggle and she is not certain when he will turn up (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 25).

Coming back to Chandran's mother in The Bachelor of Arts, she too awaits her run away son in a similar fashion. Hoping that he may turn up any day, she sweeps and cleans his room everyday.

> There was not a speck of dust on anything, nor a single spider's web. In fact the room and all the objects in it were tidier than they had ever been (116).

On returning home, Chandran gets excited to see this. To his question why she has taken so much trouble she replies in the interrogative: "What better business did I have?" (117).

But regarding paternal affection things are a bit different. Most often fathers seem reserved in showing affection towards their children. Some even adopt a negative way. That is to say, they always reprove the children -- especially the male ones -- for no particular reason. Both these reserved and negative ways may be the offshoot of

the notion that unrestraint expression of paternal love will spoil the child.

Ramani, the protagonist of Narayan's novel The Dark Room takes this notion to the ridiculous extreme. He is an oppressive father and seems to look upon his son as his enemy. He bullies his son even for trivial mistakes. During the Navaratri festival Ramani's son Babu prepares a gorgeous platform for the dolls. Later on in his eagerness to make it something unique in the whole of the neighbourhood he fixes up a festoon of ornamental coloured bulbs on it with the help of his friend Chandru. Unfortunately something goes wrong with the arrangement. Hence when Babu pushes the switch of the coloured bulbs the entire house plunges into darkness. After a while Ramani returns home from his office and notices the failure of electric current. He becomes quite upset. Blind with anger he turns to his son:

> 'You blackguard, who asked you to tamper with the electric lights?' Babu stood stunned.
>
> 'Don't try to escape by being silent. Are you following your mother's example?'
>
> 'No, father.'

> 'Who asked you to tamper with the electric lights?'
>
> . . . . . .
>
> This insistent question was accompanied by violent twists of the ear. Babu's body shook under the grip of his father's hot fingers . . . His father slapped him on the cheek. 'Don't beat me, father,' he said, and Ramani gave him a few more slaps (47-48).

Krishnan's father in The English Teacher and Chandran's father in The Bachelor of Arts, however, do not believe in pelting their sons with harsh words, let alone beating them. They are always soft-spoken and are quite moderate and mellowed in expressing paternal affection.

At the beginning of The English Teacher Prof. Krishnan is shown as staying in a hostel near his college. Though he is married and has become the father of a child he does not even think of taking his wife and child to his place of work and setting up a family. But his father does not find it proper on the part of his son, and what he writes to Krishnan in this regard shows how deeply concerned he is about the comfort of his son:

> I think in the best interests of yourself you should set up a family. You have been in the hostel too long

> and I don't feel you ought to be wasting the best of your life in the hostel as it will affect your health and outlook (19).

Chandran's father, too, is more or less of the same mould. After graduation Chandran wastes nearly two years toying with the idea of going to England for higher studies. Later on he feels guilty-conscious regarding this and expresses his regret before his father. Then the affectionate and compassionate father consoles and reassures his son:

> It is no waste. You have been reading and getting to know people and life and so on. Don't worry. Time enough to apply for jobs after you return from England. It will be really worthwhile, you see. There is no use in getting a bare forty or fifty as a clerk, though even that would be difficult to secure in these days (125).

But Chandran drops the idea of going to England and insists on taking up the chief agency of the newspaper, 'The Daily Messenger'. On hearing this his father gets very much disappointed, but he does not object to his son's proposition. Later on he speaks of it to his friend

Nanjundiah, "seems to be more keen on this. I don't know, that boy gets a new notion every day. But I don't like to stand in his way if it is really a sound proposition" (128).

Of Basheer's novels Childhood Friend alone deals with father-son relationship. But the father here is not like Krishnan's or Chandran's father. His kinship is with Ramani of The Dark Room. He is short-tempered and tyrannical in nature. So his son Majid cannot love him. Rather he is in dread of his father, who manages everything like a despot without caring the least for anybody's opinion. If Majid needs anything he will ask his mother and get it. A silent roar of protest rises from Majid's heart whenever he hears his father's voice.

> Protest against what? Majid is not certain. Is he not a good father? Does he not do everything for Majid? Then what is his failing? (Me Grand Dad 25).

From these questions that Majid asks himself it is evident that his father loves Majid. But the trouble is that either he does not know how to express his love or he believes that to be friendly with one's son is the surest way to spoil him. Whatever it be, he is always rude to the boy and beats him time and again. One day, being mad with anger he goes to the extent of asking his son to get out of the house.

> Shouting, bapa grabbed him by the neck and pushed him out into the yard. Majid fell flat on his face. He cut his lip and it started to bleed. When Majid got up, bapa again shouted angrily, 'Get out!' The sound of it was enough to drive Majid to the other end of the earth (27).

Basheer's father characters, however, are much more liberal in expressing affection towards their daughters. In Childhood Friend, for instance, you find Suhra's father brimming with affection for his daughter. It is true that Basheer is not much elaborate while portraying their interactions, but there are a few eloquent statements, such as, "His highest aim in life was to give Suhra a really good education", scattered here and there (Me Grand Dad 16). Such statements show that her father loves Suhra more than anything in this world. On hearing Suhra's misgiving that she will not be able to go for higher studies because of their poverty, her father asserts confidently:

> Allah will give us the money. We shall all three (the third is Majid) come back together from the town school. Every day, after selling the arecanuts, I'll come and stand in front of the school (17).

Unlike Majid's father Suhra's father never beats or even scolds her. Most often he treats her as a friend and finds time to chat with her. And in playful moods he may try to provoke her with comments like "When she holds a good job, she will forget us all. She will feel ashamed to admit that I am her father" (16).

The father in Manthrikapoocha (Basheer himself) appears as a playmate of his five and a half year old daughter. Even when he is busily engaged in writing a new story or novel, he is ready to play with her at her bidding.

> It is for hopping with her that she invites me when I set out to produce this world class literature. I have to draw some lines and boxes in the courtyard and hop (between these boxes). I have hopped properly. But at times hops may become foul (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1202).

The father-daughter relationship found in Narayan's novel The English Teacher is really moving. Similar to the daughter in Manthrikapoocha Krishnan's daughter, too, is a little girl. Besides, she loses her mother at a very early age, which makes Krishnan's attachment and devotion to her still deeper. He slips into the double

role of father and mother to the child. He becomes an adept in tending a young child. Krishnan himself makes a mention of it with a tinge of pride:

> In three or four months I could give her a bath with expert hands, braid her hair passably, and wash and look after her clothes, and keep correct count of her jackets and skirts. I slipped into my double role with great expertness. It kept me very much alive to play both father and mother to her at the same time (97).

The child is his only relief in an otherwise blank and empty world. He "felt a thrill of pride whenever I (he) had to work and look after the child. It seemed a noble and exciting occupation -- the sole responsibility for a growing creature" (103). Krishnan's excitement knows no bounds as the day on which the girl is to be put to school dawns.

> I was as excited as if I myself were to be put to school. I did little work at my table that day. I ran about the house in great excitement. I opened her trunk and picked out a shirt and skirt, fresh ones, printed cotton (123).

Referring to the traditional concept of man and wife relationship in India M.N.Srinivas says in his book Village, Caste, Gender and Method:

> The husband was not only the wife's master but her deity. In his service was her salvation. He might be a wife-beater, drunkard, gambler and womanizer but her duty was to serve and obey him. Mythological characters like Sita and Savitri were held up as ideals of devotion for women of the Sanskritized, high castes (148).

Savitri's friend Janamma in Narayan's novel The Dark Room upholds this Indian concept when she tells Savitri:

> As for me, I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative, but nothing more. What he does is right. It is a wife's duty to feel so (59).

Then she cites the examples of

> her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband who had three concubines at home; her aunt

> who was beaten every day by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years; another friend of her mother's who was prepared to jump into a well if her husband so directed her (60).

Savitri, too, is quite happy to stick on to this Indian concept with all her heart. When she gets wind of her husband's infatuation with Santa Bai, she does not hate him. She simply yearns for a soothing word from him and nothing more.

> She would have given anything to lighten her mind of its burdens and to be able to think of her husband without suspicion. Just a word from him would do, just an unangry word; even a lie, a soothing lie. Unpleasant thoughts seemed to corrode her soul (93).

She finds it hard to believe that her husband can be guilty of infidelity even after his spending a whole night out at his office where Santa Bai has been given accommodation. She thinks that her friend Gangu may have lied. It may be nothing more than a scandal.

> The poor man was perhaps poring over account books all night, and now without a moment's rest

> he has to be rushing back once again in the hot day after heavy food. All for whose sake? (96).

This line of thought prompts her to despise herself for listening to gossip. After all these years of life together, this is not the way to judge him. Hence she resolves not to let her foul mind spoil their life (96).

Later on, however, she gets convinced that her husband has been ensnared by Santa Bai. Still she believes that the fault is hers:

> Perhaps I'm not good enough for him. Let me admit my complexion has become rather sooty, and these dark rings under the eyes. I am getting careless about my hair, and braid it anyhow; It's hardly his fault if he can't like my appearance very much (104).

Rosie, the heroine of The Guide also thinks more or less on the same line. Though it is her husband's neglect and indifference that drive her to share bed with Raju in a hotel room, she is haunted with the thought that what she does is quite unbecoming of a traditional Indian wife. Hence she asks Raju, ".... is it not a wife's duty to guard and help her husband, whatever the way in which he deals with her?" (120).

For Suhra, the heroine of Basheer's Childhood Friend, her husband's house is virtually a hell. Her husband subjects her to beastly

tortures. Still she continues to stay with him. She is well aware of the lesson taught by the ancestors -- be an embodiment of patience, suffer silently all the tortures and humiliations inflicted by the husband and be with him till the end. But her husband drives her away commanding her to fetch her share of the family property. Thus finding no other go she returns home. And since she is unable to demand her share from her miserable mother, she cannot think of rejoining her husband.

Seeing Suhra back home, her neighbours think that she has come for a short stay with her mother and sisters, and will go back to her husband soon. Hence when they find Suhra not rejoining her husband in due course, they cannot but ask:

> Why doesn't she go back to her husband's house? All this is against the law of God . . . What if her husband kicked her once? When he beat her, she might have lost a tooth! Still he's her husband" (Me Grand Dad 38).

Savitri's husband Ramani in Narayan's The Dark Room and Suhra's husband are determined to capitalize on this concept. For all the bullying that he inflicts upon his wife Ramani has the justification:

> India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realised that a woman's primary duty (also a divine privilege) was being a wife and a mother, and what woman retained the right of being called a wife who disobeyed her husband? Didn't all the ancient epics and scriptures enjoin upon woman the strictest identification with her husband? (141).

Ramani is eccentric and lawless in his taste, and hence always finds fault with his wife for whatever she does. If she prepares salted cucumber for the meals, he may ask: "Why do you torment me with this cucumber for the dozenth time? Do you think I live on it?" (2-3). If there is the slightest delay in serving food he will definitely taunt her with remarks, such as, "Ah, ah! I suppose I'll have to apply to my office for leave and wait for this salted cucumber!" (3) Suppose she serves him only a few pieces of cucumber, that too brings out taunting remarks from him:

> A fine thing. Never knew people could be so niggardly with cucumber, the cheapest trash in the market. Why not have cut up a few more, instead of trying to feed the whole household on a quarter

> of it? Fine economy. Wish you'd show the same economy in other matters (3).

Savitri never interrupts this running commentary with an explanation, and her silence sometimes infuriates her husband. "Saving up your energy by being silent? Saving it up for what purpose? When a man asks you something you could do worse than honour him with a reply." In case she offers an explanation he will snub her: "Shut up. Words won't mend a piece of foul cooking" (3).

Ramani's fluctuating moods and temper keeps Savitri always on tenterhooks. His returning from the office in the evening is an ordeal for her. She cannot predict in what mood he will be. If he is angry, the whole evening will be spoilt with shoutings and snubbings. One evening he returns from the office much earlier with the intention of taking his wife to a cinema. Finding his wife gone to the neighbourhood Ramani gets angry. The moment she learns of it from her daughter, she runs home as frightened as a rabbit.

> Savitri's throat went dry at the sight of her husband. He was pacing the front veranda; . . . He looked fixedly at her as she came up from the gate and said, 'You have made me wait for half an hour . . . A

> fellow comes from the office, dog-tired, and he has only the doors and windows to receive him' (24).

Suhra's husband in Basheer's novel Childhood Friend is virtually a bully. When Majid returns home after his seven years' wandering, Suhra gives him an account of her beastly husband. This short-tempered boor has another wife and two children. He bids her persistently to go home and get her share of the family property. Thinking of the lamentable condition of her mother and two younger sisters she refuses to do so. Consequently he beats her ruthlessly.

> One time he kicked me in the stomach. I fell flat on my face. That day I broke my front tooth, see . . . From going there till now I haven't had even one meal that was enough to satisfy my hunger. Not for a moment have I enjoyed peace of mind. I am not a wife. Just a servant. I have to make money by beating out the fibre from coconut husks for someone. If I don't make as much as he expects, he beats me. He never gives me anything. When I was out . . . . . For four days in a row . . . . I had to starve (Me Grand Dad 34-35).

Majid's father in the same novel is also a domineering and rude husband, though not a bully like Suhra's husband. The conversation between him and his wife in the sixth chapter of the novel makes it clear. When the husband pokes fun at the wife asking, "Did your bapa learn how to write? -- No! Of course not! Did your brothers learn? -- No!", the wife naturally gets offended. She retorts sarcastically: "Oh, all your people learnt a great deal!" Majid's father is now made speechless for a while because he has not learnt how to write. Her husband's silence, however, inspires Majid's mother to go further. She reminds him of the fact that his father and mother also were illiterate. On hearing this Majid's father gets angry and bawls: "If you talk too much, I'll kick the life out of you! You understand? -- No!" (Me Grand Dad 20-21).

According to Majid his father will definitely make a scene in case his mother opens her mouth further.

> If umma had made any sort of reply to that, there would right away have been a real rumpus. He would have picked up the betel-box and flung it into the yard; he would have beaten umma; he would have beaten Majid; he would have beaten Majid's sisters. Not only that, he would have uprooted all Majid's plants . . . So umma said nothing (21).

Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that all the Indian wives do not believe in the sanctity of such a tradition regarding man and wife relationship. There are a number of Indian women who are determined to resist the male dominance in marital life. Ponni of The Dark Room, the headmaster's wife, who makes brief appearances in The English Teacher and Kunjuthachumma of Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant are good cases in point. These characters seem to have taken the vow that they will not be silent sufferers before the atrocities of their husbands. They even go to the extent of trying to put their husbands under their control.

Ponni's husband Mari is a blacksmith-cum-burglar. He is a drunkard as well. But he is as meek as a lamb before his wife. Rather she has a knack of keeping him quite under her control. She reveals it to Savitri: "Keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right. Show them that you care for them and they will tie you up and treat you like a dog" (The Dark Room 136). See how she manages her husband when he comes home drunk:

> But when I know that he has been drinking, the moment he comes home, I trip him up from behind and push him down, and sit on his back for a little while; he will wriggle a little, swear at me, and then

> sleep, and wake up in the morning quiet as a lamb. I can't believe any husband is unmanageable in the universe . . . (136-137).

Savitri's friend Gangu is a wife who does not care for her husband at all.

> She left home when she pleased and went where she liked, moved about without an escort, stared back at people, and talked loudly. Her husband never interfered with her but let her go her own way, and believed himself to be a champion of women's freedom (The Dark Room 19).

But compared to the headmaster's wife of The English Teacher Ponni and Gangu are far better. The headmaster's wife is the devil of a woman. The headmaster himself tells Prof. Krishnan about his wife:

> Can't get a straight answer from her, at any time of the day! There are people in this world who have rough tongues but who are soft at heart-- but this lady! (145).

When the headmaster takes Prof. Krishnan to his house, Krishnan is confronted with a "terrible domestic condition" (144). Without

caring the least for the presence of a guest, the headmaster's cantankerous wife mutters, gritting her teeth:

> So you have found the way home after all! . . . How long must I keep dinner waiting? Do you think I am made of stone? (144).

Then the headmaster replies that nobody asked her to wait. On hearing this she gets provoked further and unleashes her vile tongue again:

> You are not to decide who should wait and who should not. You and your school! You don't know the way back from your school, I suppose (144).

At this juncture the headmaster reminds her of the presence of a cultured visitor and bids her to keep quiet lest the visitor should laugh at them. Instead of bringing forth the desired effect, her husband's cautioning adds fuel to her burning rage, and she goes to the extent of insulting the guest:

> Let him, what do I care? If he is big, he is a big man to you. He is not a big man to me. What do I care? Answer me first. Where were you all the time? Do you think I am a paid watch-keeper for this house? (144-145).

The poor headmaster is now driven to despair and he remarks

poignantly:

> I can't bring a gentleman to visit me without your driving him away with your fine behaviour (145).

Later on the headmaster explains why his wife has become such a nasty woman:

> I was the only son of my father, but he said such bitter things that I left home. We had a fine house in Lawley Extension, you wouldn't believe it. I was brought up there, it is the memory of those days which is rankling in my wife's heart and has made her so bad and mad . . . my wife thought I would occupy that house after his death, but not I (146-147).

Kunjuthachumma of Basheer's novel Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant also becomes a bad-tempered and quarrelsome wife in a similar fashion when her family collapses all on a sudden into utter poverty. For some years theirs had been the wealthiest family in the village. Naturally Kunjuthachumma had been living a pompous life. There had been several servants and helpers in the house. So Kunjuthachumma's main occupation was chewing betel and talking.

> Decked out in all her jewelry, wearing gold-threaded head-shawl and silk kuppayam (a substitute for blouse) and dressed in a double lower cloth also made of silk, she sits by the betel-box on a finely woven mat. She will not go barefoot. Umma (Kunjuthachumma) walks only on wooden sandals. Both the toe-grips of umma's wooden sandals are made from the tusk of uppuppa's (her father's) elephant (56).

It is from such a lofty status that she stumbles into the ditch of poverty. But she cannot reconcile herself to this stunning reality. She gives vent to her frustration by way of quarrelling with her husband, whose lapses and inefficiency are responsible for their downfall. She cannot stand the sight of her husband.

> She finds fault with him for everything and abuses him too. Nor does she do it quietly; passers-by can hear it. People all over the place make fun of them, laugh at them. But what can be done? Umma always tries to find some new name to ridicule him with. Thus umma labelled bapa, 'Shrimp-dealer Adima' (76).

The oft-repeated quarrel between Kunjuthachumma and her husband Vattan Adima finally leads to manhandling. One day Vattan Adima comes home hearing his wife talking about something in a loud voice. He asks her to keep quiet. But Kunjuthachumma takes no notice. Though her husband repeats his bidding, she continues to defy him. This infuriates Vattan Adima and he approaches her with a menacing look. Seeing this Kunjuthachumma laughs sarcastically and says in a singsong tone:

> Shrimp-dealer Adima has come to frighten Anamakkar's darling daughter! (78).

Before she can finish these words something terrible happens. With his right hand her husband catches her by the throat. As the grip on the throat becomes tighter Kunjuthachumma's stare becomes fixed. Between his teeth Vattan Adima mutters softly that he will kill her.

> Bapa lifted umma by the neck as if she were a small child and then dropped her. He kicked both her wooden sandals outside. Umma lay there motionless! (78).

This is the one and only occasion when Vattan Adima is angered to the extent of losing self-control and laying hands on his wife. In fact

he loves her deeply. That is why he feels repentant of his deed and comes forward to rub his wife's body when he hears her asking their daughter to do so. He asks his daughter to move and "went up to umma and started rubbing her down" (79).

Beneath the periphery of rudeness and rough words Kunjuthachumma, too, is an affectionate wife. It is quite evident when she asks her husband:

> You want to kill me and marry again, don't you? (79)

The marital life of Prof. Krishnan and Susila in The English Teacher is entirely different from the lives of all the couples mentioned above. It is a life of mutual devotion. Neither the husband nor the wife tries to dominate the other. They quarrel with each other just for once, but their mutual affection is so deep that they cannot prolong their discord. Hence just an invitation to go to a cinema is enough to bring about reconciliation between them. About this unfortunate but short-lived quarrel Krishnan recollects later:

> By the time we were coming out of the Variety Hall that night we were in such agreement and showed such tender concern for each other's views and feelings that we both wondered how we could have treated each other so cruelly (51).

Krishnan has immense faith in Susila's skill and efficiency as a house-wife, and leaves the entire household affairs under her charge. She rises upto his expectation. Her meticulous and highly economic way of preparing the list of provisions wins his special applause:

> She was very proud of her list. It was precise. Every quantity was conceived with the correct idea as to how long it should last. There were over two dozen different articles to be indented and she listed them with foresight and calculation (40)

Day by day their affection and attachment get deeper and deeper, and both become indispensable to each other. Hence her falling ill all on a sudden breaks him down completely. His anxiety about her recovery knows no bounds.

> Three days, four, five and six days passed and still she did not leave her bed. It was difficult for her to swallow any food or medicine. . . . The grey, vine-patterned bed-spread, green shawl, and that girl lying with her face to the wall, hardly awake for two hours in a day -- it shattered my peace (18).

When she shows slight improvement he feels immensely relieved.

> My wife changed her dress, combed her hair, and ate a little food, though she said it tasted bitter. She looked refreshed. She remade her bed. I was elated. The gloom which had hung on me for these four days lifted, and I hummed a little tune to myself as I went to my room (70).

But that improvement does not last long. The illness gets aggravated and she becomes bedridden. At this juncture he transforms into a devoted nurse and takes charge of the sick-bed.

> I sat in that chair watching her sleep, every hour or so pouring into her throat medicine or barley water or glucose. I hardly stirred from the place, and got up only at nine in the evening when my father-in-law or mother-in-law (both of whom had arrived a few days before) took charge of the patient (80).

Yet another face of Indian domestic life can be seen in Basheer's novel Pattumma's Goat. The novel tells the story of a typical poverty-stricken family found in any Indian village. It is a jumbo family with so many men, women and children. They have a meagre income and it is very hard to make both ends meet. Hence quite befitting to the

tradition set by their ancestors and upheld by their counter-parts in any other Indian village the women folk of the house take it as their privilege to endure privation. They curtail the family expenditure considerably by depriving themselves of nutritious food items. Basheer comes to know of this glorious sacrifice-cum-pitiable secret quite accidentally.

He notices that his mother, sisters and sisters-in-law do not eat rice regularly. That is to say they do not get any. There is rice for the men and children only. The women live on tapioca.

> In the morning at eleven o'clock they pound the dried tapioca into a powder and make puttu with this instead of the usual rice-flour. They put a pinch of tea leaves (generally this is given by Sulaiman) into some hot water and drink it without sugar or milk. After that they work . . . (Me Grand Dad 162).

According to Basheer this practice of women enduring privation is not confined to his house alone. This is how things are going on in almost all middle-class homes (162).

We cannot cite any instance of such a sacrifice from Narayan's novels, because he deals with upper middle-class families alone. And

it goes without saying that extreme poverty and privation are something alien to such families.

Till recent times family ties had been very strong in Indian villages and jumbo families or joint families had been a common sight. Referring to this practice of too many members living together under the same roof M.N. Srinivas has pointed out in his book Village, Caste, Gender and Method:

> . . . and the female heads of such families have considerable work and responsibility. They have to look after the cooking arrangements for a large number of adult men and women including servants, and the special needs of infants, sick and old members. They have to allocate domestic work among the different daughters-in-law and servants (143).

In Narayan's The Man-Eater of Malgudi the main character, Nataraj gives a description of such a huge family that lived together for so many years:

> All the four brothers of my father with their wives and children, numbering fifteen, had lived under the same roof for many years. It was my father's

> old mother who had kept them together, acting as a cohesive element among members of the family. . . . It had been a crowded house since the day it was built by my father's grandfather, numerous children, womenfolk, cousins, relatives and guests milling in and out all the year round . . . (11-12).

But as times changed even the innocent village folk became less tolerant and more cantankerous. Hence some silly incident was more than enough to provoke quarrels among members of the family. When such quarrels became recurrent, living together under the same roof turned out to be an ordeal, and the joint family system gradually ceased to exist. The family of Nataraj's father described above breaks up in this way.

The trouble starts with one of Nataraj's aunts, who complains loudly one day that her children have been ill-treated and she is hated by everyone. Without the least hesitation her husband upholds her cause. Soon various other differences appear among Nataraj's uncles and their wives, although the children in the house continue to play in the open courtyard, unmindful of the attitude of the elders to each other.

Before the year is out, on a festive day, they have their biggest open quarrel, provoked by a minor incident in which an eight-year old boy knocks down another and snatches a biscuit from his mouth. A severe family crisis develops, as the mother of the injured child slaps the offender on his bare seat. Nataraj's father and uncles are sitting around, eating their midday meal. Two of Nataraj's uncles, incensed at the incident, get up without touching their food. Then his father comments without looking at anyone in particular, "You need not abandon your food. This is a sacred day. Such things should not be allowed to happen" (12). Hearing these words Nataraj's mother, who is standing near his father, serving ghee, asks him in a whisper to mind his business. She adds that Nataraj's uncles are not babies to be taught how to conduct themselves on a festive day.

Nataraj's father accepts her advice without a word and resolves at that moment to break up the joint family in the interests of peace (12).

In The Painter of Signs, too, there is a brief reference to the joint family system. In a conversation with Raman, Daisy speaks of her childhood which was spent in a large joint family consisting of numerous brothers, sisters, uncles, sisters-in-law, grand-aunts, and cousins (128).

Any way in Narayan's novels the reader gets only passing references to the system of too many persons living together under the same roof; whereas Basheer's novel Pattumma's Goat is entirely devoted to the portrayal of such a family. It is the story of the author's own family, and he makes a commentary on its over-crowded state:

> My house is just a small building with a thatched roof. Who are all those who live in it? There is my umma; my next younger brother Abdul Khader, his wife Kunjanumma, their darling children Pattukkutti, Arifa and Subaida; the next younger brother after Abdul Khadar, namely Muhammed Hanifa, his wife Aisomma, their darling children Habibu Muhammed, Laila and Muhammed Rashid; Hanifa's younger sister Anumma, her husband Sulaiman, their darling child Saidu Muhammed, and lastly my youngest brother Abubaker (Me Grand Dad 133).

The author has one more sister called Pattumma. Though she lives with her husband Kochunni and only daughter Khadija in a separate house she spends the day-time at her mother's. After sending her husband off to his trading, "Pattumma washes all the pots and pans,

stands them upside down to dry, and then comes straight to our house with her small daughter, Khadija" (136). Before that she sends her goat to her mother's so that it can fill its stomach with jack-leaves and kanji-water available there.

With so many men, women and children huddled together under the same roof, naturally there arise quarrels. The chief cause for quarrel among the women folk is Pattumma's goat. The goat eats everything including the author's books, the bananas kept for him to eat and the food items kept for the children and women in the house. Whenever somebody makes a complaint against the troubles caused by the goat, Pattumma gets angry which is invariably followed by a quarrel. One day the author himself catches the goat red-handed while it is eating the bananas kept for him. He calls in his sisters Anumma and Pattumma to witness the goat's deed. Then Pattumma defends the goat saying, "It's because it's hungry." Anumma crosses that statement: "No matter what it eats, it'll still be hungry. It steals my goat's grass and eats it." On hearing this Pattumma gets angry and snubs Anumma: "That's enough of that! Your goat's grass!" (Me Grand Dad 163).

Quarrels occur among the brothers as well. One day while the author returns home from an outing he finds

> Abdul Khadar and Hanifa were there quarrelling. The cause of the quarrel was nothing in particular; Abdul Khadar had come to know the previous day that Hanifa gave nothing towards the cost of food for the house. Hanifa did not like that. So he and his family were going to leave! (151)

Though Hanifa repeats this threat of leaving the mother's house with his wife and children quite often, he never ventures to do so.

Similarly the petty quarrels in the house never lead to a crisis and break up of the household, because underneath the periphery of quarrels and heated exchange of words members of that family are strongly linked together with a pure and artless sense of oneness. In other words, as Dr.R.E. Asher puts it, each and every member of this huge joint family loves each other strongly, but

> This affection is far removed from sentimentality and is not expressed directly in words. Indeed, it is more usually expressed in a negative way, through the regular petty quarrels or the small jealousies, all of which somehow serve to emphasise the bonds that bind together those involved (Basheer: Malayalathinte Sarga Vismayam 56).

Another aspect to be noted here is that not only his mother but his brothers and sisters as well demand money from Basheer frequently. Whenever a money order comes for the author they will definitely know it, for they have asked Kuttan Pillai, the postman to let them know first (Me Grand Dad 181). And the moment the money is handed to the author by Kuttan Pillai "they all just grabbed it and left me (Basheer) with nothing" (164). Besides money the author gives them so many things as per their demand.

> I (Basheer) gave them money, I bought pots and pans for them, I bought tumblers, I bought head-cloths for the women to wear (164).

Anyway one cannot say that Basheer's relatives are exploiting him. They have every right and reason to ask for whatever they want from him. He is the eldest male member of the family and is blessed with frequent arrival of money orders. Besides, as his mother puts it, he is "just a single person with only one stomach to think of" (144). On the other hand, his brothers are all married and have two or three children to look after. And none of them has a steady and sufficient income.

It is to be specially noted that none of them seems to have the least hesitation in asking for money or other things from the author.

They simply feel as if they were taking it from their own pockets or money-boxes.

Moreover, all of them are keen on supplying him with whatever he requires. They all know that Basheer has come to stay at home as a man failing in health. They are well aware of the fact that he should be provided with nutritious food items, too. So they bring for him

> tomatoes, pineapples, sweets and several varieties of banana. It was only the sweets that I (Basheer) paid good money for. They were useful for stopping the children's crying. The rest of the items my brothers and Kochunni and Sulaiman (Basheer's brothers-in-law) brought for me (Me Grand Dad 142).

The author cannot refute his brother Abdul Khadar's assertion:

> Don't you have everything you need here? You have oil, ghee, milk, tea, beedis, matches, bananas, tomatoes, pineapples, plantains, jackfruits, meals; and umma, me, Abu and Kochunni as company? . . . (151).

The author himself admits that he is given special consideration:

> In my house, however, no-one uses milk. I take ghee and drink milk. But mine is a special case (164).

In short, what you see here is a give-and-take between siblings. And through this give-and-take Basheer's brothers and sisters express their eagerness to establish the fact that he is theirs and they are his.

The reason why Narayan has highlighted only the unpleasant aspects of the joint family system is that he did not have any experience of having lived in a joint family. In his autobiography My Days Narayan has made it clear that he had spent his childhood at his grandmother's, where he had only his grandmother and uncle to live with. It is true that he had returned to live with his parents towards the end of his high school days. But there too he did not have to live with so many members. Apart from his parents, he had only three siblings to share that house. Hence it is evident that Narayan had gathered some second-hand information regarding the joint family system; and that too from somebody belonging to a discordant and disintegrating family.

Basheer and Narayan have dealt with almost all the different forms and types of family relationships and interactions. These, of course, help the reader to get a glimpse of Indian domestic life in all its variety and colour.

Chapter III

THE RHYTHMS OF RURAL LIFE

With all the hectic activities on the line of urbanization, India can still be described as a huge cluster of villages. Hence Gandhiji's reiteration that India lives in villages is quite relevant even today. Naturally most of the prominent Indian writers have a rural background and a major share of their works deal with rural life and rustic characters.

R.K. Narayan and his works, however, do not come under this category. Though Narayan is quite eloquent and elaborate in portraying the domestic life of the upper middle-class families of Malgudi town, he seems quite reticent in the presentation of rural life. He does not explore rural situations or depict rustic characters in detail. In short, his knowledge of village life and rustic characters appears to be very limited. But there are some rustic characters scattered in some of his novels like The Dark Room, The Guide, The Financial Expert, The Man-Eater of Malgudi and A Tiger For Malgudi. Restricted though they are to brief appearances, these rustic characters, however, have been endowed with some of the prominent virtues commonly found among the village folk, such as, innocence, simplicity, sincerity and selfless affection for fellow-beings.

Mari's wife Ponni in The Dark Room is a cantankerous woman who domineers over her husband. She even goes to the extent of persuading her husband to do burglary in the neighbouring villages. But the very same woman takes all the pains to be a fine hostess to Savitri when the latter reaches their village after her futile attempt to commit suicide by drowning in the river Sarayu. As soon as she hears from her husband that Savitri is lying on the river bank, she makes him run thither, shouting, "You can't leave a woman helpless all alone there. Go there this minute and see if she is all right" (134)..

She invites Savitri to her house. But Savitri declines the invitation. Then Ponni says:

> I see you are a Brahmin and won't stay with us. I will ask someone of your own caste to receive you. . . . Or stay in our house. I will clear a part for you and never come there. I will buy a new pot for you, and rice, and you can cook your own food. I will never come that way. I will never cook anything in our house which may be repulsive to you (137).

Ponni's invitation, however, persuades Savitri to go with her. On reaching home, Ponni takes out her best mat, unrolls it, and requests

Savitri to sit down on it (155). Then taking her husband to the back-yard she makes him climb a coconut-tree and pluck a couple of coconuts saying, "Here is the lady. We shall have to give her something that she will accept from us . . . Now get up this tree and pluck a couple of coconuts. We will beg her to drink at least the water in them" (156). But Savitri refuses to drink the coconut water. She tells Ponni quite adamantly, "I am resolved never to accept food or shelter which I have not earned" (157). Ponni becomes much distressed and she pleads, "Please take this coconut, sister. It rends my heart to see you starve. You have been in the water a long time" (158).

Ponni finds it a sacred duty on her part to be the hostess of that run away woman. Hence she goes on beseeching:

> Please rest here tonight. You will be making me very proud and happy if you will kindly accept my hospitality for just this night. . . . I will prostrate myself at your feet and never rise unless you say 'yes' (171).

At last Savitri consents to stay with them. But she persists that she should get some job for her subsistence. Then Ponni bids her husband to seek a situation suitable for the lady. Mari shoulders the

responsibility quite willingly. He tramps the village streets up and down, speaks to all sorts of people about the woman, but receives no help from anyone. Towards the end of the day, however, he succeeds in procuring a job for Savitri -- "Sweep the god's shrine, scrub it, and tend the garden" in a temple (166).

Captain, the circus owner in A Tiger For Malgudi also experiences how cordial village folk are in receiving and entertaining guests. While he goes to the village, which is haunted by the Tiger, in order to capture it, "some rushed into their homes and brought out ancient stools and benches and offered him seats. Some brought him tender coconut and chipped off the top and offered him a drink. Others brought him papaya and banana" (41).

In the brief biography of Basheer contained in the first volume of Basheer: Sampoorna Krithikal it has been recorded that Basheer was born and brought up in a village called Thalayolapparamba. Hence his portrayal of village life has got a touch of authenticity. Through his novel trio, namely, Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan, Aanavaariyum Ponkurisum and Mucheettukalikkarante Makal he tells the story of a people who are untouched by the evils of urbanization. A village called Sthalam is the background of these people. Hindus, Muslims and Christians constitute the population of Sthalam. But they live as the

members of a single family. They are strongly bound together with the deepest sense of fraternity and oneness. Whenever anyone of them is confronted with a problem the entire village folk consider it as their own and make joint efforts to solve it.

In Mucheettukalikkarante Makal such a situation arises as Ottakkannan Pocker refuses to give his one and only daughter Sainaba in marriage to her lover Mandan Muthapa. A great majority of the villagers come forward in support of Muthapa and launch a people's war against Ottakkannan Pocker.

> Thus the first people's war of Sthalam was declared. An unrelenting war indeed! The news of this war spread everywhere in Sthalam like a wildfire. The inhabitants of Sthalam, who have the tradition of having waged many a war, became very active. All on a sudden they split into two groups. The two policemen of the police outpost were on Pocker's side at the beginning. But later on most of the people including these policemen crossed over to Muthapa's side (Basheer: Sampoorna Krithikal I: 661-662).

Slogans such as 'Mandan Muthapa Zindabad!' and 'Down with Ottakkannan Pocker!' begin to be shouted.

> People were eager to praise Muthapa and they entertained him with tea. At the same time they abused Pocker and decided not to give him even lime (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 662).

Finally Pocker is left with no other option but to succumb to the popular demand.

> At last, Pocker married sainaba to Muthapa. All the people participated in the marriage. They were given sherbet to drink, betel-leaf, arecanut and lime to chew, and beedi to smoke -- at Muthapa's expense. That night there were fireworks too by the people (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 666).

In Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan you find the people once again joining hands to fight out another injustice. A rumour is heard that two of their comrades Thorappan Avaran and Driver Pappunni have been arrested. They conduct a huge march to the Police Station to register their protest.

> Under the noble leadership of Aanavaari Raman Nair and Ponkurisu Thoma they marched with discipline through the Chennan maidan to the Police Station and roared out slogans: 'Let the Government perish! People who have the tradition of fighting injustice will resist this atrocity unitedly! Thorappan and Driver Zindabad! Down with the moorachi Government! Down with the Police, the yes-men of the Government! Thorappan and Driver Zindabad! (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 744).

The same sense of unity is exhibited in their effort to build a school for the village in Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan.

> Kunnethazhath Kuttyali Mudalali donated the Chennan maidan to the people for building the school. Laterite and cement were provided by Pathros Mappila. These materials were carried almost three fourth of a mile from Chandakkadavu to Chennan maidan by Aanavaari, Ponkurisu, Mandan Muthapa, Ottakkannan Pocker, Pachu the drunkard, Ettukaali Mammoonju, the two police moorachis, Kochu Thresiya and Lechippennu under

> the leadership of the sanyasis. People encouraged all these, shouting inquilaab and other slogans, such as, 'school zindabad! Kunnethazhan zindabad! Kariyil zindabad!' (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:772).

For the inhabitants of Sthalam Kochuneelandan and Parukkutty, the two elephants belonging to Chathankerimana, too, are beloved and inseparable comrades. Hence when Muthapa reports in Aanavaariyum Ponkurisum that the police moorachis say that Kochuneelandan is to be shot dead, the men folk of Sthalam rush to the Police Station for the third time.

> People advanced together roaring out slogans. They besieged the Police Station. The police moorachis, the yes-men of the belligerent Government shuddered. Thoma and Raman Nair issued statements. The policemen should withdraw their statement that Kochuneelandan is to be shot dead, and apologize to the people . . . Finally the policemen yielded to the people's will (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:802).

It is true that quarrels and disputes occur among these rustic characters occasionally. But similar to the petty quarrels occurring

among the members of Basheer's family as depicted in Pattumma's Goat these short-lived strifes and quarrels are manifestations of their mutual affection and sense of fraternity in a negative way.

It is mentioned in Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan that Aanavaari Raman Nair is a misogynist, because

> once a young woman named Ammukutty cheated him in love-affair. . . . He does not like the thing called romance either. A love-token for him is a deadly poison and so he rejects it. Don't see it, don't touch it, don't eat it. It is his vow; (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 732).

Everybody in Sthalam knows it. Still Thoma makes Raman Nair eat "roasted jack-seed, dried coconut, a pastry sweetened with jaggery, roasted cashew nut" which have been presented to Thoma by his beloved Kochu Thresya (732). But Thoma does not tell Raman Nair from where he got all these things. No doubt, it is treachery on the part of Thoma. Naturally Raman Nair becomes mad with rage when he comes to know of Thoma's foul play. Roaring out abuses he rushes to Thoma.

> There follows a duel between Aanavaari and Ponkurisu. Pushing, thrusting, abuses - wrestling! (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 738).

Though the fight continues for some time it is not a neck and neck one, because "while considering the constitution, Aanavaari is very strong" (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 741). Anyhow Thoma succeeds in getting himself freed from Raman Nair's grip and runs away. Later on he creates an impression that he is armed with some poisonous worms and will throw them at Raman Nair.

Can this move by Thoma be justified? Isn't it a heinous way of retaliation? People take sides and indulge in arguments and counter-arguments. And within no time the issue takes on a dangerous colour -- a communal tinge! The Christians come out in support of Thoma with the threat "we will beat the Nairs!" Consequently the Nair community arrays themselves enbloc behind Raman Nair and retorts: "We will beat the Christians!" (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:743).

But these threats and discord end then and there. Since they are bound by the deepest sense of fraternity and oneness they find it quite easy to forgive and forget. The arrest of Thorappan Avaran and Driver Pappunni does have a magical impact on them. They forget all the quarrels and stage a protest march towards the Police Station against the arrest (744).

If the compassion shown by Ponni towards Savitri in Narayan's The Dark Room highlights the rustic simplicity and artless affection

for the suffering fellow-beings exhibited by Indian village folk, Basheer's character Ponkurisu Thoma elevates these traits to Himalayan heights through an inimitable deed. In Aanavaariyum Ponkurisum you see Thoma assuming the role of a saviour for the poverty-stricken police constable Palunkan Kochukunju.

By profession Thoma is a thief. And it is when he plans to steal the golden cross kept in the local church that he gets arrested. His stay in the police lock-up enables him to learn about the miseries and hardships of the old policeman, Palunkan Kochukunju, who " . . . has just two months left for retirement. And seven daughters are there at home to be married off!" (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 810). Thoma takes pity on him and decides to help him. He requests Palunkan to set him free for two hours so that he will do something to put an end to Palunkan's miseries. The helpless Palunkan cannot but obey him. After about one and a half hours Thoma returns with the golden cross stolen from the church and hands it over to Palunkan saying, "sell this and marry your daughters off ! And buy medicines for your wife!" (Sampooorna Krithikal 1: 812)

Neither Kaduva Mathan, the Police Inspector nor his subordinates can find out the culprit behind the theft of the golden cross. Since Thoma is believed to be in the police lock-up at the time of

the theft nobody suspects him. However, Kaduva Mathan brings Thoma's friends Ottakkannan Pocker, Mandan Muthapa, Aanavaari Raman Nair and Ettukali Mammoonju to the Police Station for interrogation. Seating them before a bench he asks them to protrude their tongues and keep them pressed on the bench. Then he threatens them that he will nail their tongues to the bench unless they reveal the person who has taken the golden cross. On hearing the threat, Thoma, who loves his friends more than himself, gets alarmed. And he comes out with the confession that he is the culprit (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 813).

Till recent times there had existed in Indian villages the practice of village elders sitting together for discussing and finding solutions to each and every problem confronting the villagers. As M.N. Srinivas has pointed out in his book Village, Caste, Gender and Method the village elders

> administer justice not only to members of their own caste group but also to all persons of other castes who seek their intervention. Even now, in the rural areas, taking disputes to the local elders is considered to be better than taking them to urban law courts (56).

In Basheer's village Sthalam you find the senior and prominent citizens like Aanavaari Raman Nair, Ponkurisu Thoma, Chathankeri Manakkal Namboodirippad meeting, discussing and finding ways to solve the local problems. It is after discussions and consultations that they decide to launch a people's war against Ottakkannan Pocker when he refuses to give his daughter in marriage to her lover. The protest march against the arrest of Thorappan Avaran and Driver Pappunni is also a unanimous decision taken at the meeting of the prominent citizens mentioned above.

You will get a passing reference to such an assembly of village elders in Narayan's novel The Guide as well.

> They (the village elders) were sitting solemnly around a platform in the centre of the village, discussing rains. There was a brick platform built around an ancient pepul-tree, at whose root a number of stone figures were embedded, which were often anointed with oil and worshipped. This was a sort of town hall platform for Mangala (name of the village) . . . there was always a gathering of men on one side conferring on local problems, . . . (100).

The most amusing aspect of country life that you come across in Basheer's novel trio - Aanavaariyum Ponkurisum, Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan and Mucheettukalikkarante Makal -- is perhaps the practice of nicknaming individuals. Those who choose nicknames for their fellow-beings prove to be endowed with amazing power of imagination. Most often these nicknames seem to be quite funny. It may be one's trade or idiosyncrasy or some blunder committed that results in a nickname. And it is quite interesting to note that the nickname once given to a particular person turns out to be an inseparable part of his individuality. In other words, the person concerned does not seem to have an existence without his nickname.

Almost all the major characters in Sthalam have been given nicknames. And when you examine the nicknames chosen by Basheer you will be convinced that these names are at once curious, and befitting the characters concerned. Besides, these added names are in harmony with their real names. Thus Raman Nair has been made Aanavaari Raman Nair (Elephant-scooper Raman Nair); Thoma has become Ponkurisu Thoma (Golden-cross Thoma); Pocker is known as Ottakkannan Pocker (One-eyed Pocker); Mammoonju has been re-named Ettukaali Mammoonju (Spider Mammoonju); Muthapa is called Mandan Muthapa (Idiot Muthapa) and so on.

It is a Himalayan blunder committed by Raman Nair that has given him the title 'Aanavaari'. Raman Nair and his gang are thieves by profession. In addition to making thefts for themselves, they are ready to act as hired thieves as well. Accordingly Undakkannan Anthru, the chief miser of Sthalam appoints them to steal the cow-dung heaped on the river bank. This cow-dung belongs to Kunnethazhath Kuttyali Muthalaali.

It is pitch-dark as they set out for the theft. Hence on reaching the river bank Raman Nair cannot discern the pile of cow-dung. However, a darker mass comes into his view. Raman Nair assumes it to be the cow-dung and flings his spade down on it. And then!

> Then that heap of cow-dung begins to roar as an elephant, shaking the earth and the sky! All the dogs begin to bark collectively! The inhabitants of Sthalam wake up with a start (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:806).

What Raman Nair tries to dig up with his spade is an elephant! -- the elephant named Parukutty of Chathankeri Mana! Realising the perilous mistake Raman Nair runs for his dear life and climbs up a tree (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:806).

Though the nickname 'Aanavaari' is associated with this incident, it has another significance also as far as Raman Nair is concerned. As already mentioned in this chapter, while describing the fight between Raman Nair and Thoma, Basheer has indicated that Raman Nair is a man of immense physical strength (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:741). Hence the title 'Aanavaari' (elephant-scooper) implies that he is strong enough even to scoop an elephant.

Raman Nair's chum and colleague Thoma gets his nickname 'Ponkurisu' (golden cross) because of his stealing a golden cross from the local church. But Thoma makes this particular theft not for his own sake. It is for helping a poverty-stricken policeman, Palunkan Kochukunju. This unusual generosity on his part proves that in spite of being a thief, Thoma is good at heart. In other words, Thoma can be called a 'virtuous thief'.

As far as Christianity is concerned, a cross (kurisu) is the symbol of holiness or divinity. But at the same time as an instrument used for torturing somebody it has negative associations as well. On the other hand, gold, which is something precious and bright, stands for virtue. Thus the title 'Ponkurisu' is proved to be the aptest one to be conferred on a philanthropist-cum-thief like Thoma.

But Pocker has no such story to tell regarding his nickname 'Ottakkannan'. He is called so simply because he has only one eye.

Pocker's chief occupation is gambling. He cheats people at a peculiar game using three cards. And what is remarkable about his gambling is that he is the winner always. Rather he plays some foul trick and cheats those who participate in the gambling. To be more precise, he has his eye always directed towards profit-making, and in that sense, too, Pocker can be called 'Ottakkannan' (one-eyed).

Barring the protagonists of The Financial Expert and Talkative Man no other character in any of Narayan's novels has a nickname. The reason could be that they are all town-folk, to whom the practice of nicknaming is almost unknown. The central character of The Financial Expert is known by the name 'Margayya', though his real name is Krishnan. The author himself explains the meaning of this nickname and the reason why Krishnan comes to be known by this name:

> It was purely derivative: 'Marga' meant 'the way' and 'Ayya' was an honorific suffix: taken together it denoted one who showed the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble (1).

The young journalist, who has been made the main character of the novel Talkative Man, has earned his title 'Talkative Man' because he cannot contain himself. At the very beginning of the novel the man himself confesses:

> My impulse to share an experience with others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back. I don't care. I'd choke if I didn't talk, perhaps like sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst (1).

The rustic characters of Narayan and Basheer fascinate the reader with their simplicity, innocence and cordiality. These qualities, of course, make them lovable and memorable.

Chapter IV

LIFE IN THE STREET

Compared to the rural, life in urban surroundings appear much darker and seamier. But human predicament, irrespective of the background, has been a major concern of writers through the centuries. Basheer and Narayan are no exceptions to this.

In his article Samoohathinu Nere Pidicha Kannadi Tatapuram Sukumaran remarks:

> That youth with pulsating blood vessels (Basheer) wandered through several parts of India. He visited various towns, such as, Bombay, Delhi, Ajmir and Kashmir. And he saw several sights in those towns (168).

This statement about Basheer gives sufficient ground to assume that the street life portrayed by Basheer in his novel Voices can be located anywhere in India. It gives you quite a shock to go through Basheer's description of a typical Indian slum and you come to the appalling realization that it is in city streets and slums that you find the seamiest face of India. There are thousands and thousands of human creatures who are born and bred in streets. They go through an

accursed and wretched life, and die in the end like worms without being lamented by anybody.

The disgusting and mournful scenes depicted in Voices are enacted in an open space lying adjacent to a city. It is the nocturnal abode of beggars and prostitutes. With the fall of night that little space becomes over-crowded with men, women and children resulting in a non-stop clamour of human voices.

A sacked soldier, who happens to be there one night, narrates to the author what he hears and sees in that back street.

First of all he hears a strange sound -- "Gluck-gluck-gluck" --, but he cannot ascertain whether it is the sound of a dog lapping up water or it is the voice of a little child. That sound is followed by a man's voice asking, "Didn't your mother feed you? You slut. You animal with breasts!" Then a woman replies, "I am pissing" (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 95).

Lying still on the ground the narrator hears a hubbub of people talking; voices of men, women and children. By way of greeting, a man asks a woman, "Why were you lying in the path?", to which the woman answers, "I fell unconscious as I was walking." To the man's question, "How did that happen?" she reveals, "I...I gave birth to a

baby.....yesterday" (96). And it is appalling to hear the woman adding quite indifferently that she does not know who the father of the baby is.

Then there comes voices from another corner. A man is heard declaring that eleven years have elapsed since his reaching there. On hearing this declaration somebody asks him what he has saved out of those eleven years. And pat comes the reply, "Sh-shit!" (96).

Thereafter a woman is heard raging at a man: "Why do you stretch out your dirty septic foot on my face?" And the man utters something obscene by way of a reply: "It's your cunt that's septic, that's what!" (96).

After a while the narrator's attention is caught by a mother, who is beseeching her baby to fall asleep because one of her 'customers' is about to reach:

> Son....mother's little darling....drink your fill, son....and sleep....someone is coming to mother....He....he will give us money....son, go to sleep (97).

What falls next in the narrator's ears is a proud utterance by a woman:

> My mother gave birth to me in a gutter. Even then I have had two husbands and nine children (97).

Then there follows a verbal fight regarding the ownership of that open space. The persons involved in the fight belong to three different communities, and each of them claims that the place belongs to his community. The heated words that they throw at each other, however, bring out the terrific reality that religious fanaticism has its roots even among these miserable beings:

> 'What is their business over here? Even though the place is ruined it is ours.'
>
> 'Shut up you dog! It is ours!'
>
> 'It is neither yours nor theirs. It is ours.
>
> And there is proof for that!' (97).

Luckily enough the quarrel does not lead to a physical fight because of the intervention of a man who is addicted to ganja. By way of asking for a puff of ganja he brings the other three back to their senses: "Ay! You want to quarrel about this? Give me a whiff of ganja and then quarrel if you like!" (97).

Presently the narrator is made to listen to an amusing dialogue between a drunken husband and his wife. Seeing her husband coming

drunk, the woman remarks in a complaining-cum-affectionate tone:

'There he comes! Roaring drunk.'

'Yesh, my honey.'

'Yes, what do you want?'

'A kish!'

'You are reeking of toddy!'

'You slut, it isn't toddy, it'sh frandy!'

'It's toddy!'

'If you call frandy toddy I'll kill you!' (98).

Leaving that couple the narrator once again turns his ears to the mother, who is awaiting her 'customer'. Her words "son, here he comes" are followed by the foot steps of the man approaching. Then the man and the woman talk something in low tones. But the narrator lies so close to them that he can hear their conversation. The man is understood to have started pawing her breast, whereupon the woman forbids him:

'Now, wait a minute. Pay the money before you start pawing!'

'Oh, you only think of money. Haven't I come all this distance because I like you?

After a choking laugh she replies:

'Affection can't satisfy my son's hunger and mine.'

'How much do you want?'

'One rupee....in advance, in my hands -- put it in my hand!'

'Here's one rupee...you slut, have you any disease?'

'Go on...! disease indeed!'

'Haven't you had anything to eat?'

'Forget the fine talk. Do what you want to do and go. Is it all right if I stand against this wall and take my dhoti off?' (99).

Amidst all these material and moral ugliness there occurs an incident that heightens human nobility -- to be precise, the nobility of a mother -- to the skies.

Though the woman suggests that she should stand against the wall and take her dhoti off, her 'customer' rejects it. He proposes to take her into the privacy and comfort of the ruined temple nearby. But

she hesitates to leave her child alone in the open space. His insistence, however, compels her to lay the sleeping child on a rag spread on the ground and accompany him into the temple.

Unfortunately for the child, it is on a patch of ground infested with ants that she lays the child. After a while the child starts screaming loudly because of being bitten by ants. The narrator, who has been lying close by pretending to be asleep, rushes to the child and picks it up. Laying the child on his lap he starts picking out the ants.

Hearing the screams of the child its mother comes running, full of anxiety and sorrow. When she sees the child on the narrator's lap she jumps into the conclusion that he is trying to steal the child. She "grabbed the child and gave me (the narrator) a kick on the chest!" (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 102). As it is the easiest way to make the child stop crying, she offers her breast to the child. Naturally the ants start biting her breast. And it is then that she realises what has really happened. Approaching the narrator she asks him regretfully:

> Did it hurt when I kicked you? . . . . . Did you pick up the baby when it was bitten by ants? . . . . . I thought you were stealing it! (102).

Then she takes out a quarter-rupee from a knot in her dress and drops it into the narrator's lap. The narrator is rendered speechless. His eyes brim with tears. He feels "as if my (his) heart had broken into a thousand little pieces" (102).

Basheer has a little more to say about that hell of a back-street:

> There were men, women, children and a few dogs. Faces lit up by the glow of fire. Nothing was distinct; red eyes, sweating faces, whiskers and beards; beggars' cloth bags; women with breasts uncovered; many communities; many fashions in dress (100).

Those who have assembled there have no specified programme of activity. They do not have any village or town of their own. This back-street itself is their home. Though they have nothing, "they had all that was needed by men. In that community child birth is not a private happening. Nor is copulation. And the children grow up" (101).

Yet another terrible picture of street life can be seen in Basheer's own novel Maranathinte Nizhalil.

> Those seen in the street are people. A collection of dreadful diseases, all kinds of foul smell and everything that is abominable. Can they be called

> people? . . . There in that street, under that lamp post a woman lies dead. A child sucks the breast of that dead body. . . . The private parts of that dead woman are naked. . . . Somebody has taken off her clothes (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 621).

The same novel reveals a much more grotesque picture:

> . . . father sells daughter; for sometime -- to a man, who is afflicted with syphilis. Just for a rotten orange. . . . Babies bite the breasts of their mothers, because there is no milk in those breasts. Hence it is their mothers' blood that the babies suck (1:621-622).

In Manthrikapoocha there is a brief commentary on the filthy condition of most of the Indian cities:

> Centenary celebrations of cities which are stinking like chronic ulcer that has become septic! Pah! Celebrations for so many days! Lakhs of rupees are wasted! But nobody thinks of cleaning the city. Nor is there any plan for concealing the drains. Nobody is there to ask people not to piss and shit on public roads (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1219-1220).

What Narayan writes about the sweepers' colony of Malgudi town in Waiting for the Mahatma is not much different. According to Narayan, "It was probably the worst area in the town." Though it is supposed to be a cluster of huts, it is

> an exaggeration to call them huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and shreds of coconut matting all crowded in anyhow, with scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust (37).

Ironically enough, though the people living in these hovels are employed by the Municipality for scavenging work in the town, no municipal service is extended to this colony. They get ten rupees a month per head for the scavenging work, but they spend all their earnings in the government toddy shop situated near the Municipal Office. These people spend less than a tenth of their income on food or clothing, always depending on mendicancy in their off hours for survival. Deep into the night their voices can be heard clamouring for alms, in all semi-dark streets of Malgudi.

The pittiest of all is that

> if a cow or a calf died in the city they are called in to carry off the carcass and then the entire colony

> brightens up, for they hold a feast on the flesh of the dead animal . . . (37).

From the description of their pathetic living conditions and the deplorable states of their hovels it is certain that all kinds of immoral deeds including 'sex-trade' take place in that colony. But Narayan is not as outspoken as Basheer in describing and revealing such matters.

What is said of Anderson Lane in The English Teacher is also a pungent criticism on the dirty and putrified states of our cities. Anderson Lane is a street within a street, and a lane tucked away into another lane. Carpenters, tinsmiths, egg-sellers and a miscellaneous lot of artisans and traders seem gathered in this place. The street is littered with all kinds of things -- wood shavings, egg shells, tin pieces and drying leaves. Dust is ankle deep. Hence Prof. Krishnan is afraid to allow his daughter to walk through that street. Unkempt and wild-looking children roll about in the dust. Mangy dogs growl at the passers-by. Donkeys are also there in abundance.

According to Narayan, there is every sign that the Municipality has forgotten the existence of this part of the town. Yet it seems to maintain a certain degree of sanitation, mainly with the help of the sun, wind and rain.

> The sun burned so severely most months that bacteria and infection turned to ashes. The place had a general clean up when the high winds rose before the monsoon set in, and whirled into a column the paper scraps, garbage, egg-shells, and leaves; the column precipitated itself into the adjoining street, and thence to the next and so on, till, perhaps, it reached a main thoroughfare where the municipal sanitary staff worked, if they worked anywhere at all (142).

In The Financial Expert Narayan has portrayed some human-shaped vultures who 'feed on' unclaimed dead bodies found in the street. When Margayya goes through the Malgudi town, "obsessed with thoughts of money" he is accosted by "A ragged fellow with matted hair" who has thrust before him a mud tray. Pointing at a sheet-covered object on the ground the fellow tells Margayya: "An orphan's body, Sir,. Have pity, help us to bury him" (27).

Margayya knows all about this drama. Such professional cheats are a common sight in every street. Whenever they find an unclaimed dead body in the street they seize upon it. They undertake to give it a burial and collect a lot of money for the purpose.

> They celebrated it as a festive occasion . . . They left their occupations, seized the body, carried it to a public place . . . and assailed the passers-by . . . (they gave) a gorgeous funeral to the body . . . and were left with so much money at the end of it all that they drank and made merry for three or four days and gave up temporarily their normal jobs, such as, scavenging, load-carrying, and stone-quarrying (28).

Repulsive and terrific though they are, such scenes recur in the existential drama acted out on the street. The works of Narayan and Basheer bear witness to this human predicament.

Chapter V

SOCIAL YOKES

Customs, beliefs and superstitions play a major role in defining the psychological and behavioural patterns of any social and cultural group. They function as invisible yokes restricting human mobility and freedom of choice. Irrespective of the regional, religious and caste differences, the characters of Basheer and Narayan attach undue importance to the age-old customs that leave not even a single aspect of life untouched. Strict adherence to the customs sometimes go to the extent of shaping the destinies of individuals.

Till recent times early marriage, especially for girls, was prevalent in almost all communities in India. And the following statement of Leela Dube in her article "Caste and Women" throws light on the fact that the practice still exists atleast in certain parts of India:

> The objective of early marriage, namely, to preserve the virginity and purity of the girl until marriage, becomes clear if we look at Rajasthan where in some areas a number of baby brides are formally married to baby grooms in a specially held marriage fair on an auspicious day. It is also customary to marry off

> all the girls in a family from the age of two to thirteen or fifteen together on a special auspicious day (14).

Advocates of early marriage like Chandran's mother in The Bachelor of Arts argue that girls should be married when they are around fourteen. If not, it will be concluded that something is wrong with the girl. Hence when Chandran speculates on Malathi's age to be around sixteen, his mother screams:

> Sixteen! They can't be all right if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty ages ago. They can't be all right. We have a face to keep in this town. Do you think it is all child's play? (69-70).

The same eagerness to give little girls in marriage had been shared by Kerala Muslims as well. Basheer's novel Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant contains a passing reference to it. Kunjupattumma, the heroine of the novel begins to have proposals for marriage at the age of fourteen. The chain of thoughts that comes to her mind makes it clear that she does not know much about marriage and marital life at that time. But she knows one thing -- marriage will provide her with

certain privileges. And the chief among them is "Then I (Kunjupattumma) shall be able to chew betel-leaf". She is well aware that

> It is not proper for unmarried Muslim girls to chew betel-leaf. Kunjupattumma is not sure whether Allah (God) or Nabi (Prophet Muhammed) have said anything regarding this. But according to custom it is not permissible (54).

Hindus all over India believe in preparing horoscopes for each and every child born in their families, and it is believed that these horoscopes destine their marriages. As the first step of a marriage the horoscopes of the boy and the girl are studied individually and together because,

> how are we to know whether two persons brought together will have health, happiness, harmony, and long life, if we do not study their horoscopes individually and together? (The Bachelor of Arts 98).

It is the duty of astrologers like Ganapathy Sastrigal, the well-known priest of Malgudi, to study and decide whether the horoscopes of the boy and the girl match or not. If the astrologer's verdict is negative the

proposed marriage will never take place. In The Bachelor of Arts Chandran's desire to marry Malathi does not get fulfilled because Malathi's family astrologer, after careful study and comparison, says that the horoscopes cannot be matched. Moreover, her father, who has great faith in horoscopy, believes "that the marriage of couples ill-matched in the stars often leads to misfortune and even tragedy..." (86).

If the marriage proposal overcomes the hurdle of horoscope successfully the girl's family will invite the boy's people to 'view' the proposed bride. This practice is popularly known as 'bride-viewing'. If the bride is gifted with special aptitudes her relatives will mention it, and the bridegroom's party can examine them. In The Vendor of Sweets Ambika sings a song to the accompaniment of a harmonium when Jagan goes to view her. Chandran, who comes to view Susila in The Bachelor of Arts is told by her father "She plays very well (on the veena), and also sings" (`161).

In The Painter of Signs Daisy gives a detailed description of her own experiences when she was presented to be viewed by a would-be bridegroom:

> They (the elders in her own family) decked me in all the jewellery pieces borrowed from my sister-in-

> law in the house, diamonds and gold all over my ears, neck, nose, and wrist, and clad me in a heavy sari crackling with gold lace. I felt suffocated with all that stuff over me. . . . And then they seated me like a doll, and I had to wait for the arrival of the eminent personage with his parents. What a fuss they made when they arrived. It's hard to get a bridegroom, and when one is available parents treat him as a hard-won prize (131).

The girl to be viewed is expected to behave just as a doll. She does not have the right to say whether the would-be bridegroom is acceptable or unacceptable to her. All that is expected of her is "to pace before the visitors coyly and reverently" (The Painter of Signs 132). There will be some routine questions, such as, "What class are you studying in?", "Can you Sing?" and the like. To these questions "all would-be brides have to answer modestly" (133). If the girl takes the liberty to ask any such question back to the person who has come to inspect her, it will be treated as an offence or insult and the proposal will be dropped. Daisy, however, shows the audacity to ask, "What class are you studying in?" The question comes out with the impact of a thunderbolt. It embarrasses the bridegroom's party, "since the bright

young fellow did not seem to have got beyond the kindergarten, his only merit and qualification being wealth" (133). And it goes without saying that Daisy's attempt to establish her identity and individuality by way of putting questions back to the would-be bridegroom is treated as 'unseemly behaviour' and the proposal comes to an end. Daisy herself makes a recollection of its consequences:

> For days no one (at her home) spoke to me. I had brought disgrace on the family by my unseemly behaviour. A highly respected family in these parts had been offended and insulted and it was going to be difficult to find a bridegroom for me any more or for the other girls in the family as well. I had damaged the family reputation (133).

Narayan exposes an amusing aspect of bride-viewing while furnishing the details of Jagan's experiences when he goes to view Ambika in The Vendor of Sweets. It is customary to provide a light treat to the would be bridegroom and his companion(s) before presenting the girl for inspection. Accordingly, at Ambika's house "a silver tray heaped with golden-hued jilebi and bonda made of raw banana, and coffee brown and hot, in two silver tumbles" are brought and placed before Jagan and his brother. On seeing these Jagan feels

"hungrier than ever" and wishes to gobble up the entire lot. But his brother restrains him with a glance, because "they were honoured visitors . . . and they were expected to carry themselves with dignity without displaying any emotion even at the sight of jilebi". Even if one is maddeningly hungry one has to say "Oh, why all this? I cannot eat. We have just had coffee and everything . . ." And it is the duty of the hosts "to press the delicacies upon" the guests, who then "would have to break off the jilebi minutely with the tip of one's fingers and transfer it to one's mouth, and generally display reluctance or even aversion until pressed again, and then just to please others eat two or three bits in succession and then take an elegant sip of coffee" (150-151).

Another curious thing to be noted here is that even though the boy approves of the girl, he should not reveal it then and there. When Ambika appears before him Jagan finds her acceptable to him and it seems to him "a matter of the utmost urgency to convey to her" that he will marry her. Therefore he asks his brother eagerly, "How will they know? Should we not tell them?" He receives but a reprimand from his brother:

> I hope you have not been a fool, telling anyone that you like the girl. One doesn't cheapen oneself (The Vendor of Sweets 155).

A number of formalities are also to be observed on the wedding day. The one that is very remarkable for the reason that it may lead to embarrassing situations is that at the time of feast close relatives, especially elderly ones should be given due consideration and respect. Otherwise they may get angry and stage a walk-out. In The Vendor of Sweets there arises such a situation on the night of Jagan's wedding feast. A cousin of Jagan's father, who has come all the way from Berhampore to participate in the marriage, happens to hold "the highest precedence in the family hierarchy." Unfortunately this seventy five-year-old 'distinguished guest' is given "a half-torn banana leaf to dine on and was seated in the company of children instead of in the top row." This lapse may have developed into a "first-class crisis", but the girl's father, at whose house and expense the feast has been arranged, openly apologizes for the slip and all is forgotten (161-162).

The poor quality of food or drink supplied to the guests may also lead to embarrassments. Jagan's wedding feast has the misfortune of witnessing such an unpleasant situation too. The bitterness caused by the poor quality of coffee supplied to the bridegroom's party by their hosts grows so serious that "one of Jagan's uncles, a very elderly man, threatened to leave the marriage party" (161).

As indicated earlier the practice of preparing horoscopes and letting the horoscopes decide the marriages is strictly followed by Hindus in Kerala too. Though Basheer has written novels based on all the major communities in Kerala, the nature of the themes chosen has not given him any opportunity to say much about the formalities regarding the Hindu marriage; whereas in Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant he has said something about the customs concerned with the Muslim marriage. The Muslims in general, however, do not believe in horoscopes. Hence no mention is made of the matching of horoscope and the like in any of Basheer's novels. But even the orthodox Muslims of Basheer's younger days had the practice of bride-viewing. Though a close parallel can be drawn between the bride-viewing experiences of Daisy of The Painter of Signs and Kunjupattumma of Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant, there is a notable difference also.

In Kunjupattumma's community the bridegroom is not permitted to go and inspect his would be wife. Instead it is the women folk of his house who perform the duty. That is why Kunjupattumma cannot gratify her longing "to see the man she is going to marry beforehand. Just see him -- nothing more. But she could not tell anyone about this desire. Is it not bad? It is not fitting for Muslim women" (Me Grand Dad 64).

Anyway she is always kept "dressed up. She has reddened her hands and feet with henna and blackened her eyes with collyrium" (Me Grand Dad 63). A women delegation may turn up any moment to inspect her. Since she is the one and only daughter of the richest family of that locality she is expected to have proposals for marriage only from rich and high-class families. Hence with a view to impressing the fastidious lady inspectors, Kunjupattumma's entire body is covered with ornaments.

> If Kunjupattumma moves, the world will know. She is shy about it. If she so much as breathes, the sound will reverberate. And if she were to walk! There would be such a clinking and clanking and clattering! Why does one need so many ornaments? May be she should take a few off. But then nobody knows when some women will come to see the future bride (Me Grand Dad 64).

The women who come to view her, too "were covered with gold. All were very grand." They ask her so many questions.

> What questions they ask! No end of doubts. . . . Some have looked into her mouth. Does she have a full

> set of teeth? Are any of them decayed? . . . Some others wanted to know if she was deaf; or whether she was well-informed. To find out they would ask various questions. 'Who made us?', One woman asked. 'Allah', said Kunjupattumma. 'What are the signs of qiyamat' That means, 'what are the signs of the end of the world?' (Me Grand Dad 64-65).

Of all the Indian customs associated with marriage the one that can definitely be called a highly harmful social evil is the dowry system. It causes untold miseries, especially to the poor. How cancerous this evil practice has grown can be understood from the following statement of M.N. Srinivas in the introductory chapter of his book Village, Caste, Gender and Method:

> The last five or six decades have seen the spread of dowry to every group in the country (India), cutting across caste, class, region, language and religion. Prosperity and consumerism have only added to the cost of dowry. And reports of 'dowry deaths', and wives setting fire to themselves by pouring kerosene over their saris, disfigure the newspapers everyday (xvi).

It is the inability to give a handsome dowry to the bridegroom that compels Suhra's mother in Childhood Friend to marry Suhra to a polygamist. Regarding this unfortunate marriage Suhra tells Majeed:

> They decided everything. Nobody asked for my consent. Umma was burning with anxiety. It was many years since those of my age were married! Unless they gave jewelry and dowry, nobody . . . Finally we mortgaged this house and the land that goes with it, had the jewelry and so on made, and the marriage took place (Me Grand Dad 33-34).

On most occasions excessive greed for dowry on the part of the bridegroom's parents degrades marriages to the level of an auction. Dowry plays the role of a villian, too, foiling love marriages. In Basheer's novel Thara Special Polly confesses that he and Ealikkutty love each other:

> I (Polly) have sent thirty letters to Ealikkutty. And she has given me thirty letters in reply.... But it is doubtful even now whether the marriage will take place or not, because they will give only twenty thousand rupees as dowry. What my father demands is thirty thousand (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1173).

There are repeated references to the dowry system existing in Kerala in The Love Letter. Saramma tells Kesavan Nair, "I think my father and step mother are going to demand some room rent from me" (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 29). She has good grounds for anticipating such a situation, because "It was with the dowry brought in by the stepmother that the debt on this building (their house) was cleared" (Poovan Banana 29). On another occasion she mentions to Kesavan Nair of the three proposals for marriage she had the previous year that got foiled just because her father could not offer any dowry:

> There were three enquiries about my marriage. They came bang-bang-bang in quick succession last year. . . . But all three enquiries came to nothing. No one would marry me without a dowry!" (Poovan Banana 33).

To Kesavan Nair's remark that if someone loves her, he will marry her without accepting any dowry she replies emphatically, "Even then, dowry must be provided. That is our religious custom" (Poovan Banana 33).

Most often the amount of dowry demanded and given will disturb the peace and harmony of the married life also. It may be a cause of

quarrel between the man and wife. Whenever she gets an opportunity the wife may try to belittle the husband referring to the dowry given to him. The husband on his turn will always complain that the amount given to him was not worth his status. You find such an instance in Childhood Friend. Majid's mother reminds her husband of the dowry he was given at the time of their marriage:

> Now we've got on to the subject of my dowry! You didn't marry me for nothing! They gave you a full thousand rupees, and on top of that no end of golden ornaments for my neck, for my ears, for my wrists, for my ankles; then there was the jewelled belt. Or have you forgotten? (Me Grand Dad 21).

But in her husband's eyes this dowry is nothing. Hence he retorts in a contemptuous tone:

> Hm! A thousand miserable rupees! Even if they gave your weight in rupees, would anybody marry a brainless creature like you? - No! (Me Grand Dad 21).

Narayan's community adheres to the tradition of demanding dowry as if it were a religious bidding. That is why Chandran's mother gets irritated when he argues against the practice of demanding a cash

dowry. He describes the practice as extortion. But his mother counters this argument vehemently:

> My father gave seven thousand in cash to your father, and over two thousand in silver vessels, and spent nearly five thousand on wedding celebrations. What was wrong in it? How are we any the worse for it? It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law. We can't disregard custom (The Bachelor of Arts 84-85).

Accepting a girl without dowry, according to Chandran's mother, will lower the status of the bridegroom's family. In his eagerness to marry Malathi, Chandran pleads to his mother: "But, Mother, you won't create difficulties over the dowry?" Then his mother replies:

> We must not be too exacting, nor can we cheapen ourselves . . . We have a status and a prestige to keep. We can't lower ourselves unduly (84).

That the proposal should come first from the girl's side is yet another time-honoured practice. On hearing Chandran's desire to marry Malathi, the very first condition put forward by his parents is regarding this issue of initiative.

> Whatever happened they would not take the initiative in the matter; for they belonged to the bridegroom's side, and according to time-honoured practice it was the bride's people who proposed first (The Bachelor of Arts 70).

In Kerala, it is among the Muslims (especially the Malabar Muslims) that you see such a custom; whereas the Hindus have adopted quite the opposite way. For them the bridegroom's party should seek the bride. Anyway in Basheer's novels no mention has been made of who takes the initiative regarding a marriage proposal.

As in the case of marriage there are also a number of customs and formalities in connection with death. And it is highly interesting to go through the various forms of funeral rites found in India. In Narayan's novel The English Teacher there is a detailed description of the rites and rituals performed in connection with Susila's death. In accordance with the traditional belief that "the body, even if it is an emperor's must rest only on the floor, on Mother Earth" Susila's body is laid on the floor (94).

Somebody is sent to bring the priest and the corpse-bearers. Immediately after the arrival of the priest they raise a small fire near

the front step with cinders and faggots. This is the fire which is to follow the corpse to the cremation ground. The bearers, after brief curt preliminaries, walk in, lift her casually, lay her on the stretcher, and tie her up with ropes. Her face looks at the sky. It is bright with the saffron touched on it. There is a string of jasmine somewhere about her head. Everyone gathers a handful of rice and puts it between her lips. Then they shoulder the stretcher.

As they enter the cremation ground her husband is given a pot containing the fire. Basket after basket of dry cowdung fuel is brought and dumped. Presently her husband goes over, plunges in the river, returns, and performs a great many rites and mutters a lot of things which the priest asks him to repeat.

They build up a pyre, place her on it, cover her up with layers of fuel. Then her husband pours ghee on and drops the fire (95-96).

Mention is made of a few more formalities concerning the funeral rites in Waiting for the Mahatma. Sriram's granny is taken to the crematorium on the wrong assumption that she is dead. Just before the body is to be cremated the priest asks for two rupees in coins saying,

> Our elders have decreed that the Dear Departed
> should have two silver coins on his or her chest from

> the hand of the nearest and dearest. It is said to smooth out the passage of the soul into further regions (179).

The priest further instructs Sriram to shave off his moustache and the top of his head. Later on the priest places a small vessel in Sriram's hand and asks him to pour the milk in it over the lips of the dead (180-181).

As indicated above Sriram's granny is not dead actually. It is noticed immediately after the lighting of the pyre. The fire is put out all on a sudden. But the priest forbids them from taking the granny back home. According to the priest it is said in the Shastras that "No one who has been carried here (the crematorium) can ever step into the town bounds again." If anybody dares to do so "the whole town will be wiped out by fire or plague" (183-184). The priest's verdict, however, gathers a lot of support and the poor granny is left with no other option but to go to Benares to spend her last days there in the company of "old persons who are waiting to die" (203).

The customs and practices of Muslims and Christians associated with death are but entirely different from the ones mentioned above. And it is understood from P.C.Kartha's Acharanushtanakosam that

even among Hindus there are regional and castewise variations in this regard (338).

There is no practice of cremation among Muslims. Instead they bury the dead. Their funeral rites are very brief. In Basheer's novel Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant you get a glimpse of the formalities associated with the burial of the dead among the Muslims in Kerala. Assuming that her mother is dead because of her father's strangle-hold (at the end of a quarrel), Kunjupattumma thinks:

> Umma's body . . . someone will wash it, cover it with a Kafan (white clothes), lay it in a sanduq (a box-like carrier for the dead body) and carry it to the burial ground chanting, 'La ilaha illallah! La ilaha illallah (there is no God but Allah)!' There she will be buried (78).

The funeral rites described in The English Teacher and Waiting for the Mahatma have already revealed the role played by priests at the time of cremation. Their importance, however, is not confined to such functions alone. For the Indians, especially for the upper and middle caste Hindus the advice and supervision of priests are indispensable whenever a new venture is launched. And as Leela Dube

has pointed out in her article "Caste and Women" "A Brahmin, . . . still performs the functions of the purohit (priest) for upper and middle level castes" (3). Hence in Mr. Sampath the day for the inaugural ceremony of the film-shooting is fixed with the help of a committee of astrologers who "had studied the conjunction of planets" (131-132). The producers of the film believe: "We cannot take risks in these matters. The planets must be beneficial to us" (132). Later on the very same Brahmins are invited to officiate at the inaugural ceremony. And the formalities observed at the ceremony are quite elaborate.

> A couple of framed portraits of Shiva and a saint, who was Somu's (the owner of the studio and one of the producers) family protector, were leant against the wall, smothered under flowers. The holy men sat before them with their foreheads stamped with ash and vermilion and their backs covered with hand-spun long wraps. They each wore a rosary around the throat, and they sat reading some sacred texts. In front of them were kept trays loaded with coconut, camphor and offerings for the gods. A few minutes before the appointed moment they rose, lit the camphor, and

> circled the flame before the gods, sounding a bell. Then they went to the camera and stuck a string of jasmine and a lot of sandal paste on it (132).

Srinivas, the script-writer is amused to see their garlanding the camera. He remarks to himself:

> They are initiating a new religion, and that camera decked with flowers is their new god, who must be propitiated (132-133).

Though DeMello, the English man, who is the director of the film to be shot, trembles to see the priests totally reckless in dealing with the camera, he checks himself. The reason is, as he confesses later,

> In this country, sir, one doesn't know when a religious susceptibility is likely to be hurt. A mere sneeze will take you to the stake sometimes - . . . (132).

It is a similar course of action that you find in The Painter of Signs when the prospective lawyer proposes to practise law. The very first thing that he does is approaching an astrologer for getting the day for opening his office fixed. Then he moves on to Raman, the painter of signs to order for a name-board. Prompted by the astrologer's words he tells Raman that he "must have the board absolutely on Thursday

before eleven", and insists that he "should not miss that time" (4). The lawyer gives certain stipulations regarding the lay-out of the board as well: "I want the letters to be slanted, to the left -- otherwise it will be of no use to me." And he adds by way of an explanation: "It's my astrologer again, who believes that a left slant is auspicious for my ruling star, which is Saturn" (5).

On the day appointed for the opening a few invitees are found being received at the proposed office by the lawyer's aged father. Then they are seated on a carpet in the passage "amidst incense, holy fire, and a lot of chanting by a group of priests." The lawyer himself is found "in a state of holiness, draped in red silk, forehead blazoned with vermilion and sandal paste. He had gone hoarse reciting holy verse all through the morning" (6).

When Raman makes preparations for hanging the name-board, one of the priests

> stretched a jasmine garland across the board, touched it with sandal paste, recited something aloud, commanding the lawyer to repeat after him, circled a camphor, and sounded a bell all at once (9).

In his book Religion of Islam C.N. Ahmed Moulavi has pointed out that "Islam forbids all forms of idol worship" (92). Hence the kind

of rituals and poojas mentioned above are forbidden to Muslims. As stated in the preface of the same book priesthood also has no place in Islam (ii). But orthodox Muslims in India are keen on having the presence of one or more preceptors from the mosque to officiate at such ceremonies as the ones mentioned above. These preceptors are supposed to be very close to God, and are considered indispensable to pray to God for the success of the new venture. Such a notion is actually the creation of the preceptors themselves so as to exploit the ignorant folk. And by and by these preceptors have risen to the stature of priests. Hence Basheer says in his short story "Visudha Romam":

> The assertion that there is no priesthood in Islam is confined to the religious decrees alone (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 378)

A comparative study of the dress habits of the characters of Basheer and Narayan reveal interesting parallels. Here it is women who show more uniformity than men.

Almost all the women characters of Narayan have been made to appear in sari. Thus Chandran, the impulsive lover in The Bachelor of Arts observes that his beloved Malathi appears in "a dark sari and a green sari alternately" (64). Savitri of The Dark Room is satisfied with

wearing some old and faded sari when she is at home. Nay, she even thinks that such saris are sufficient for visits to the neighbours as well. But it is to be noted that she "dressed her hair, washed her face, renewed the vermilion mark on her forehead" before going to the neighbourhood (11). Her husband Ramani, however, cannot approve of this view. He is of the opinion that women should dress most beautifully and smartly when they are at home.

> Why can't they (women) put on some decent clothes and look presentable at home instead of starting their make-up just when you are in a hurry to be off? Stacks of costly saris, all folded and kept inside, to be worn only when going out. Only silly-looking rags to gladden our sight at home. Our business stops with paying the bill. It is the outsider who has the privilege of seeing a pretty dress (26).

Margayya, the hero of The Financial Expert also thinks likewise. Hence he reflects on noticing his wife's appearance at home: "How plebeian she looked, with her faded jacket, her patched, discoloured sari . ." (20).

Whether the sari they wear is old or new, faded or bright, women attach greater importance to hair-dressing. Most often they adorn their

hair with jasmine. Women like Susila, the heroine of The English Teacher "would treasure a garland for two whole days, cutting up and sticking masses of it in her hair morning and evening" (183).

For an illiterate girl like Kunjupattumma, who has been confined to the four walls of an orthodox Muslim house of three or four decades ago, sari and blouse appear to be a curious kind of dress. It is with a mixed feeling of wonder and liking that she watches the school mistresses, who "wear saris" and "those small kuppayams known as blouses." She notices further that "underneath the blouse they have a thin, tight bodice" (Me Grand Dad 55).

People like Kunjupattumma's mother believe that it is non-Muslims alone who wear sari and blouse. In their ignorance they believe also that Muslims should not imitate non-Muslims in any way. That is why she admonishes Kunjupattumma, when the latter expresses desire to wear sari and blouse, "We can't do anything like that, Kunjupattumma! That's the way Kafirs (those who deliberately hide or deny the truth about God--but here, Non-Muslims) dress. We should distinguish ourselves from Kafirs!" Hence Kunjupattumma is always "dressed in silk mundu (a kind of dhoti). She wore a silk kuppayam (a substitute for blouse). Covering her head she had a head-shawl . . ." (53-54).

But their new neighbours, who are progressive in outlook, wear sari and blouse. It is at noon one day that Kunjupattumma notices the young girl of the neigbouring house for the first time. That girl is found standing by the lily pond taking off her sari and blouse. Kunjupattumma realises that the girl is going to have a bath in the pond. She rushes to the girl to prevent her from plunging into the leech-filled pond. All this while she is under the impression that the other one, who is now "standing in her bodice and slip" is a non-Muslim girl (88). Naturally when "That sari-wearing toff" says that she is a Muslim girl, Kunjupattumma wonders:

> Genuine Muslims--! She has not had her ears pierced for halqats. In the lobes of her ears there are two gold earrings (91).

If Kunjupattumma is only doubtful of the fact that their neighbours are Muslims, her mother Kunjuthachumma is damn sure that they are Kafirs.

> They are not Muslims! it is I, Anamakkar's darling daughter, who am telling you--they are not Muslims! . . . Look, that woman (the girl's mother) has flowers on her hair . . . flowers! . . . And did you

> ever see such a sight as that girl? She has done her hair in two pigtails and brings them in front over her shoulders! (96-97).

Towards the end of the novel, however, a radical change occurs to Kunjuthachumma's outlook and she marries her daughter off to that very neighbouring family of 'Kafirs'. Needless to say, at her husband's house Kunjupattumma is made to wear "a blouse and a grey sari. Her hair was done beautifully and had flowers in it" (117).

Being a man belonging to the same generation and surroundings Kunjupattumma's father Vattan Adima, too, believes that

> Muslims have a special way of dress. If it is a man, he must wrap his dhoti to the left. His head must be clean-shaven. His beard must be trimmed to a thin line, like a path going through a paddy field. If it is a woman she must have her ears pierced for the special ornaments called halqats. They must wear a kuppayam and cover the head. They can comb the hair but cannot part it (62).

Since he is the trustee of the local mosque, Vattan Adima considers it his duty to ensure that nobody goes against these customs.

Once a Muslim youth violates these rules. He lets his hair grow and has it cut and groomed. On hearing of this Vattan Adima sends for the youth and gets his head shaven with the help of a barber. Then he declares:

> As long as I am alive, with the help of God Almighty and Nabi (Prophet Muhammed), I will not allow you to break Muslim customs! (62).

You come across this 'shaving and trimming' ritual in Narayan's world as well, but with a slight difference. Here men are ordained to grow a tuft on the crown of the head, and the rest of the head should be kept clean shaven. Besides, one is not permitted to grow a moustache. Hence Sriram, the main character in Waiting for the Mahatma has to undergo much heartaches "in order to get rid of his odd tuft" and grow a crop, because his granny "would not hear of it at first" (165). Later on when he grows a moustache his granny cries out:

> Whatever made you grow one, my boy? Take it off, don't come before me with that, whatever else you may do (185-186).

In addition to the restrictions regarding dress Muslim girls of Kunjupattumma's generation had been subjected to some other

restrictions and don'ts as well in an orthodox household. For instance, they were not permitted even to stand in the courtyard of their house lest they should be seen by celestial beings like Jinn, Ifrit or satan. Hence whenever Kunjupattumma stands in the centre courtyard looking up at the sky, her mother calls her in, because the sky is not empty as it seems!

> Malak, Jinn, Ifrit, Satan -- not to mention that scoundrel Iblis, fly in the air. Suppose they see Kunjupattumma as they fly along like that -- if they are fascinated by her, she might be possessed by them (Me Grand Dad 67-68).

There are restrictions for free movement and mingling with others in the case of orthodox Hindu women also, but in a different context and prompted by a different notion. There is a reference to these restrictions in Narayan's novel The Vendor of Sweets:

> In an orthodox household with all the pujas and the Gods, a menstruating woman had to isolate herself, as the emanations from her person were supposed to create a sort of magnetic defilement, and for three days she was fed in a far off corner of the house and was unable to move about freely (164-165).

The ideal and covetable relationship between teachers and students has been one of the glorious traditions of India. Though not as common and widespread as it used to be, it still exists in this land. Among the followers of the tradition teachers treat their students as their own children, and the students, of course, show no discrimination at all between their parents and teachers in showing affection and respect. C.D. Narasimhaiah has made special mention of this tradition in his article "R.K. Narayan's The Guide":

> The novelist gives us the traditional teacher-pupil relation of this land when Raju tells us that when he had passed out of the school, the master himself escorted him and two others to the board school for admission, seated them in their new class and blessed them before he took leave of them. Such is the fear, respect and affection of the boys towards their teacher that when a schoolmaster, an utter stranger, appeared before him while he was on his way to sainthood, Raju involuntarily rose from his bed and made kind enquiries of him (179).

But you cannot see a detailed description of such a relationship in any of Basheer's novels. The reason may be that Basheer had to stop

his studies at a very early age. As described in his autobiographical novel Childhood Friend his father's harsh treatment compelled him to run away from his village while he was still a young boy (Me Grand Dad 27). However, in his short story "Aanappooda" there is a passing reference to the deep veneration and affection shown by students towards their teachers:

> Puthussery Narayana Pillai used to teach us quite diligently. He would beat us at times. Still we had affection and reverence for him (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1597).

A great number of superstitions prevalent in India have also been revealed through the novels of Basheer and Narayan. After going through the description of these curious beliefs and notions the readers will be left with the impression that this country is an inexhaustible mine of such beliefs.

Belief in omen is very strong among Indians. In The English Teacher as the headmaster comes to see Prof. Krishnan to request him to take charge of his school lest it should be ruined, "a donkey brayed into the night." Then the headmaster says, "It is a good omen they say, the braying of the donkey" (161).

While discussing the prospects of Chandran's marriage with Malathi, Sastrigal expresses confidence that the marriage will certainly take place. The basis of his confidence is "Even as I (Sastrigal) started for their house (Malathi's house) a man came bearing pots of foaming toddy; it is an excellent omen" (The Bachelor of Arts 78). But contrary to the assertion of Sastrigal that marriage does not take place.

In Waiting for the Mahatma Sriram, the freedom-fighter persuades a village shopman to destroy the English biscuits that he has kept for sale, but the latter refuses to do so. Then Sriram ventures to prevent the villagers from buying anything from that shop. Meanwhile, a little boy dashes past Sriram to the shop and hands over a coin to the shopman demanding some goods. Sriram requests the boy, too, not to buy anything from the shop. At this juncture two or three persons come in support of Sriram and they shout at the shopman to give the money back to the boy. But the shopman refuses to return the coin, and here goes his logic:

> How can I? This is a Friday, and would it not be inauspicious to give back a coin? I'll be ruined for the rest of my life. I am prepared to give him what he wants for the coin, even a little more if he wants, but no, I can't give back the cash (121-122).

A horoscope is usually touched with saffron before it is sent to the would-be bridegroom's parents, as a mark of auspiciousness. Hence Chandran notices "that the corners of the paper (Malathi's horoscope) were touched with saffron" (The Bachelor of Arts 83). During festive occasions mango leaves are strung across the door way. Coloured rice-powder is used to decorate the threshold. In Waiting for the Mahatma we find Sriram's granny securing a yard-long sugar-cane for the celebration of Sriram's birthday, because "No birthday is truly celebrated unless and until a sugar-cane is seen in the house. It's auspicious" (10). In The Painter of Signs the bangle-seller tells Raman, "it's auspicious for women to renew their bangles" during the Pongal festival (23).

People like Raman's aunt in The Painter of Signs believe that even one's death should be in an auspicious way. So towards the end of her life she goes to Kasi "to be finally dissolved in the Ganges," with the conviction that "That is the most auspicious end to one's life" (152). And it is to Benaras that Sriram's aunt goes to await death cheerfully and "look forward to the final fire and final ablution in the sacred Ganges" (Waiting for the Mahatma 203).

Jagan, the sweet-vendor also makes a similar retreat when he is in the sixties. Referring to this deed of Jagan, William Walsh has

commented in his book R.K.Narayan: A Critical Appreciation: "It is, of course, a decision in the classical Indian line" (150). Jagan's own words support this view:

> God knows I need a retreat . . . at some stage in one's life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so that others may continue in peace (The Vendor of Sweets 120).

Jagan's friend, the bearded man, too, conforms to this notion:

> It would be the most accredited procedure according to our scriptures -- husband and wife must vanish into the forest at some stage in their lives, leaving the affairs of the world to younger people (120).

Some Indians stick to the notion that certain things or persons can bring luck. That is why Kanni, the shopkeeper in Waiting for the Mahatma refuses to sell to Sriram the portrait of the lady with apple cheeks, hanging in his shop. He tells Sriram: "It has brought me luck. Ever since I have the picture there, my business has multiplied tenfold" (7).

In some of Basheer's novels, too, we get glimpses of such Indian superstitions. In Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan there is a god-man, named

Kandambarayan. The inhabitants of Sthalam have immense faith in him. One morning there spreads a rumour that two of their comrades, Thorappan Avaran and Driver Pappunni have been arrested. Aanavaari and Ponkurisu decide immediately to go to Kandambarayan to find out whether the rumour is true, or false. Then Ettukaali Mammoonju expresses his willingness and desire to join them in their mission. This poses a problem -- it is not right for three persons together setting out on a journey. "So they set out taking Mandan Muthapa the pick-pocket along with them. The omen was excellent! A tethered cow!!" (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 748).

In the same novel you find yet another superstition which is connected with the house lizard. The inhabitants of Sthalam believe that

> A house lizard is a holy creature that can distinguish between truth and falsehood, and tell you in advance about the merits and demerits (of anything) (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 746).

Choosing an auspicious moment to begin or do something is also quite common here. The novel Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan provides an instance in this regard as well. The inhabitants of Sthalam propose

to build a school for their children. They get a huge piece of timber to be used for this purpose. When the question of sawing the timber arises, Chathankerimanakkal Valiya Thirumeni suggests:

> Choosing an auspicious moment we can begin sawing tomorrow itself (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 776).

Quite often diseases are attributed to evil spirits. Basheer sheds light on this tendency in his novel Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan:

> It is Satan and Lady-Satan, and Devil and Lady-Devil who spread small pox and cholera respectively in Sthalam. And the panacea for preventing these diseases lie with Muslims and Christians (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 755).

Whenever the presence of small pox is noticed in Sthalam the Muslims get ready to fight and defeat Mr. and Mrs. Satan, the patrons of the disease and thereby to drive the disease away.

> Under the leadership of Kunnethazhath Kuttyali Mudalali all the Muslim notables, such as, Undakkannan Anthru, Ettukali Mammoonju, Mandan Muthapa (Thorappan Avaran also, if he is present) and Ottakkannan Pocker get ready

> enthusiastically! They are going to conduct a raathib (a sacrificial ritual). A ram or bull is required for this. It is the Hindus who should donate it (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 757).

The creature thus donated (to be used as the sacrificial animal) will be treated as a holy animal.

> That holy animal will have complete freedom. He can go everywhere. He is permitted to hit or stab anybody, because it is a blessing to be hit or stabbed by a holy animal. He can destroy any crop (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 757).

The raathib will be held after one month or so.

> By that time the holy animal will have become obese. A temporary thatched shed of considerable size will have been built at Chennan maidan. The holy animal will be slaughtered at dusk. Those who participate in the raathib will fill their stomachs with rice specially flavoured with coconut and spices, and meat, dhal, pappad, sugar and plantain. This feasting is at mid-night because by then only raathib will come to an end (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 758).

Similarly it is the exclusive right and duty of the Christians to extrude the devil coming with cholera. When it appears,

> Kariyil Pathros Mappila is ready! Ponkurisu Thoma and all other Christians are ready! A 'luthiniya' service; and taking out of the golden arrow (kept in the church) in a solemn procession! . . . There will be the sound of a band. Explosion with the help of a salute gun is the most important item . . . There will be hundred and one explosions. By the end of these explosions not even a trace of the devil causing cholera will be left there! It will run away! And everything will be clean (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 758).

In Manthrikappoocha when Rajala suffers from anxiety-neurosis she is taken to Sankunni Vaidyar, an Ayurvedic physician. Being incapable of diagnosing the disease, Sankunni Vaidyar declares that it has been caused by an evil spirit. Describing this Sankunni Vaidyar as a fake Basheer comments:

> Medical treatment is only an eye-wash. His chief business is sorcery! When he heard of the symptoms of Rajala's disease Sankunni Vaidyar said, 'It is an

evil spirit! Gold foil itself is required. It costs sixty rupees.'

With much difficulty Rajala procures the amount demanded by Sankunni Vaidyar and "thus a beautifully designed talisman has been tied round her waist . . ." (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1262).

The moment Kunjupattumma, the heroine of Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant begins to have a liking for Nisar Ahmad she feels a kind of indefinable, but sweet 'pain' at heart. This 'pain' gets reflected on her face and is noticed by her mother, who asks with concern, "why have you looked off-colour for some days?" Then Kunjupattumma replies, "My heart is aching umma!" (106). Hearing these words Kunjuthachumma jumps into the conclusion that her daughter is possessed by some ifrit or jinni (evil spirits).

She reports the matter to Kunjupattumma's father. And "Bapa got a string dedicated by the khatib (the head of a mosque) in the mosque and hung it round her neck. In addition to that there was something presented by an elder, namely a 'charm' in the shape of a tiny suitcase hanging from her neck" (106).

Nevertheless, Kunjupattumma's love for Nisar Ahamed gets deepened day-by-day. But one day she hears the shocking news that

"Her wedding will take place soon. Bapa is looking for a boy!" (113). The news shatters her sanity for a while. Keeping mum for some time, "Kunjupattumma burst out laughing; she laughed without stopping. Then she wept; with aching heart she wept. It was far into the night, and the whole world was sleeping. Still she did not stop crying." Once again her parents suspect, ". . . is she possessed by some devil?" (113).

Her father brings an elder to exorcise the devil. As per the elder's instruction, a pit is dug in the yard. It is then filled with live coals. Around the pit they place a few earthenware dishes with small burning candles on them. Kunjupattumma is made to sit on a board close by. The elder stands nearby with a cane in his hand. He is going to exorcise Satan!

The exorcist puts various things including incense and sandalwood into the fire over Kunjupattumma's head. And while doing it he is murmuring various incantations. "Suh, fala, hala. Exorcism of Satan!" (114).

The cane seen in the elder's hand is the famous cane that drives away ifrit, jinn, ruhani and many such evil spirits. He beats Kunjupattumma with it. Holding her by the hair, he beats her on the back, the thigh and all over. That is how evil spirits are exorcised. If

they still do not go, they will put ground chilli in the eyes. They will put fire in the palms of the hands. Then the skin will burn. It will hurt from the top of the head to the soles of the feet.

> . . . 'Say, who it is!' . . . The elder asked again. The third time it was the cane that spoke. . . . The elder beat her ten or twelve times. She cried. She cried aloud. She snatched the cane from his hand, broke it and put it into the fire (114).

Susila's illness in Narayan's The English Teacher is also believed to be caused by some evil spirit. Her mother was "convinced that the Evil Eye had fallen on her daughter and that at the new house a malignant spirit had attacked her" (83). Hence she "arranged with the help of the cook for an exorcist to visit" them (84). When the exorcist comes he is conducted to Susila's bedside. Sitting in a chair "He uttered some mantras with closed eyes, took a pinch of sacred ash and rubbed it on her forehead, and tied to her arm a talisman strung in yellow thread" (84).

In Mr. Sampath Ravi gets mad because of his unreciprocated love for Shanti, the actress. But Ravi's mother believes that "he was possessed." She recounted a dozen instances similar to his, where exorcising restored a man to his normal state" (204).

The exorcising ceremony is performed by a wild-looking man with huge beads around his neck, clad in red silk, his forehead dabbed with vermilion. The air is choked with incense burning in a holder. The exorcist has a couple of assistants sitting behind him, one bearing a cymbal and the other a little rattling drum which produces a peculiarly shrill noise. The chief man has a thin cane of a whip-like thinness at his feet, and he has smeared it with saffron and vermilion.

> The magician was reciting something monotonously in a stentorian voice, and his pauses were punctuated rhythmically by the cymbal and the rattle-drum (205).

The chants and rhythmic beats go on for a long time. Then the exorcist picks up his cane and thwacks it sharply over Ravi's back and asks at the same time, "Now will you go or not?" (208). The beating is so severe that

> Ravi smarted a little under the blow, and rolled his eyes, and the thwacking was renewed with vigour. The question was addressed to the evil spirit possessing him. Ravi winced under repeated blows (208).

Promising offerings to churches, mosques or temples, and praying at the graves of saints to get one's wishes gratified are not uncommon sights in India. In his short story "Visudha Romam" Basheer makes a sweeping comment on this practice existing in all communities. According to him this may be a bribe. From generation to generation people have been observing this.

> Hindus make offerings to temples, Christians to churches and Muslims to masjids. Who are there at these houses of worship? At temples there are idols made of granite. At churches there are painted wooden figures of Holy Mother, Holy Son and Holy Father-- and also the figures of saints. Though there are no such things in Muslim Masjids, offerings are sent there too. It is to the masjids, where holy men described as auliyas have been buried, offerings are sent in abundance. And these offerings can be anything like golden leg, silver eyes, goat, cow, buffalo and grains (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 377-378).

In this story Basheer speaks of a holy hair (which is believed to be that of Prophet Muhammed) kept in a Masjid at Kashmir. People "swarm around that Masjid like bees" to kiss that hair (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 379).

In Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant there arises a dispute between Vattan Adima and his sisters over the right of their family property. Both the parties engage competent lawyers to argue the case. Still they are not confident of gaining victory in the case. Hence "To ensure victory, both sides promised offerings to all the mosques. In the mosques flags were raised; sandalwood paste was presented" (71).

Even educated youth follow this superstitious practice hoping that they will be able to make things happen as per their wishes. In Basheer's novel Thara Special Polly, an advocate and his friend Pappachan go to meet their common friend Prem Raghu to demand the cigarette-manufacturing machine, which he is believed to possess. Driving the car slowly,

> Polly put a half-rupee coin (as an offering) in the box kept at the church (that they found on the way) with the wish that Prem Raghu should be seen at his house, they should not meet with any accident on the way, and they should get the machine easily (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1176).

People in Narayan's world also turn to temples with some offering when they want any wish to be gratified or to recover anything

lost. Thus in Swami and Friends when Swaminathan is found missing, his grandmother prays "to the God of Thirupathi Hills. . . promising him rich offerings if he should restore Swaminathan to her safe and sound" (152). Swaminathan, who misses the track and goes astray on his way back to his house, naturally gets frightened of elephants, yellow and black tigers, cobras, scorpions and demons. This crisis forces him to turn to the gods.

> . . . He promised them offerings . . . to role bare-bodied in the dust, and take alms to the Lord Thirupathi" (160).

Those who belong to non-Brahmin communities have been made to believe that Brahmins are viceroys of God on earth. If you displease a Brahmin and get cursed by him you will be ruined, and you are sure to go to hell after death. On the other hand, propitiating Brahmins is the surest route to God's blessings and thereby to heaven. Hence Brahmins have been given the exclusive right to priesthood. Accordingly they are invited to officiate at all religious and other important functions, and are given handsome gifts. What Raman's aunt reminisces about her father throws light on this Brahmin-worship which was very predominant in the past:

> My father was a priest and officiated at birthdays, funerals, and all kinds of religious functions and brought home his fee in the form of rice and vegetables and coconut and sugar-cane. Occasionally he also brought in a cow, which, as you know, when gifted to a Brahmin helps a dead man's soul to ford a difficult river in the next world (The Painter of Signs 19).

In The Financial Expert though Margayya craves for money, he does not approach any financier or economist. Instead he approaches the priest of a temple, because "He (the priest) was a wise man, well-versed in ancient studies, and he might be able to give advice" (29). Here Margayya highlights the Hindu belief that priests are thorough with the scriptures, and accordingly they know everything regarding the cause and effect of human sufferings.

True to his expectation the priest shows him the route to prosperity. He should propitiate Lakshmi, the Godess of Wealth, by performing a special pooja. Before starting the pooja Margayya must procure some red lotus flowers and "ghee made of milk drawn from a smoke-coloured cow!" (60). Then the petals of the lotus are to be burned. "Take the blackened lotus petal, mix it with ghee, and put a

dot of it on your (Margayya's) forehead after prayer, every day, exactly between your eye-brows" (60).

A great number of Indians turn to temples, churches or mosques with offerings or poojas seeking remedy even for barrenness. In The Financial Expert Margayya himself reveals the things he has done for getting a son:

> I prayed for him, and promised the Gods his weight
> in silver rupees if he should be born (160).

Immediately after his son Balu's birth Margayya goes with his wife on a pilgrimage to Thirupathy Temple to fulfil the promise. His wife "had worn a saffron-dyed sari, had carried the infant on her arms and walked behind him, as he went to ten houses and begged for alms. His pride would not let him beg", but as his brother explains,

> The God at Thirupathi does not like anyone to visit
> him as a holiday-maker, just for fun. He wants you
> to go there as a humble supplicant, in the attitude
> of a beggar (160).

In The Vendor of Sweets Jagan and his wife are taken to the temple on Badri Hill because "a visit to it is the only known remedy for barrenness in women" (167). They pray at the temple and promise to

give the child's weight in gold, silver and corn, in case they are blessed with an issue.

> The very minute he (Jagan's son Mali) was delivered (in the village home of his mother) he was weighed on a scale pan, even before the midwife could clean him up properly -- and an equivalent weight in gold, silver, and corn was made up to be delivered to the God on Badri Hill, according to the solemn vow made during their visit (172).

Basheer's story "Sinkidimunkan" deals with a similar theme. Abdul Razak and Ayisha Beebi are the childless couple here. Though they are Muslims, they turn to the gods and saints of almost all the religions to get blessed with a child. Their friend Kariyathan explains:

> It is ten years since they married. But they don't have a child. They prayed and promised offerings to Muslim saints, Christian saints, gods of Namboodiries, Tamil Brahmins, Nairs and Konkinies, the temples of Ezhavas, and Goblins, Sabarimala Ayyappan, Vavaru Swamy and Beemapalli (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 2098).

But they find everything in vain. Finally, as they lose all hopes, Kariyathan persuades them to take recourse to Sinkidimunkan, "the deity of Pulayas!" (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 2089). As per Kariyathan's instruction, Abdul Razak and Ayisha Beebi pray to Sinkidimunkan:

> Be kind enough to give us a child. We will give you the child's weight in fish and a pot of toddy, too (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 2092).

What is to be specially noted here is that even though twenty years have elapsed since Kariyathan, the agent or poojari of Sinkidimunkan got married, he does not have a child. Nevertheless, Ayisha Beebi becomes pregnant and gives birth to a male child in due course. The couple once again visit the temple of Sinkidimunkan to fulfil their promise.

In addition to dead saints and other deities even ordinary men with all human weaknesses are quite often elevated to the stature of idols. Alluding to this Indian tendency Basheer once wrote to Ronal E. Asher:

> The only surplus thing that India can boast of is our Gods and their divinity! New prophets and new incarnations appear all of a sudden in every nook and corner. And they vanish in the same way.

Asher has quoted the words in his book Basheer: Malayalathinte Sarga Vismayam (37).

This ridiculous craving for human-gods can be seen in the second phase of Raju's life in Narayan's novel The Guide. Soon after getting released from prison Raju reaches a lonely river bank. As he sits there on a granite slab beside an ancient shrine a villager called Velan comes that way. The moment he casts his eye on Raju's face he takes Raju to be a holy man. He stands for some time "gazing reverentially on his face" (5). Reading the expression of devotion on Velan's face Raju says: "I am not so great as you imagine. I am just ordinary" (8). But these words do not fall into Velan's ears. Strangely enough, Velan is driven to the conviction that the man before him is a super human who can work some miracle and convert his ungrateful and defiant sister into an obedient and affectionate one. He narrates everything related to his sister including her refusal to marry the son of Velan's cousin. She does not give any importance to the fact that both the families actually yearn for the marriage. Velan ends the story thus:

> She sulks in a room all day. I do not know what to do. It is possible that she is possessed. If I could know what to do with her, it'd be such a help, sir (16).

With the sole intention of pacifying Velan's worried mind Raju asks him, "Bring her over; let me speak to her" (16). But these words intensify Velan's reverence for Raju. He "rose, bowed low, and tried to touch Raju's feet" (16).

Once you are accepted as a holy being even the simplest of your remarks will be regarded as something extra-ordinary or divine by these devotees. Luckily for Velan, his sister changes her mind and expresses willingness to marry the man proposed by her brother. Then Velan comes running to convey the happy news to Raju. Explaining the miraculous change that has come over his sister he says that he will call the pipers and drummers the next morning and get through the marriage ceremony quickly. He adds that the astrologer, whom he has consulted already, says that that is an auspicious time. He makes it clear that he does not want to delay the happy event even for a second (29).

Raju knows why Velan is rushing through at this pace. Anybody can guess it. Hence he asks: "For fear that she may change her mind once again?" (29). But these words throw the other into a fit of admiration, and he asks with amazement, "How did you know what I had in mind, sir?" (29). Raju is now forced to remain silent, because he cannot open his lips without evoking admiration. This is a dangerous

state of affairs. He feels a strong urge to debunk himself a little. So he tells Velan sharply, "There is nothing extraordinary in my guess" (29). And promptly comes Velan's reaction:

> Not for you to say that, Sir. Things may look easy enough for a giant, but ordinary poor mortals like us can never know what goes on in other people's minds (29-30).

When Velan's sister is brought before Raju she is rendered awe-struck by his mere presence, and it is this awe that brings forth the miraculous change in her attitude. Hence she says, "He doesn't speak to anyone, but if he looks at you, you are changed" (30). In short, even his attempt to remain silent "not wishing to utter anything that might seem too brilliant" is interpreted by Velan and his men as a part of Raju's divinity (30).

Owing to some misunderstanding resulting from Raju's conversation with Velan's brother, it is thrust upon the 'Swami' (Raju) that he should undertake a fast to bring forth rain to the drought-affected Mangala village. Raju, the puny mortal gets shocked at the proposal and is compelled to reveal his past history to Velan, the first and chief of his disciples. He discloses everything regarding his corrupt

and immoral life including the forgery committed by him which resulted in his being put in jail. He finishes the narration hoping that

> Velan would rise with disgust and swear, 'And we took you for such a noble soul all along! If one like you does penance, it'll drive off even the little rain that we may hope for. Begone, you, before we feel tempted to throw you out. You have fooled us' (232).

But to Raju's dismay, Velan reacts quite innocently:

> I don't know why you tell me all this, Swami. It's very kind of you to address at such length your humble servant (232-233).

Chandran, the immature youngster of The Bachelor of Arts, who runs away from his house, is also taken to be a sanyasi. Out of quaint fancy Chandran assumes the appearance of a sanyasi with "the shaven pate and the ochre loincloth", and sets out to travel on foot aimlessly (107). In the course of this journey he reaches Koopal Village in Sainad District. At the very first sight the villagers take him to be a holy man and feel that his very presence in the village will be a blessing. Hence when he is about to go away, they beg of him:

> Master, our village is so unlucky that few come this way. Bless us with your holy presence for some more days, we beg of you (109-110).

When Chandran sits with closed eyes they take it for meditation. They bring plantains, milk, fruits and other food items for him. An important man of the village even invites him to reside in his house (109). However, Chandran does not want to exploit the innocence and ignorance of those people. He hates living as a parasite.

> The sight of the gifts (brought by the villagers) sent a spear through his heart. He felt a cad, a fraud, and a confidence trickster (111).

And finally he leaves the village "as the most decent and practical thing that he could do" (112). Otherwise he may have become another Raju.

The reverence and fear shown by Chandran's mother for ochre-dressed persons take a ridiculous and amusing turn. When the person who has stolen flowers from their garden is caught she screams shaking with excitement: "Take him away and give him to the police." But the moment she notices that the man wears the garb of a sanyasi her attitude changes: "Is he a sanyasi? Ah, leave him alone, let him go."

She is afraid that "The curse of a holy man might fall on the family." Therefore she tells the man respectfully, "You can go, sir" (43). Seeing this Chandran remarks quite cynically:

> What, Mother, you are frightened of every long hair and ochre dress you see (The Bachelor of Arts 43).

As the title indicates there is a God-man in Basheer's novel Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan. His name is Kandambarayan. He is revered by all communities in the village. Hindus, Muslims and Christians all alike believe that Kandambarayan has occult powers.

> There is nothing that is unknown to Kandambarayan. He can fly a roasted cock. He will bring back the snake that has bitten you and make it suck back the poison (from your body). He will find out treasures. He will tell you where the goods stolen (from you) have been hidden. Whether the child in a woman's womb is male or female, whether the woman you love will cheat you or not, whether the thing you wish for will be accomplished or not, whether you will pass in the examination or not, what is the apt time for a theft, details of the houses abroad (outside

> Sthalam) -- you will get all such information from him (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 752).

He is believed to be a great benefactor of the people of Sthalam. To be precise, he lives for the people. A number of supernatural beings are there to assist him.

> Seven world powers are there as his friends. The moment he calls them they will appear before him -- so says the inhabitants of Sthalam . . . The following are those seven world powers: (1) Goblin (2) Ottamulachi (3) Aanamarutha (4) Godess Kali (5) Paduvan (6) Arukola (7) Gulikan (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 753).

When you go to Kandambarayan you should not go empty-handed. Some offering must be there with you. "Black cat, black cock, owl, mango-pickle and ganja" are the items he likes most (749). His fondness for the things mentioned above makes it clear that Kandambarayan is a boor addicted to ganja. But strangely enough, the inhabitants of Sthalam attribute divinity to him, and approach him seeking solutins for all kinds of problems confronting them.

It is thus that under Aanavaari's leadership Ponkurisu, Ettukali and Mandan Muthapa go straight away to Kandambarayan to confirm

whether their beloved comrades Thorappan Avaran and Driver Pappunni have been arrested or not (747).

Soon after reaching Kaduvakkunnnu, Kandambarayan's abode, they propitiate him with some offerings, and then express their doubt regarding the arrest. Making them go through some anxious moments, the God-man makes the prophecy: "Hanthonth!" (760). It is nothing more than a meaningless and uncouth utterance of a half-conscious drug-addict. Naturally the four-men delegation cannot make out anything. Still they firmly believe that it is a divine revelation. But "What is the meaning of this divine revelation? . . . Aanavaari thought over it. Ponkurisu thought over it. And the four of them climbed down Kadvakkunnu silently and without turning back" (760-761). The mystery is unravelled at last by Ettukali Mammoonju. He interprets 'hanthonth' as 'come . . .come' and declares: "What Kandambarayan has said is Thorappan and Driver are coming" (763). That means they have not been arrested. They are somewhere outside Sthalam and will come back soon.

Basheer's short story "Manthracharadu" throws light on the superstition of using charmed strings for curing diseases and getting all kinds of wishes gratified. Magical power is injected into a string by repeated chanting of mantras (hymns) a certain number of times.

Zainul Abideen Thangal, the seller of the charmed string asserts that it is a very powerful remedy for

> Cough, pain in the intestine, burning sensation in the chest, epilepsy, possession by Satan, madness, syphilis, leprosy, gonorrhoea, back pain, night mares, disturbance by worms, anger -- (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1614-1615).

Thangal claims further that it can be used very effectively for

> curing love-lornness, for finding out treasure, for winning a lottery, for getting a promotion, for curing diarrhoea, for passing an examination, for getting sound sleep, for conception, for abortion, for getting a desired child, for defeating enemies . . . (1616).

Abdul Azeez and his wife, the main characters of the story, listen keenly to the words of Zainul Abideen Thangal, and when they come to know that the string can be successfully used for growing hair on a bald head, their happiness knows no bounds. Abdul Azeez has been suffering from baldness for several years. Hence without expressing the least doubt and without hesitating even for a split-second, Abdul Azeez purchases two strings, joins them together and ties it round his

waist with the help of his wife (1617). Then he buys two more strings and sends them to his bald-headed friend Sankara Iyer, who lives in some other place.

And it goes without saying that the string does not bring forth any miracle and Abdul Azeez continues to be bald-headed. But Sankara Iyer's experiences after tying the string are very curious. He too is not blessed with even a single additional hair on the head, but it happens quite by chance that he wins one thousand rupees in a lottery after tying the string. Sankara Iyer, however, is quite convinced that it is the string that has brought forth the money. Therefore he ties the string round his pregnant wife as a protective measure. And there happens a miracle again! Iyer's wife gives birth to a male issue! And the delivery is quite normal! (1619-1620).

In his novel Manthrikapoocha Basheer ridicules the tendency, especially of women, to believe in miracles. For Basheer's wife and her friends, who appear in the novel, a few coincidental happenings are more than enough to be interpreted as miracles.

Once one of their neighbours presents a kitten to Basheer's little daughter. The kitten is believed to be a female one. So it gets special consideration from Basheer's wife as well as the women in the

neighbourhood. The lucky kitten lives quite happily enjoying special favours and privileges. But one fine morning, to the dismay of all, it is revealed that the kitten is a male one. The women folk find it hard to believe this shocking reality. On deeper thought they are led to the conviction that Basheer is endowed with some divine power with which he has converted the female kitten into a male one. This foolish belief is based on some previous incidents that have taken place by sheer coincidence.

To Basheer's question "Do you think it is I who have converted it into a male kitten?" his wife and her friends put back a number of disarming questions:

> Who was it that caught a hooded cobra with a snare? . . . Who was it that foretold the falling of the ash-gourd? . . . Who was it that asked the jack tree to produce four jack fruits, and made the tree obey? . . . (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1240).

To all these questions Basheer has only one answer -- 'I!' But they will not believe him when he asserts that all these were nothing but chance happenings. Hence they begin to consider him a divine person.

Not only human beings but almost everything under the sky is attributed holiness or divinity. This Indian tendency has also been satirized by Basheer in Manthrikapoocha:

> What a number of things that are holy . . . Holy fishes . . . Holy serpents . . . Holy cities . . . Holy rivers . . . Holy trees . . . Holy cows . . . Holy bulls . . . Holy mountains . . . Holy caves . . . Holy colours . . . (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1244).

In a country like India that is known for its age-old tradition of spirituality and religiosity the readiness to worship anyone or anything that is believed to be holy is quite understandable. But when you probe deeper you will be amazed to note that this readiness for blind worship is not confined to the spiritual realm alone. As exemplified by some of Basheer's and Narayan's characters a good number of Indians are keen on having some god or gods in the material sphere as well. The blind and servile worship of the rulers and the ruling class is the result of this peculiar craving.

At the time of Kings and Emperors these people lay prostrate at the feet of His Majesty. In their eyes His Majesty was God's own incarnation. K. Surendran's novel Jwala is a pungent satire on this

ridiculous conviction. Janamma, one of the characters in this novel argues very strongly:

> If God has any power over men, the King also has. To whom does the whole Kingdom belong? If it is not entirely his own, why do we pay him tax? The King can take possession of any land or any person (any woman) whenever he desires so. That is God's decree . . . How is it that we become devoted to His Majesty? Is it because somebody instructs us to be so? Nay, we feel it all by ourselves (45).

And when India came under the British rule they shifted their loyalty to England. In his article "Rabindranatha Tagore" Krishna Kripalani describes such men as the toadies of the new rulers (27). The white-complexioned Westerners (especially the British) were supermen in their eyes. In short, these people found it a bliss and boon to be ruled by the British. Everything related and belonging to the new bosses began to be looked upon with veneration and awe.

Prof. Gajapathy, one of the characters in Narayan's novel The English Teacher, is such a typical anglophile. He is an English teacher and a colleague of Prof. Krishnan at the Albert Mission College. For

him English is somewhat like God's own language. Hence he finds it a great sin to make even a minor mistake in the use of that language.

One day the Principal of the College, Prof. Brown (an Englishman) happens to know that one of the students of the English Honours does not know that the word 'honours' is to be spelt with a 'u'. He gets shocked at the realization. Wasting no time he summons an informal staff meeting and makes it an issue there. Of all the members of the staff present in the meeting, Prof. Gajapathy alone shares the Principal's feelings with all its intensity. He scowls at his colleagues as if it were they who induced the boy to drop the 'u'. On his way back from the college with Prof. Krishnan, Gajapathy pursues the issue and mutters:

> Disgraceful! I never knew our boys were so bad . . .
> We cannot pretend that we come out of it with
> flying colours . . .(6).

Prof.Krishnan gets irritated to hear these words. He retorts sharply:

> Mr.Gajapathy, there are blacker sins in this world
> than a dropped vowel. Let us be fair. Ask Mr.Brown
> if he can say in any of the two hundred Indian
> languages: 'The cat chases the rat.' He has spent
> thirty years in India (6).

Mr. Gajapathy, however, dismisses this argument saying, "It is all irrelevant" (6).

Later on, when the issue comes again for discussion in the staff room, Prof. Krishnan points out that "Americans spell 'honours' without the 'u'". This statement provokes Gajapathy, and "with his loyalty of a life-time to English language and literature" he snaps: "I think the American spelling is foolish buffoonery" (16).

During his college days Chandran, the hero of the Bachelor of Arts appears to be an anti-colonialist. He hates persons like Prof. Brown, about whom he thinks:

> All Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won't do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart. They must be paid this heavy amount for spending their time in the English Club. Why should not these fellows admit Indians to their clubs? Sheer colour arrogance. If ever I get into power I shall see that Englishmen attend clubs along with Indians and are not so exclusive. Why not give the poor devils -- so far away from home -- a chance to club together at

least for a few hours at the end of a day's work?
Anyway who invited them here? (5).

But after his graduation the very same Chandran finds some kind of glory in continuing his studies in England. Hence whenever his friends and well-wishers ask him about his future plans he replies proudly, "I am going to England next year." And to the question why he is not starting immediately he answers, "We can't go to England on an impulse, can we?" (53).

Towards America too a great many Indians show a similar kind of mania. In The Vendor of Sweets Narayan has portrayed a father (Jagan) who feels elated beyond all limits when his son Mali goes to America for studying the art of story telling. He feels "so superior about it" and tells "a dozen persons every day" that his son is in America, "puffing with pride on each occasion." On his way to his shop he stops "even the slightest acquaintance" he meets on the road, and instead of discussing weather or politics, he will "lead the talk on gently to the topic of America and of his son's presence there" (51). Gradually his practice of reading the Bhagavad Gita gives way to the reading of blue airmail letters. From their study "he formed a picture of America and was able to speak with authority on the subject of American landscape, culture and civilization." Without showing the least sense of propriety,

he makes anyone met on the road his listener. Hence his acquaintances fear "that he was afflicted with the talking disease" (55).

The common people look upon those, who return from England or America, with awe. The behaviour of those who meet Mali at the Railway Station on his way back from America exemplifies it well. A small gaping crowd follow him to the taxi murmuring, "He's from America" (58).

Mali, the 'American hero' feels that he has become something invaluable because of his stay and study in America. He believes, therefore, that Indians should make use of people like him and the knowledge and skill they have acquired from America for the uplift of India. He rejects his father's proposal that he should take charge of his father's shop, and it is at this juncture that he comes out with the haughty question:

> I have learnt valuable things in the United States at a cost of several thousand dollars. Why can't our country make use of my knowledge?" (125).

He is full of contempt for his motherland, which, according to him, is "a miserable place with no life in it" (127). During his three-years' stay in America he imbibes their culture and returns to India

with a half-Korean, half-American mate, whom he does not marry formally. As his father reflects later on, there is

> not even the business of knotting the thali around the bride's neck. Nothing, no bonds or links or responsibility. Come together, live together, and kick each other away when it suited them. Whoever kicked harder got away first . . . (175).

But it is something inconceivable in the Indian context. Even Mali's father, whom we have seen somewhat intoxicated with pride and elation on sending his son to America, finds it "too much to swallow and digest at one sitting." He believes that his son and his mate are "living in sin and talking casually about it all." He wonders "What breed of creatures were these? They had tainted his ancient home" (135). But the son, on the other hand, hails all these Western ways and practices whenever he gets an opportunity. Once Mali's mate Grace goes out all alone late in the night. Jagan comes to know of this and seeks an explanation from his son. Mali's reply is insulting not only to his father but to all Indians as well:

> Who are you to stop her from going where she pleases? She is a free person, not like the daughters-in-law in our miserable country (127).

While talking about the so-called 'story-writing machine' with Mali and Grace Jagan says:

> Grace, do you know that our ancestors never even wrote the epics? They composed the epics and recited them, and the great books lived thus from generation to generation in the breath of the people (78).

On hearing this Mali jeers:

> Oh, these are not the days of your ancestors. Today we have to compete with advanced countries not only in economics and industry, but also in culture (78).

There was no scarcity of such worshippers of the West in Kerala also. In Basheer's novel Thara Special there is a character, named Polly, who is an ardent lover of the English and their products. This man has a car, of which he is immensely proud because it is "purely English -- made in England."

> His fondness for the English goods go back to his student days. The moment he hears of goods made in India he will say: 'cancel!' He is much displeased with the British for setting India free and going away (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1166).

When Polly's friend Pappachan puts forward the idea of running a joint-business, once again the anglophile within him comes out:

> This country has been ruined with the departure of the British. Nobody is secure here. Especially the businessmen . . . (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1172).

Some of the anglophiles were so blind with their loyalty to the British Government that they even went to the extent of subverting all the moves and actions of the freedom-fighters. Sriram, the freedom-fighter in Waiting for the Mahatma does have such an experience. Wherever he writes 'Quit India', the loyalists go on "amending it with: 'Don't' or 'I' before 'Quit'." Some people ask Sriram, "What is the use of your writing 'Quit India' in all these places? Do you want us to quit?" (109).

These wretched British loyalists had tried their best to mislead the common folk through their anti-nationalist propaganda. Hence a great number of the common men would

> thank us (the freedom-fighters) for leaving them alone, rather than for telling them how to win Swaraj. They simply don't care (Waiting for the Mahatma 126).

Those who were misled by the loyalists hated the nationalist leaders. Even Mahatma Gandhi was considered a trouble-maker. Like Sriram's granny these ignorant folk believed that

> the Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into the temples, and who involved people in difficulties with the police (Waiting for the Mahatma 62).

In The Vendor of Sweets Jagan's brother and sister despise Jagan for joining Gandhi and thereby becoming a freedom-fighter. His sister writes to him:

> We are ashamed to refer to you as a brother. Even when you joined Gandhi and lost all sense of caste, dining and rubbing shoulders with untouchables, going to jail and getting up to all kinds of shameful things, we didn't mind. But now . . . (141-142).

Hypocrites and fake patriots were also there in abundance. Opportunism was their motto. You have a very good example of these cheats in Mr.Natesh, the Municipal Chairman, who "conveniently adopts patriotism when Mahatmaji arrives" (Waiting for the Mahatma 26). Hoping that Mahatmaji will stay in his palatial mansion, Natesh makes a few alterations in it,

> such as, substituting Khadar hangings for the gaudy chintz that had adorned his doorways and windows, and had taken down the pictures of hunting gentry, vague gods and kings. He had even the temerity to remove the picture of George V's wedding and substitute pictures of Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Motilal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and Annie Besant. He had ordered his works manager to secure within a given time 'all the available portraits of our national leaders', a wholesale order which was satisfactorily executed; and all the other pictures were taken down and sent off to the basement room (44-45).

He secures for himself a khadar jibba and a white gandhi cap, for his wife a white khadar sari, and for his son a complete outfit in khadar. Driving his car nearly a hundred miles within the city he procures a white khadar cap to fit his six year old son's dolicho-cephalic head. On his shirt front he has embroidered the tricolour and a spinning wheel (45).

Then there is the timber-contractor, who tries his best to be in the good books of both the British and the freedom-fighters. He tells

Sriram:

> I gave five thousand rupees to the Harijan Fund. I have a portrait of him (Gandhiji) in my house, the first face I see is his, as soon as I get up from bed (108).

Though this contractor "never missed a day's lecture when he (Gandhiji) came to Malgudi," he "attended an equal number of loyalist Meetings" also. And he has his own justification for it:

> After all, when the Collector comes and says, 'Do this or that', we have to obey him. We cannot afford to displease government officials (108).

Basheer himself was a freedom-fighter, and his prison life described in the novel The Walls was the consequence of writing stories against the British Government. But apart from the vague references in The Walls he does not say much about Indian freedom-struggle in his novels. However, in some of his short stories it is a recurring theme.

Basheer's veneration for Mahatma Gandhi was somewhat like an adoration. That is why he feels immensely proud and elated when he tells his mother in the short story "Mother", "Umma, I touched Gandhi!" (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 17).

A dedicated nationalist like Basheer was naturally anguished and aggrieved at the ironical and distressing situation of fake patriots gaining the upper hand in society and subjecting some of the loyal sons of India to persecution and endless miseries with the help of unscrupulous police officials.

He has described such an instance in his short story "Kaivilangu". During one of his terms in prison Basheer gets acquainted with another prisoner, a true and loyal worker of the Congress Party. This man has not committed any crime, but is put in prison as the result of a conspiracy. An opportunist who joins the Congress Party and becomes a local leader within a short time wants to annihilate the former. Therefore "He gave five hundred rupees as bribe to the Police Inspector and made him charge a false case against me (Basheer's fellow prisoner)" (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 352). This counterfeit, who has crept into the Congress Party is held in great esteem by the society because "when Gandhiji came to this place he was the guest of that man for two days--." Moreover,

> he has erected a monument to Gandhiji at the very spot where Gandhiji used to sit.... The words 'Gandhiji sat here' have been inscribed in golden letters at the centre

> of the central room in the upper storey of his mansion (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 349-350).

In addition to the servility shown towards spiritual and material gods, Indian psyche is endowed with a number of other peculiarities as well. The most amusing one among them is, perhaps, the squeamishness about sex. As William Walsh has pointed out in his book R.K.Narayan: A Critical Appreciation this is of course "an extra-ordinary characteristic in a tradition whose public art shows sex in its grossest and most extravagant form" (80). Referring to the attitude of Narayan's characters like Seenu and Chandran towards sex, William Walsh observes further:

> Sex, even in so polite a form as arranging a marriage, is the subject of such scalding embarrassment for the young that Chandran's younger brother Seenu cannot even bring himself to voice the matter to his brother. As for Chandran, it is impossible for him to address the girl he has fallen in love with directly, and it is inconceivable that he should introduce himself to her, so that he walks up and down in front of her by the river bank as though she were behind a wall of glass . . . (41-42).

In The World of Nagaraj you find Nagaraj's wife Sita restraining herself from sitting beside her husband "for fear that the neighbours might gossip." Whenever Nagaraj tries to hold her hand and pull her down to his side, she resists and "drew herself away out of his reach." To his question "After all you are my wife, what is wrong?" She replies that such things are to be confined to the four walls of their bed-room (25).

In The Financial Expert the squeamishness about sex is exhibited in the form of timidity and fear to go through the pages of a pornographic book. Dr. Pal writes a book entitled 'Bed-Life', which he claims to be a combination of Vatsyana's Kama-Sutra (Formulas of Sexual Pleasure) and the observations of Havelock Ellis. Later on he hands the manuscript of the book to Margayya. On turning the pages of the book Margayya feels "too shy. He felt eager to read on, but put it away feeling that further inspection would seem indecorous" (68). Anyway, he accepts it to be printed and sold, but carries it home "as if he was trying to secrete a small dead body. He was afraid lest somebody should stop him on the way and look at it." He tells himself all along the road, "I must see that the young fellow (his son) doesn't get at it." He proposes "to tuck it within the folds of a stack of clothes in his box the moment he reached home" (90). When it is shown to his wife "She turned the leaves and was horrified" (93).

When you go through Basheer's novel Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant you get the impression that for Kunjupattumma's community the word 'marriage' itself is a synonym of 'sex'. You are led to such an inference by the very fact that the would-be brides and bridegrooms are not permitted here even to see each other before the marriage. Hence Kunjupattumma cannot gratify her longing "to see the man she is going to marry beforehand." She knows very well that she cannot even "tell anyone about this desire" because if she does so she will be deemed an immodest girl. Therefore she buries that desire honouring the traditionally accepted law that "It is not fitting for Muslim women" (64).

Indians are excessively fond of celebrations and festivities. In her article "Indian Customs and Conventions Depicted in the Writings of R.K. Narayan" S. Girija has remarked that "As per Hindu Sastras from cradle to grave there are several ceremonies associated with every walk of life" (30). And how enthusiastically these ceremonies are converted into grand celebrations can be seen in some novels of Narayan and Basheer.

The first of such celebrations in an individual's life is held when he is given a name. Thus in The Vendor of Sweets the naming ceremony of Jagan's son is celebrated in a grand style. The child is born in its mother's house. When it becomes three-month-old it is brought to the

father's house with the accompaniment of "an enormous load of gifts." Thereafter the naming ceremony is conducted, and in this connection "a huge feast was held for which a hundred guests were invited" (173).

The next stage in the series of celebrations comes when a child is put to school. Narayan has depicted this 'putting-to-school-celebration' in The Financial Expert. When Margayya's son Balu attains the age of six he is admitted to the Town Elementary School. Margayya makes a great performance of it.

> He took the young man in a decorated motor with pipes and drums through the Market Road: the traffic was held up for half an hour when Balu's procession passed. Balu sat with the top of his head shaved, with diamonds sparkling on his ear lobes, and a rose garland round his neck, in a taxi with four of his picked friends by his side. Margayya walked in front of the car, and he had invited a few citizens of the road to go with him as well (105-106).

There is a wide-spread tendency among Indians to celebrate marriage with the maximum pomp and show possible. Referring to this practice M.N. Srinivas has observed in his book Village, Caste, Gender and Method:

> Indian weddings are occasions for conspicuous spending and this is related to the maintenance of what is believed to be the status of the family . . . Villagers talk of the great dinners given at the wedding of so-and-so. They mention the number of sheep slaughtered, and the wonderful dances of nautch girls, etc. (176-177).

Celebration of Jagan's marriage described in The Vendor of Sweets resembles a grand festival or a huge political meeting. Jagan's father sends out three thousand invitations with the result that

> an enormous crowd turned up by every bus, train, and vehicle at the wedding . . . Jagan's whole time was spent in greeting the guests or prostrating himself at their feet if they were older relatives (160).

In The World of Nagaraj the readers are made to witness yet another celebration--the celebration of the sixtieth birthday of Nagaraj's brother Gopu. It is celebrated

> like a wedding with printed invitation and pipe and drum and garland and feast at his village home, having himself (Gopu) and his wife photographed

> in bridal costume . . . He had entertained the entire village, hundreds of guests for each meal . . . (7).

Nagaraj feels a little awkward about it as he notices

> his brother and sister-in-law going through elaborate ceremonies conducted by showy priests from Trichy and then moving around, giggling like newly-weds, with garlands dangling from their necks (7).

Celebrations in Kerala, too, are more or less of the same nature. The one and only celebration that has found a place in one of Basheer's novels is something associated with the Muslim ritual of circumcision. It is the circumcision of Majid, the hero of Childhood Friend, that has been described as being celebrated in a grand style. The chain of activities that you find here, however, has a very close resemblance with the performances associated with the 'putting-to-school-celebration' described in The Financial Expert. Majid's father makes it

> an event that enlivened the whole village. There were fireworks and feasting. Majid was brought on the back of an elephant to the sound of a band and by the light of portable gas lamps! Then there was

> the feasting. More than a thousand people took part (Me Grand Dad 13).

To be in the good books of others is a matter of serious concern for certain people, especially women. Characters like Srinivas's wife in Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi firmly believe that one is permitted to do only such things that are approved by the people around. That is why she cannot agree with the idea of her husband's waking up very early and going out for coffee. On hearing the suggestion she asks:

> When you have a house, why should you go out for coffee? What will people say if they find the master of the house going out for coffee? (37).

His wife's line of thinking, however, prompts Srinivas to think of how girls are brought up in an Indian family:

> A child's life was reduced to a mere approved behaviour in the midst of father, mother, grandmother and uncles; and later in life parents-in-law, husband and so on and on endlessly till one had no opportunity to think of one's own views on any matter, till it grew into a mania . . . (37).

His wife also must have gone through the same training with the result that

> She didn't want him to get up and go out early in the day, lest it should upset the neighbours; she didn't want to raise her own voice in her own house, lest the neighbours should think of her as a termagant, she wouldn't send the little fellow (their son) out to play with some children in the neighbourhood because they were too ragged, and there were still others who might think her plebeian (37).

It is the very concern for other people's approval that prevents Saraswathy Devi's parents in Basheer's novel Anuragathinte Dinangal from giving their consent to her marriage with Basheer. Her parents are afraid that they will be humiliated before others if the marriage takes place. Basheer can understand their fear. Therefore he gives up his desire to marry her (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1945).

In the initial stages of their romance Saraswathy herself seems a bit afraid of being seen in Basheer's company, especially by her relatives and acquaintances, and takes much care in this regard. But one day one of her friends, who is known by the initials K.S., happens to see her

walking with Basheer. The moment she notices K.S. coming from the opposite direction she becomes panicky and cries: "Oh God! I wish to die now! There comes K.S!" (1860). Gradually their romance ceases to be a secret, and the frightened Devi writes to Basheer requesting, "Don't see me. Nor should you write to me" (1863). Basheer, however, cannot act as per her request. Therefore he advises her:

> Don't try to be a good fellow in everybody's eyes.
> Don't pay attention to what others talk about you.
> Let them talk anything (1868).

In his book R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation William Walsh has made a reference to "the turmoil and hysteria with which an Indian family receives tragic news" (83). He substantiates the point citing an instance from The Financial Expert. When Margayya's wife receives a post card containing the false information that her vanished son Balu is no more, she takes it to be true and reacts quite hysterically "rolling on the floor and wailing in a voice he (Margayya) had never heard before." With all his callousness resulting from excessive greed for money, Margayya also is prompted to cry aloud "losing all control over himself" (155).

Getting crossed by somebody or being put to a seeming insult is more than enough for some women to become hysterical.

Kunjupattumma's mother Kunjuthachumma in Me Grand Dad 'Ad an Elephant is such a woman. When their new neighbour Nisar Ahmed asks Kunjuthachumma not to use the land in front of their house for answering the second call of Nature, she takes it as an affront and creates a scene when her husband Vattan Adima comes home:

> They won't leave us alone! Oh Mayyadin! They won't leave us alone! . . . He came and peeped! While I was squatting there, he came and peeped! Oh Mayyadin! they won't leave us alone! (103).

Kunjupattumma, however, tells her father what has happened, upon which Vattan Adima gets angry with his wife and threatens to kill her. Kunjuthachumma now feels that she has been betrayed and put to shame by her daughter. Once again she wails hysterically:

> You can kill me! Here's my neck. Mayyadin, here's my neck! Ye saints, here's my neck! I have no-one! (104).

Women's craze for jewels is yet another notable trait of Indian psyche. For a great number of Indian women wearing gold ornaments is as indispensable as air, food and water. They seem to have the notion that every inch of a woman's body is to be decorated with jewels. Hence under the entry heading "Dress and Adornment" you can find the

following remark in The New Encyclopaedia Britanica: Macropaedia:

> Indian women were thus the first to decorate themselves with huge quantities of jewels--so many that they were almost fully clothed without wearing any real garments. The clothing of these lovely Indian girls often consisted of tiaras, necklaces, earrings, armlets, bracelets, belts, . . . (17: 520).

If a girl or woman does not have any ornament of her own, there is no hesitation in borrowing from others. As already mentioned in this chapter, it is with the ornaments borrowed from her sister-in-law that Daisy, the heroine of The Painter of Signs is decorated at the time of bride-viewing (131).

Being the one and only daughter of the richest man in the locality, Basheer's character Kunjupattumma has a huge collection of gold ornaments.

> . . . she has twenty-one gold rings. On each of them there is a fine gold leaf. When the wind blows, these all move with a faint sound. In the lobes of her ears are two gold pegs. From these hang two tiny gold leaves. On her neck are some gold chains and also a

> solid gold luffa fruit. . . . On her wrists she has gold bangles that jingle. On one finger she has a ring . . . It is set with a stone that is red like the eye of an elephant. There is a golden chain round her waist . . . Then she has big golden anklets . . . (Me Grand Dad 67).

As per her parents' insistence Kunjupattumma always keeps herself almost completely covered with these ornaments. Nevertheless she feels awkward and shy about it and wonders: "Why does one need so many ornaments?" (64).

The funniest thing to be noted here is the inquisitiveness shown by some women about the jewels possessed by others. Even old women like Swaminathan's grandmother in Swami and Friends share this inquisitiveness. On the very first occasion that she meets Rajam (one of Swami's friends) she asks him whether his mother has many jewels. Rajam seems quite pleased to hear this question and replies proudly that "his mother had a black trunk filled with jewels, and a green one containing gold and silver vessels" (39).

Some women are even jealous of those who possess jewels in abundance. Most of the town girls who come to Kunjupattumma's

village on vacation do not have "as much gold jewelry as Kunjupattumma has! She has seen many of them looking at her enviously" (Me Grand Dad 54).

Mothers appear to be keen on cultivating in girls a strong affinity for jewels in their childhood itself. Hence in Pattumma's Goat what Pattumma demands from her elder brother Basheer is a pair of gold rings for her little daughter Khadija (Me Grand Dad 139-140). Basheer promises to give the earrings, and on a later occasion when Pattumma reminds him of the promise, Anuma, Aisomma and Kunjanumma notice it. However, they do not hear even a single word uttered by Pattumma because she talks to Basheer in a low whispering voice. Hence the inquisitive Anumma asks Basheer, "What secret is elder sister telling you? . . . What is it you've agreed to give?" Basheer is made to stand agape as he hears the other two women Aisomma and Kunjanumma saying in unison, "If it's gold or ornaments, we want some for our children also." He does not have any idea "where they got hold of this information." Anyway one cannot but agree with Basheer when he infers, "It may have something to do with women's intuition" (170).

In the case of Leela, daughter of Prof. Krishnan in The English Teacher, it is her grandmother who makes the little girl interested in

gold ornaments. The grand mother brings a gold chain from her village as a present to Leela and the girl is highly pleased to get it (173).

Women can also be seen bragging about the collection of ornaments they have at home. One of Chandran's aunts referred to in The Bachelor of Arts is said to be such a woman. Therefore when his mother asks Chandran to go and spend a few days with that aunt he refuses to do so saying, "No, no. She will keep telling me what jewels she has got for her daughter. I can't stand her" (58).

When the fascination for jewels becomes an obsession it will definitely create problems. In Narayan's novel The Vendor of Sweets a severe crisis occurs on the day of Jagan's marriage simply because the women folk of the bridegroom's party happen to notice that

> the bride was not provided with the gold waist-belt that had been promised when the original list of jewellery was drawn up. When the piece was finally delivered, it was found to be made not of one gold sheet but a number of little gold bars intertwined with silk cords. The women felt that this was downright cheating (162).

Strict observation of customs and conventions, uncompromising adherence to superstitions, and susceptibility to peculiar bents of mind as seen in the lives of the characters of Basheer and Narayan throw light on the complexity and unpredictability of human life and at the same time make the works of these writers interesting and entertaining.

Chapter VI

THE SPELL OF EVIL

Social evils can definitely be compared to cankers or cancerous growths. They grow and spread fast and pose huge threats to the healthy and peaceful existence of society. Every society has nurtured some kinds of evil or other patronized by schemers, exploiters and traitors.

Of all the social evils found in India caste-consciousness is perhaps the worst. It was highly conspicuous before and immediately after independence. Hence in his article "Rabindranath Tagore" Krishna Kripalani has pointed out: ". . . the rigidity of caste became the greatest curse of our society" (30). This social evil still lingers in many parts of India, and as G.K. Karanth has stated in his article "Caste in Contemporary Rural India",

> It is a matter of common knowledge that caste plays an active role in the political life of the country at all levels. Indeed allotment of party tickets, formation of state ministries, and appointment to numerous boards, committees and commissions are

> made on a caste basis, and this seems to be accepted as legitimate by the bulk of the people (107).

Each caste prefers to be a water-tight compartment, and inter-caste marriage is considered a taboo. Alluding to this Indian reality Leela Dube has stated in her article "Caste and Women":

> Marriages are effected predominantly within a jati (caste) or jati cluster . . . A matrimonial relationship with a much lower caste seems out of the question (16).

In Narayan's novels The Guide and The Painter of Signs you find some of the upper caste characters fighting tooth and nail against inter-caste marriages. Rosie, the heroine of The Guide belongs to the caste of temple dancers known as Devadasis. It is considered to be a lower caste. Therefore when Raju, an upper caste youth, takes her home with the intention of living with her, his mother strongly objects to it. She does not want her son to debase their caste. At her request her brother (Raju's uncle) comes from the village and tries his best to separate Raju from Rosie. He confronts Rosie with a menacing tone:

> "You are not of this family? Are you of our clan? .. . No. Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No.

> In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand? (169).

Similarly when Raman, the protagonist of The Painter of Signs proposes to marry Daisy, who does not belong to his caste, his aunt, the one and only relative of his, finds it appalling. She takes Daisy for a Christian girl (becuse of her name) and exclaims; "A Christian! How can you bring in a Christian . . . ." (147). Though Raman implores her to be nice with him and give her consent to the marriage, she remains unmoved. Later on she goes away to Kasi in order to save herself from the 'sin' of witnessing that 'forbidden' marriage.

Untouchability is the ugliest face of caste-consciousness. During his visit to Malgudi Mahatmaji speaks against caste-consciousness and untouchability. On hearing his words Sriram reflects:

> There must be a great deal in what he says. We always think we are superior people. How granny bullies that ragged scavenger who comes to our house every day to sweep the bakyard! (she is) so orthodox that she would not let the scavenger approach nearer than ten yards, and habitually

> adopts a bullying tone while addressing him (Waiting for the Mahatma 30-31).

Not only orthodox women like Sriram's granny but almost all the Malgudians prefer to keep aloof from the scavengers. They have been allotted a colony "outside the town limits, beyond Nallappa's Grove, where nobody went, and they (the scavengers) used only a part of the river on its downward course" (37).

As already mentioned in the fifth chapter when Jagan, the leading character in The Vendor of Sweets joins Gandhi and thereby mingles freely with untouchables, his siblings despise him. And their sense of humiliation crosses all bounds when they come to know that Jagan's son Mali has chosen a half-Korean and half-American woman as his mate. Hence his sister writes to Jagan:

> . . . But now is it a fact that you have a beef-eating Christian girl for a daughter-in-law? I can hardly call you a brother in the presence of my in-laws (141-142).

As already indicated in the fifth chapter it is the barrier of caste and community that prevents the marriage between Basheer and Saraswathy Devi in the novel Anuragathinte Dinangal. Basheer, the hero of the novel is a Muslim, whereas the heroine Saraswathy Devi is

a Nair girl. Therefore Devi's parents oppose the marriage. They cannot even think of it. And Basheer realises that those orthodox parents will commit suicide if the marriage takes place. Hence he takes the heart-breaking decision of not to marry Saraswathy Devi. Although she comes to him prepared for an elopement, he dissuades her saying,

> The deep sense of humiliation may lead your father and mother to suicide. They cannot bear the disgrace. Their suicide will caste a dark shadow in our married life. My grief knows no bounds. Still, my dear Devi, my sad sweet poem, you should obey your parents courageously . . . (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1945).

A still more rigid and ugly form of caste-consciousness is seen in Basheer's novel Voices. It is revealed by way of a passing reference by somebody amidst the hubbub produced by the beggars and prostitutes who have jumbled together in their nocturnal abode.

> 'People here are God-fearing. Some feed five hundred people, some hundred, some ten.'
>
> 'But those who eat the food have to say they belong to the same caste as the donor'.

'That means you shouldn't' tell the truth.'

(Poovan Banana and Other Stories 96).

The story "Manna and Sanka" is a pungent satire on the caste-consciousness seen even among the prominent social and political leaders of Kerala who insist on attaching caste names to their personal names.

While conversing with Basheer one of his friends declares that in future there will be only four communities in Kerala. There will be no such things as Nair, Namboodiri, Marar, Pisharody, Panicker, Variyar, Nambiar, Pillai, Thiyya, Ezhava, Thandan, Pulaya, Kurava, Paraya, Ganaka, Chokon and Poduval. Christian and Muslim will be there. The rest are all Hindus, among whom there will be two communities only--Manna and Sanka. He explains further that all the upper-class Hindus will come under the Manna community and the rest under the Sanka community. And thereafter A. Balakrishna Pillai will be A Bala Krishna Manna. C. Kesavan - C. Kesava Sanka. Karoor Neelakanda Pillai - Karoor Neelakanda Manna. K. Ayyappan - K. Ayyappa Sanka. E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad - E.M.Sankara Manna. R. Sankar - R. Sankara Sanka.

To Basheer's question, "Of what use it is to Islam?" his friend replies:

> We will attach caste names, such as, Namboodiri, Thandan, Nair, Poduval and Marar to our names. Which name do you prefer?

Without the least hesitation the author declares:

> Vaikom Muhammed Basheer Namboodiripad! (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 1122-1123).

One of Basheer's charaacters rages at the communal hatred prevailing in India, especially in the northern states. According to him when compared with the situation existing in North India, the caste-hatred in Kerala is only a breeze. Gales of fierce hatred blow round the northern states almost every day! Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs behave as if they were wild animals looking for an opportunity to bite each other and suck the blood.

He proceeds to say that the vendetta, originated centuries ago, is still there mixed in the blood. Killing of cows, disputes regarding language, and such things are like oil poured into the fire of rivalry. Then he jeers at the unhealthy and unwanted competition in constructing temples and mosques.

When the call for namaaz rises from a mosque, sounds of conche and bell will be heard from the neighbouring temple. If the temple bell tolls, the call for namaaz will be made still louder.

The man concludes his words hinting at the dire consequences of these unhealthy competitions:

> Tumult will be the outcome. If Hindus reap ten Muslim heads, Muslims cut down eleven Hindu heads. It is by counting the fallen heads that victory is determined. From childhood itself the youngsters are taught that those who belong to the other community are their born-enemies. It is literature that fosters it most (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 902).

Corruption, bribery, police atrocities, and the indifference shown by the authorities towards the public and their problems are also to be mentioned here as some of the formidable social evils existing in this country. It may be true that corruption and bribery have become universal phenomena. But through some of their novels Basheer and Narayan convince you that in India these are found in the most grotesque and dirtiest form. More and more of officials and public men are getting infected with the germs of corruption. Demanding and

giving bribe has become so common that it is those who oppose this practice who are put to shame. Even for so trivial a favour as getting permission to see the Principal of a college one should give bribe to the peon in charge of controlling visitors. In The Bachelor of Arts the peon Aziz does not allow Chandran to enter the Principal's room saying that the Principal is busy. Then Chandran is compelled to offer him some bribe: "Aziz, I have an old coat at home; not a tear on it. Will you come for it tomorrow morning?" The peon accepts the offer quite gladly and permits Chandran to meet the Principal (32-33).

There is a proverb in Malayalam which says that the fence itself is eating the crop. You find instances of this in Basheer's novel Mucheettukalikkarante Makal and his short story "Kaivilangu". Pocker, one of the main characters in Mucheettukalikkarante Makal is a gambler. A tricky and deceitful play with the help of three cards is his 'profession'. Many a man, who comes to the weekly fair, is cheated by him. But the police-men, who are responsible for preventing such cheats, will do nothing against him on the condition that

> Out of the little money that he makes in this way the police moorachis . . . should be given rupees two at the end of every weekly fair (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 654).

The short story "Kaivilangu" shows that some policemen are ready to stoop to any level of heinousness if they are offered bribe. When a crooked politician offers five hundred rupees, the Police Inspector in the story charges a false case against another politician, who is quite innocent and has proved his loyalty and sincerity to the country (Sampoorna Krithikal 1:352).

The power to take action against unlawful deeds is quite often misused by the policemen to intimidate and exploit the public. It is the private bus operators who are repeatedly subjected to the police-exploitation. The policemen have created a wrong notion that they are entitled to rtravel in any private bus free of charge. Some of these 'bosses' go to the extent of insisting that they should be given seats of their own choice whenever they get into the bus. Thus in The Man-Eater of Malgudi when Nataraj occupies the seat beside the driver in a bus bound for Malgudi, the conductor tells him, "You will have to move and make space at the next stop. The Circle is expected." By the word 'Circle' the conductor means the Circle Inspector of Police. The front seat is supposed to be reserved for the Inaspector and if another person occupies it, it is considered "a matter of social courtesy to vacate it or atleast move up closer to the driver and leave enough space at the end of the seat for the Circle." In case anybody refuses to abide by this unwritten law, the Circle

will retaliate by doing such things as impounding "the whole bus with the passengers for overcrowding" (43).

During his repeated terms in police lock-ups Basheer had experienced the brutality and unscrupulousness of the policemen. It is these experiences that have led him to assert in his short story "Polisukarante Makan":

> Policemen are not humanbeings. They are cruel brutes in human form . . . They are uneducated and uncultured . . . To create a crime where there is no crime; to convert truth into untruch; to insult those who have a sense of honour--policemen are handy-men for all these deeds. Lack of sense of propriety, culturelessness, filthiness, excessive greed for another man's property, readiness to lick the rump of a dog for gaining something; moreover, egoism and power-baughtiness-- (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 684).

In his novel The Financial Expert Narayan has presented some shocking pictures of corruption found in society. Hence Fakrul Alam, who has subjected this novel to a detailed study, writes in his article "Narrative Strategies in Two of Naraayan Novels" that he has been struck by the

> corruption and red-tapism of financial institutions such as the Co-operative Bank and the high-handedness of their officials; . . . the endless humiliations suffered by every man and the marginalisation of women; the opportunism and cynicism of business men and officials in wartime India, and the activities of touts, money-lenders,and hustlers of various stripes who flourish in financial jungles (10).

Dr. Pal, one of the characters in The Financial Expert observes how the officials and businessmen are minting money through all sorts of corrupt means when there is a war. One of the rice merchants hoards rice in a secret godown "whose frontage was stuffed with innocent-looking rag and old paper collected from the paper mills" (192). This man sells rice at an exorbitant price to the needy, and makes "an enormous quantity of money each day" (192). Then there is the man who supplies office glue to the army and "hoarded enough cash by showing a joint stock firm with imaginary partners" (192). The merchant who supplies screws "in cartons only half-filled" and the contractor who builds huts and gets "enormous bills passed easily by bribing the Garrison Engineer" are all quite familiarto Dr. Pal (192).

This contractor has become a rich man because "his huts, meant to stand for three years, would stand only for a couple of months--till the bills were passed bythe friendly Garrison Engineer! (192-193). Even drug stockists are found no exception to this callous way of amassing money. They do not show their stock,but "bargained when it was a matter of life and death to a consumer" (193).

The brief comment that the narrator in Basheer's novel Maranathinte Nizhalil makes on one of the ruthless exploiters of the war-time situation is very pungent indeed:

> As a memorial to war my admirer has coated two of his teeth with gold . . . Because of war he could earn assets worth rupees four lakhs (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 601).

The following dialogue between the narrator and Kunhamma ridicules the incongruous and shocking hike in the prices of everything from salt to camphor:

> 'Why is this hike in the price of grass?'
>
> 'Because of the war' (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 602).

The indifference and inefficiency of higher authorities and governing bodies are getting worsened day by day. They sit in their positions not to ensure public welfare, but to gratify their own selfish motives. Narayan rages at this painful state of affairs in his novel The English Teacher:

> Malgudi had earned notoriety for its municipal affairs. The management was in the hands of a council with a president, a vice-president, and ten elected members; they met on the last Saturday of every month and battled against each other. One constantly read of disputed elections, walk-outs,and no-confidence motions. Otherwise they seemed to do little by way of municipal work (142).

To such demands as cleaning the city or repairing the drains the authorities will have a number of excuses to make and technical objections to raise. But they are ever ready to celebrate jubilies and centenaries. The reason is quite simple. Celebrations will give them ample opportunities for misappropriation and embezzlement of public money. There is a fiery criticism against such foul and filthy plays (already quoted in the fourth chapter) in Basheer's novel Manthrikappoocha (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1219-1220).

Writers have always exposed and satirized social evils. Social reformers have made untiring efforts to eradicate them. Even then most of the evils seem to have gained an upper-hand in society and won acceptance as unquestionable customs.

Chapter VII

THE CULTURAL MATRIX

In her article "Post-colonialism, Decolonization, Geography and Academic Syllabus" Kanthi Shenbagaraman has observed:

> The urge for colonization is at the root of existence. Psychologically speaking, there is in every individual this urge to conquer, to occupy space, to subordinate a fellow-human being's thought space, to shape it and to dominate it. This urge is known as psychological territorial expansion. It is embedded in the human chromosome, and is inherent in the human individual from time immemorial, and has been the force behind the migration of societies, expansion of empires, exploitation of the globe, not to say, even space today (233).

It is common knowledge that during the past few centuries the history of Europe has been that of colonial interests. Having been the most prominent and predominant colonial power, England could colonize a great number of countries. In addition to the territorial

dominance, they had even attempted to influence and reshape the cultural entity of the colonized nations.

But they had to face resolute and unrelenting resistance from the natives — resistance like that of Shakespeare's Caliban, who cries out against Prospero, the usurper of his home-land: "This isle's mine, by Sycorax my mother, which Thou takest from me" (Shakespeare 6). A great number of writers, too, have made their own contributions in this resistance movement, especially against the cultural invasion.

As a freedom-fighter Basheer had fought against the British authorities physically and also with his pen. In the brief biographical sketch of Basheer given at the beginning of Basheer: Sampoorna Krithikal it is mentioned that he had participated in the Salt Sathyagraha (non-violent revolt against taxation on salt), and had conducted extremist activities similar to the ones conducted by Bhagath Singh, Rajguru and Sukdev against the British Government. He had also written 'fire-spitting' articles against the British Government in magazines, such as, Ujjeevanam and Prakasam. And Basheer himself was the editor of some of these magazines. As a result of all these he had to undergo several terms of imprisonment in various prisons. Referring to Basheer's active role in the freedom-

struggle Ponhikkara Rafi has observed in his article "Basheerum Mattullavarum":

> Basheer's life and artistic talent have been moulded in the furnace of Indian freedom-struggle and prison life. And this is the reason why he could write more stories about freedom-struggle and prison life than other contemporary writers. See, for example, stories like 'Amma', 'Bharathmatha', 'Kaivilangu', 'Poleesukarante Makan', 'Tiger', 'Idiyan Paniker', 'Oru Jailpulliyude Chithram', 'Kalpadu' and the like (464).

Neither in his autobiography My days nor in his novels and short stories is there any indication that R.K. Narayan was a freedom-fighter like Basheer. But that he had given moral support to the freedom-fighters and the National Movement is explicit in his references to the British loyalists who tried to subvert the moves and actions of the freedom-fighters (Waiting for the Mahatama 109). His sarcastic comments in the same novel on fake patriots and opportunists like Natesh also suggest this (44-45). And the words against Europeans as a whole that Narayan has put into the mouth of Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts can be taken as an indication of his

anti-colonialist stand. According to Chandran Europeans are least interested in serving Indians even though they take huge amounts from India by way of salary (5).

What is to be noted further is that Narayan and Basheer have tried to avoid the British presence from their books as far as possible even though they had started their literary career before independence. This, according to Elleke Boehmer, was a device adopted by such writers to bring "Indian self-sufficiency . . . to the fore" (177). Regarding Narayan's marginalization of the British presence Elleke Boehmer has observed further:

> If they (the British) appear at all as in the first scenes of Swami and Friends, or in The Bachelor of Arts they act merely as aggravating but avoidable hindrances to Indian purposes . . . Although written at a time of intense nationalist activity, Narayan's 1930s and 1940s novels dramatize a world that existed quite independently of the colonial power (177).

Most of the themes chosen by Narayan and Basheer are reflective of Indian tradition and culture. According to Elleke Boehmer,

> More explicitly than in his early stories, the plots of R.K. Narayan's 1950s and 1960s novels are patterned on concepts of Karma and Hindu spiritual progression. Almost in spite of himself, Raju in The Guide comes to embody, in the right sequence, the traditional roles of student, house holder, hermit, and sanyasi (203).

Another means of anti-colonial resistance adopted by the writers of colonized nations is the use of indigenous myths and epics in their works. Under the entry heading "Myth and Mythology" it has been stated in the New Encyclopaedia Britanica: Macropaedia that myth has existed in every society and it seems to be a basic constituent of human culture (24:715). According to Elleke Boehmer, "...the adaptation of indigenous myth represented another mode of retrieval (of the cultural life of the past)" (202).

The use of myths and epics can be seen in two forms - either a complete retelling or only a fragmentary use. Indian writers like Kalidasa, V.S. Khandekar, M.T. Vasudevan Nair and P.K. Balakrishnan have attempted to retell The Mahabharata through their works Abhijnhana Sakunthala (The love story of Dushyantha and Sakunthala), Yayathi (only the part concerning Yayathi), Second Turn

and Ini Nhan Urangatte (Let Me Sleep Hence) respectively.

R.K. Narayan also has published three retold legends, namely, Gods, Demons and Others, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. Besides, you can find fragmentary forms of certain Indian myths in some of his novels.

There is a strong parallel between the mythical story of Bhasmasura and Narayan's novel The Man-Eater of Malgudi. Bhasmasura propitiates Siva and gains the boon of reducing anyone he touches with his hand to ashes. And needless to say, this boon turns out to be quite disastrous. Even the gods get alarmed. They discuss the matter quite seriously and depute Vishnu to put an end to Bhasmasura's atrocities. The tricky Vishnu approaches Bhasmasura, disguised as a beautiful damsel. And he succeeds in persuading Bhasmasura to touch himself to death (Mani 871).

Vasu, the taxidermist in The Man-Eather of Malgudi is "a huge man, about six feet tall. He looked quite slim, but his bull-neck and hammer-fist revealed his stature" (16). With his intimidating size and the gun that he possesses he keeps the Malgudians including Nataraj in constant fear. Besides he does so many harmful things against them. Nobody dares either to check or even to question his atrocities. This devil of a man, however,

kills himself quite accidentally. Once, when a mosquito happens to buss near his forehead, he gets irritated and slaps at the tiny creature. Unfortunately for him and fortunately for the Malgudians, his hammer-fist falls on his forehead and he dies at once (182).

Remote though it is there is a resemblance between Ganga Devi of the Indian myth and Daisy of The Painter of Signs. Daisy lays down two conditions before accepting Raman's proposal.

> One, that they should have no children, and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work (158).

On hearing these conditions Raman is reminded of the conditions put forward by Ganga Devi before giving her consent to be the wife of King Santhanu. Anyway, Raman accepts her conditions and declares, "I will be like the ancient king Santhanu. . . " (159).

Savitri, the heroine of The Dark Room, too, has a mythical association. The pains taken by her to be a dutiful wife remind the reader of Seelavathi, wife of Ugrathapassu. In the mythical story Ugrathapassu is depicted as an old leper with beastly character. Hence Seelavathy receives nothing but tortures and insults from her husband. But she suffers everything without even a frown on her

face. Because of old age and illness her husband is almost bed-ridden. But strangely enough, he wants to visit a prostitute. When he expresses this desire Seelavathi does not jeer at him. She, who believes that the only mission in a wife's life is to gratify her husband's whims and fancies, seats him in a basket and carries him quite happily to the prostitute's house (Mani 1232).

As has already been mentioned in the second chapter, Savitri's husband Ramani is an impossible husband. He inflicts all kinds of mental tortures on his wife. But Savitri suffers everything uncomplainingly. Even when she comes to know of his infatuation with Santha Bai, she continues to be a dutiful wife. Instead of hating her husband, she blames herself for creating such a situation.

> Perhaps I'm not good enough for him. Let me admit my complexion has become rather sooty, and these dark rings under the eyes. I am getting careless about my hair, and braid it anyhow; it is hardly his fault if he can't like my appearance very much (104).

Though it is true that Savitri is compelled to deviate from Seelavathi's path at one stage and deserts her husband and children, she cannot but come back to the same path.

When you try to examine Basheer's use of Indian myths and epics the picture you get is much blurred. But if you delve deeper into some of his short stories, you will definitely find some scattered fragments here and there, and conform to what Professor Meerakkutty says in this regard in his book Basheer: Kaalathinte Kanal (54-55). It is true that in "Sinkidimunkan" Basheer deals with idolatry. As already mentioned in the fifth chapter the childless couple Abdul Razak and Ayisha Beevi turn to almost all the saints, temples and mosques for getting blessed with an issue. But all their efforts are in vain. Finally, as per the instruction of their friend Kariyathan they pray to Sinkidimunkan, a stone idol, and strangely enough, their prayer is granted.

"The Blue Light" deals with the belief in fairies. The protagonist of the story, may be Basheeer himself, occupies a rented house, which is said to be haunted by a ghost. It is the ghost of one Bhargavi, a former occupant of the house, who committed suicide. However, the protagonist does not confront any ghost or fairy in that house. But after about two and a half months he does have some kind of an eerie experience. One night as he is writing something the one and only lamp burning in the house goes out because of the exhaustion of kerosene filled in it. He locks the door and goes out to fetch some

But on returning to the house with kerosene he gets startled to see his "room and its white walls . . . illuminated with a blue light. The light came from the lamp . . . two inches of blue flame . . ." (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 140).

The story "Poovan Banana" can be taken as an adaptation of the Kalyanasaugandhika episode in The Mahabharatha. Following the foot-steps of Bhimasena, who suffers untold hardships to procure some Kalyanasaugandhika flowers for Draupathi, Basheer's hero Abdul Khader Sahib makes a perilous journey across a swift-flowing river on a windy night to buy some poovan plantains as per his wife's demand. Unfortunately poovan plantains are not available. Hence he purchases some oranges and crosses the frightening river by swimming. But all the risk he has taken is lost upon his wife. She refuses to eat the oranges simply because it is for poovan plantains that she has asked for. Abdul Khader Sahib finds this haughtiness quite intolerable. Hence he treats her a bit harshly and converts her into a meek lamb. Not only does he make her eat the oranges but forces her to assert that what her husband has brought are poovan plantains.

However, there is a point of contrast between the two episodes. Bhimasena's act of fetching the very same thing demanded by his wife strengthens her wrong notion that a husband's duty is to dance as per

his wife's whims and fancies; whereas what Abdul Khader Sahib has done rids his wife of such feminine convictions.

The central character of the story "The World-Renowned Nose" with his elongated nose, no doubt, reminds the readers of Lord Ganapathy. And the title of one of his short stories - "One Bhagavad Geetha and Several Breasts" - is suggestive of Sri Krishna and cow-herdesses.

On closer examination one can find Thrisanku's Paradise in Basheer's "Viddikalude Swargam" (The Fools Paradise). As per the myth King Thrisanku, father of Harischandra, longs to reach Paradise with his perishable body. On hearing of this strange desire Vasishta, the preceptor of his clan advises Thrisanku to dismiss that stupid thought. The resolute Thrisanku then discusses the matter with Vasishta's sons, who, however, cannot tolerate his haughtiness. Hence they curse him to be a Pariah. Thereupon Thrisanku approaches Vasishta's rival Viswamithra, whose power of penance enables Thrisanku to climb the steps leading to Paradise. The gods in Paradise, naturally, do not like it. They push Thrisanku down. But Viswamithra prevents him from coming down. Thus Thrisanku is left stranded in the space between Paradise and earth (Mani 520).

In "Viddikalude Swargam" the narrator, who suffers sexual starvation for a long time, gets attracted to a beautiful but poor woman. Naturally his excitement knows no bounds when the woman invites him to her house for having sexual-intercourse. On entering her room she strips off her clothes and stands in the nude before him. But the burning lust within him dies down all on a sudden as he notices the painful and miserable condition of that poor house and its occupants. Thus the narrator finds himself stranded in a kind of Thrisanku's Paradise. The craving for sexual pleasure pushes him into that woman's bed room. But the lamentable state of affairs within that house drives him out.

For writers like Basheer insistence on writing in their own regional languages was also a part of their anti-colonial resistance. Basheer was able to write in English. As M.N. Karassery has pointed out in his article "Kunjupattummayude Lokasancharam" Basheer had written his first novel Balyakalasakhi (Childhood Friend) in English (Sanoo 280). But on second thoughts he felt in improper on his part to publish a book in English. Therefore he recreated the novel in Malayalam and published it.

That Narayan has written all his works in English does not mean that he had looked upon this colonial language as a 'divine' one.

Quoting Narayan's own words "English, of course, in a remote and horoscopic sense, is a native of England, but it enjoys, by virtue of its canny adaptability, citizenship in every country in the world", Elleke Boehmer has observed that English was absolutely a 'Swadesi' language to Narayan (Colonial and Postcolonial Literature 211). His conviction that English enjoys citizenship everywhere in the world led Narayan to the conclusion that writing in English would guarantee a wider readership.

Narayan's treatment of his character Prof. Gajapathy in The English Teacher also bears witness to the fact that he had never considered English as a superior or 'heavenly' language. As already mentioned in the fifth chapter, one of the students of Albert Mission College spells the word 'honours' without 'u'. When Prof. Gajapathy comes to know of this he feels shocked and describes it as a disgrace to the whole college. On hearing this Prof. Krishnan, one of his colleagues retorts that there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel (60). These words are suggestive of Narayan's sarcastic attitude towards such fanatic worshippers of English Language.

But in spite of all these attempts of marginalization of the British presence, and the use of Indian myths and other conceptual structures drawn from local tradition, the fact remains that colonialism has

influenced and sunk into the Indian psyche, at least to a limited extent. Narayan himself recognizes this reality in his novel The Vendor of Sweets. Jagan, the protagonist of the novel has been depicted as a Gandhian, who had participated in the freedom-struggle and gone to jail (141). At a later stage, however, you find him getting elated and "puffing with pride" when his son Mali goes to America (51). If this is the case with a Gandhian and freedom-fighter, there is no wonder that youngsters like his son Mali become worshippers of the West and feel contemptuous of their mother land, which according to them is "a miserable place with no life in it" (127). Bill Ashcroft and others have pointed out in their book The Empire Writes Back:

> The account of Jagan's journey to the temple with his wife and parents to sacrifice for a son illustrates the inevitable and continuing friction between 'tradition' and changing practice, a friction which is continued in a different way in Jagan's relationship with his own son (113).

Even though his parents are very much concerned about Jagan's becoming a father, he does not find it so covetable an achievement. Therefore he wishes to ask them:

> Haven't you enough grandchildren? Why do you want more? Why don't you leave me alone? (The Vendor of Sweets 172).

The authors of The Empire Writes Back find here a continuing dialectical pattern emerging

> between a traditional insistence on the collective, family, group, and society, and the opposed demands of the European ideology of the independent 'individual' whose social inflection is one of the strongest trace marks left by Europeanization on the post-colonial world (Ashcroft 114).

And it is this European or Western ideology of 'independent individual' that Jagan's son Mali tries to transplant into the Indian context in a much more audacious way. While returning from America he brings a half-Korean, half-American mate, whom he does no marry formally. And through this act he tries to show his father that the traditional concept of knotting the thali around the bride's neck is quite meaningless and ridiculous. No bonds or links or responsibility" should be there between a man and woman who decide to live together, and kick each other away when it suited them" (The Vendor of Sweets 175).

Thanks to the deeply-rooted cultural tradition of India and the strong resistance put up by the natives, the number of people like Mali could be restricted to a negligible minimum. And it is commendable indeed that even after a prolonged period of colonization the clutches of Western culture could not do much damage to India's cultural entity.

Chapter VIII

BEYOND THE LOCALE

Despite the cultural variations and language differences human beings are one and the same basically. Their pains are alike and so are their pleasures. Any piece of literature that reflects the basic aspects of human nature authentically and elegantly so as to stir the minds of readers everywhere is definitely a classic work. And a writer who succeeds in depicting human pathos, foibles, follies and pleasures realistically is a great writer indeed.

If you delve deeper into the works of Narayan and Basheer you find that transgressing the frame work of Indianness they have some universal dimensions. Some of their leading characters have kinship with characters in various foreign literatures. In other words, both these writers have delineated a number of universal characters and dealt with some basic universal situations.

Take, for example, the behaviour pattern of Savitri in Narayan's novel The Dark Room. Throughout her life Savitri tries to be a typical Indian wife suffering all the humiliations from her husband without any protest. But when she comes to know of her husband's illegitimate

relationship with Santa Bai, one of his subordinates, Savitri becomes restless, and demands an explanation from him. His callous behaviour hurts her self-respect and as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar puts it, "she is for the nonce transformed into Ibsen's Nora, asserting her elementary rights as a woman (Indian Writing in English 371).

Now, just for once, she ceases to be the traditional Indian wife, the meek and silent sufferer. She spits fire in her zest for upholding her individuality just as any other woman anywhere in the world may do under similar circumstances.

While her husband tries to take her by the hand and lead her to bed, she moves away from him shouting. "Don't touch me!" Then she continues in a fierce tone: "You are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch" (The Dark Room 112). These words anger her husband and he asks her to get out of the house. On hearing this she walks out of the house (into the darkness of the night) without the least hesitation. The words that she throws at his face before the walk-out are very sharp indeed.

> Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here, and eat food you buy with your money? No. I'll starve

> and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man . . . Things? I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's . . . Yes, you are right. They (their children) are yours, absolutely. You paid for the midwife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say that a woman owns nothing? (113).

The character of Swaminathan, the teenage hero of the novel Swami and Friends, too, has universal dimensions. When his granny suffers from severe stomach ache she asks Swami to buy her a lemon immediately. But as he is bent on rushing to the cricket ground he refuses to oblige. However, he feels qualms later on about this lapse on his part and makes amends for it. Such lapses and repentance, of course, are quite becoming of teenage psychology.

Swami's attitude to the children of the Infant Standard, too, is strictly on the lines of the teenage or school-boy psychology.

> He felt vastly superior and old. He was filled with contempt when he saw them dabbling in wet clay, trying to shape models. It seemed such a meaningless thing to do at school . . . schools were meant for more serious things like Geography, Arithmetic, Bible and French (29).

His behaviour on the 'hartal' day is equally revealing. Here he comes out as a sadist. The poor children of the Board school are the victims (99).

Regarding Swaminathan's character Cynthia Vanden Driesen has said in her article "Swami and Friends: Chronicle of Indian Boyhood":

> Swami's consciousness of the inimical quality of the adult world, his aversion to the rigours and discipline of school or study, his hero-worship, his impulsive enthusiasms and yearnings (whether for the possession of a hoop or the joys of cricket and the companionship of kindred spirits) refract the universal experiences of boyhood. His dilemmas recall the predicaments of Pip, of David

> Copperfield, of Huckleberry Finn -- fictive characters whose joys and frustrations still affect readers across time and space (170-171).

History bears witness to the pathetic fall of many great men simply because of their infatuation with women. There is the history of Mark Antony, the most prominent among the second Triumvirate of Rome, to be cited as an example. His frantic infatuation with the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra ruins him completely, and in the end he is left with no other option but to commit suicide. Needless to say, it is the story of this lamentable downfall of Antony that is dealt with in Shakespeare's play Antony and Cleopatra.

King Edward II of England can also be categorised with Mark Antony, although his infatuation was not with a woman, but with a man named Gaveston. Christopher Marlowe has portrayed this strange but pitiable 'love-story' in his play Edward II.

When you go through Narayan's novels The Dark Room, Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi and The Guide you are definitely reminded of these historic characters and their life stories.

The burning passion felt by the head of an office for a woman, who is appointed as his subordinate, and its repercussions on his family-

life is the main theme of The Dark Room. In the beginning of the novel Ramani, the protagonist is presented as a strict disciplinarian. He believes that "Women are exasperating. Only a fool would have anything to do with them" (26). Hence when he is informed that his employers have decided to take a few women probationers into the various branches of the company, Ramani comments teasingly, "We are not anxious to adorn our establishment with so many of the fair sex" (62). A woman called Santha Bai, however, gets appointed in his branch and her presence brings about a drastic change in Ramani. Getting ensnared by her stunning beauty, he throws away his self-respect and stoops to be her foot-man. It is ridiculous and painful to see this tyrannical husband fussing about his mistress' accommodation. Much to the displeasure and ridicule of his subordinates he goes to the extent of proposing that a lodging should be arranged for her in the office itself.

> Can't you transfer that lumber to some other place, and make it (the lumber room) habitable? Mrs. Santha Bai is staying in some dirty hotel; why shouldn't we give her that room till she gets settled in this place? There is no harm in it (68).

Losing all sense of propriety he even shifts the spare cot which "was her (his wife') favourite piece of furniture" to the office for Santha Bai to sleep on (70).

Sampath, one of the main characters in Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi falls a victim to a similar kind of infatuation. His blind passion for Santhi, the actress renders him so foolish that he says:

> Some people say that every sane man needs two wives -- a perfect one for the house and a perfect one for social life . . . I have the one. Why not the other? (179).

He is led even to think:

> Well, I'm going to have different establishments. I'm doing nothing illegal, to feel apologetic. After all, our religion permits us to marry many wives (180).

In The Guide you see the portrayal of an honest and straightforward railway guide becoming corrupt because of his feverish love for a married woman. In his eyes his mistress Rosie is "a figure out of a dream, mumbling vague sounds . . . " (117). He wants always to be in her company. Everything and everyone except Rosie seems

highly bothersome to him. His mother facing him with numerous problems, municipal tax, the kitchen tiles needing attention, the shop, accounts, letters from the village, his health -- all these make him totally fed up. Even his finances seem unreal to him (117). He seems so blind with his infatuation that

> The only reality in my (his) life and consciousness was Rosie. All my mental powers were now turned to keep her within my reach, and keep her smiling all the time, neither of which was at all easy. I would willingly have kept at her side all the time, as a sort of parasite;. . . (118).

Hence when he is forsaken by Rosie for a short while he goes through the most miserable period in his life.

> The usual symptoms were present, of course: no taste for food, no sound sleep, no stability (I couldn't stay put in any one place), no peace of mind, no sweetness of temper or speech -- no, no, no, a number of no's (136).

After their reunion, once again he does not like to be bothered by anything.

> Living with Rosie under the same roof was enough for me. I wanted nothing more in life. I was slipping into a fool's paradise (161).

That is why his mother shouts at Rosie:

> What a fine boy he used to be! The moment he set eyes on you, he was gone (170).

At one stage he becomes so idiotic that he forges Rosie's signature on an important document sent by her estranged husband. He ventures to do this crime for fear that "she might insist on taking the next train to his (her husband's) place, throwing up everything" in case she is shown the document (207). And needless to say, the crime is detected and he gets imprisoned for two years.

The fact that a man may become childish and idiotic when he is 'possessed' by a woman has been highlighted by Basheer as well. In his autobiographical novel Anuragathinte Dinangal he shows how intoxicated and idiotic he becomes because of his blind passion for Saraswathy Devi, the heroine of the novel. Once he writes to his beloved:

> The saliva in your mouth is honey to me. The smell of your sweat is fragrant to me (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1915).

On another occasion Basheer states that "man is an animal and love is a strange experience" (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1867). Then he proceeds to substantiate his statement citing a strange experience of his own:

> I was writing, sitting in the loneliness of my room. Suddenly Devi's memory comes to my mind quite unawares . . . She stands half-naked. Her plump breasts intoxicate me. I feel that Devi calls me . . . that she desires me . . . thereupon I get filled with rapture (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1867).

Awake and asleep, he thinks only about Devi. Naturally he forgets his duties. Although he is a professional writer he fails to write even a single line for weeks. And Basheer himself comes out with the confession with a prick of conscience:

> Strong thought about Devi . . . I could not do anything else. There was a lot of work to do. A

> number of letters were there to be replied. Letters of writers, fans and even that of my mother. Besides, letters from book-sellers seeking explanation for not releasing the books whose publication has already been advertised (Sampoorna Krithikal 2: 1851).

Basheer's short story "Oru Pazhaya Kochu Prema Kadha" deals with the foolish deeds committed by the leader of a revolutionary group when he falls a victim to the type of feverish love described above. The maddening desire that he feels for a girl in the neighboring house leads him to foolhardiness. There is a deep and muddy canal flowing in between his and her residences. On both sides of the canal there are huge walls. Hence to cross the canal and reach her house in order to meet her in private is something unthinkable for a normal human being. But the frantic lover within the leader instigates him to run any risk, and on a rainy night he ventures to cross the canal and reach near the girl. That adventurous journey, however, turns out to be futile because the foul smell coming out of that girl's mouth repels him, and he runs back from her crest-fallen.

After a while he returns to sanity and feels ashamed of himself for all that he has done a short while ago. He becomes afraid of being caught sitting on the wall like a thief completely bathed in mud and water.

> People will gather around and say 'oh, is it not the editor of that fire-brand newspaper? The leader!' (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 869).

Dr. Viktor Frankl, who was the head of Psychiatry Department in the University of Vienna, has narrated a very interesting and amazing incident in his book Man's Search for Meaning. Dr. Frankl had been imprisoned for some time in one of the concentration camps set up by Hitler. And the incident referred to here is something related to one of the female prisoners in the camp, whom Dr. Frankl happened to meet after her release. That lady had undergone solitary confinement over a long period of time in terrible conditions. As a psychiatrist Dr. Frankl wanted to know what kept her alive and what was more, sane. The lady then revealed to Dr. Frankl the fantastic means that she had adopted for her survival as well as for keeping her mental balance.

One of the branches of a small tree was the only thing visible from her cell. The lady could consider this branch as her bosom friend

and she kept on conversing with it throughout her confinement. Thus she succeeded in converting the nightmarish prison-days into a period of bliss.

Although it seems totally incredible, Dr. Frankl asserts that we can take the whole story without even a speck of salt. That lady could look upon the entire Universe -- inclusive of the microscopic beings and fibrous grass -- as a single family. And she believed that being the most sensitive members of this vast family, human beings are bound to be considerate and affectionate towards all the other living-beings. Besides, they must try to communicate even with the tiniest of flora and fauna. Hence she found it quite easy to feel the presence of a sensitive mind within that tree-branch, and spent most of her time in chatting with it. Thereby she could dispel her sense of loneliness and live a life of peace and pleasure.

What is driven home through this lady's experience is that if your heart is brimming with all-embracing affection and tolerance you can create a heaven even out of a hell. Narayan and Basheer, too, have highlighted this very universal truth in their novels The Guide and The Walls respectively.

Raju, the hero of The Guide gets imprisoned on account of a forgery. But within the prison he becomes a totally different man. He is seen everywhere in the prison as an affectionate well-wisher. He succeeds in winning the hearts of both the prison officials and the prisoners. The prisoners look upon him as their benefactor and beloved teacher. The prison authorities take him into confidence and entrust him with various duties. Later on while talking to Velan Raju recollects all these pleasant experiences:

> I visited all departments of the prison as a sort of benevolent supervisor. I got on well with all the warders. I relieved them in their jobs when other prisoners had to be watched. I watched the weaving section and the carpentry sheds. Whether they were murderers or cut-throats or highway men, they all listened to me, and I could talk them out of their black moods. When there was a respite, I told them stories and philosophies and what not. They came to refer to me as 'Vadhyar' – that is teacher. There were five hundred prisoners in that building and I

> could claim to have established a fairly wide-spread intimacy with most of them (226-227).

To make his stay in the jail more pleasant and meaningful an experience Raju works on a vegetable patch in the backyard of the Superintendent's house. He "grew brinjals and beans and cabbages. When they appeared on their stalks as tiny buds, I was filled with excitement" (227).

Thus having created a homely atmosphere within the prison, Raju no longer hates it; nor does he fear it. Instead he feels just the opposite:

> No place could be more agreeable (than a prison); if you observed the rules you earned greater appreciation here than beyond the high walls. I got my food, I had my social life with the other inmates and the staff, I moved about freely within an area of fifty acres. Well, that's a great deal of space when you come to think of it; man generally manages with much less (228).

Hence there is not even an iota of exaggeration when he claims:

> I felt choked with tears when I had to go out after

> two years, and I wished that we had not wasted all that money on our lawyers. I'd have been happy to stay in this prison permanently (228).

Basheer's own prison experiences depicted in his autobiographical novel The Walls also are not much different. Most of Basheer's works reflect the fact that he was an embodiment of good will and affection. That is why T. Padmanabhan has commented in his article "Basheer: Vyakthiyum Novelistum":

> There is a strong undercurrent visible throughout the works of Basheer. It is the undercurrent of love. This noble feeling flowing out of this writer, who was a mystic and ascetic, embraces not only man but all living beings (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 28-29).

Hence similar to Narayan's Raju, Basheer also finds it quite easy to befriend the warders and his fellow-prisoners alike. The warm friendship that exists between Basheer and the Assistant Jailor (fondly called 'Brother Jailor' by the prisoners) can be read out from these lines of Basheer.

> He did not visit me to inspect the lock-up. He came to chat. He had a small Alsatian dog . . . . we

> talked about its training, exercise, food. I told him a number of dog stories. Brother Jailor listened to them with great interest. I made black tea for him. Most people knew that I had tea and sugar with me (Poovan Banana and Other Stories 166).

Basheer seems ever willing to prepare and serve black tea to the condemned prisoners, who desire to have their final drink just before their hanging.

> The warder would wake me up and inform me. I would make some black tea and send it to him (the condemned prisoner). I would send word to him to be brave (Poovan Banana 166).

Basheer's room in the jail is the meeting-place of all the prisoners including the political ones, and the warders.

> There would be laughter and discussion then, a little township in itself. Arguments, noise, laughter, hubbub. Sometimes the Jail Superintendent came with Brother Jailor . . . We would talk about trees and plants; about tending and manuring them. We

> would pace up and down talking of these things (Poovan Banana 167).

Some of his fellow-prisoners cannot approve of Basheer's fraternising with the Jail Superintendent. They ask Basheer:

> Why should one talk and smile and make up to him? Was he not the person who increased the number of lashes to be inflicted on my friend at the whipping post to two dozens? (167).

But Basheer cannot think on their lines. Hence he continues "to be impartial and love everyone just as a man (in the original book 'a free man')" (167).

Similar to Raju, Basheer also appears to be an ardent lover of trees and plants; but unlike Raju it is a flower garden that he tends in the jail compound. Quite often Basheer "would stand still in the midst of my (his) rose garden. All around me were flowers shedding perfume. There was beauty. There was sweetness" (164).

Like the lady referred to in Viktor Frankl's book, Basheer also chats with his plants.

> I love every single tree and shrub. I have even felt that trees and shrubs understand what I say to them (167).

At one stage, however, he thinks of jail-breaking. This thought stems from the frustration and sense of loneliness that come over him when all his fellow political prisoners get released. But he overcomes that thought and resumes to love the prison life within a few days.

> By that time I come to the conclusion that it may not be such a good thing to escape from the jail. After all the trouble taken to get out, what is one to do? (176-177).

If Basheer believed and proved by his deeds that life is an incessant prayer wishing happiness and well-being to each and every creature, Narayan devoted a major part of his life for nurturing his one and only daughter who had lost her mother while she was an infant. He could not even think of a second marriage. In other words, both these writers had first hand experience of the magical possibilities of love. That is why they could present before us the picture of how a prison is being converted into a happy home with the magical touch of love. With all the frightening and gloomy pictures of prison life

depicted by other writers, this different version, of course, is simply marvellous.

Apart from the ones mentioned above, Basheer has dealt with a few more universal themes. And some of his characters, of course, have attained universal stature. While making a detailed study in this regard it is quite relevant to go through what Dr. C. P. Sivadasan has said in his article "Basheerinte Novel: Silpavum Aakhyana Sailiyum". Dr. Sivadasan points out that Basheer deals with the incessant flow of the very common life of the common folk found in the interior villages of Kerala in the first half of the twentieth century. But the time shown in these twentieth century novels is as old as this God-created Universe. To tell of the Kerala village portrayed in these novels, though it has its own individuality, it is part of this vast Universe. It has a navel connection with the globe that is hectic with world wars, military campaigns, bombardments and the like. Dr.Sivadasan substantiates his argument citing certain specific examples from some of Basheer's novels:

> Majeed and Suhra are lovers; but at the same time they are Adam and Eve. While the inhabitants of Kaduvakkuzhi boast that their village is the very

> centre of the world, they remind us not only of their pomp, but of the learned men of the past who believed and made us believe that all the planets are revolving round the earth (407).

The citizens of Sthalam claim that it is they who have discovered the sun, razor, the science of fortune-telling based on the sound and movements of lizard, fire, cookery, cock-fight, water, bullock-cart, rustling, sorcery, dagger and the like (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 733). For them all the places outside Sthalam are foreign lands, and the people outside their village are foreigners. Through this stupid boasting and narrow-mindedness of the citizens of Sthalam Basheer is actually poking fun at the fever of renascent nationalism.

While discussing the ways of patching up the quarrel between Aanavaari Raman Nair and Ponkurisu Thoma, Chathankeri Manakkal Sankaran Namboodirippad makes a speech in Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan:

> Peace, peace—that is our motto! We, the inhabitants of Sthalam have a tradition of courage. We are cultured. We will resist boorishness! We will defy violence . . . In my opinion any weapon

> can be used in a war for peace. How did our ancestors fight? Mace! Spears! Road-metal! A kind of crooked nail! Powdered chilli! Time changed; policy, too; there came bows and arrows. Time changed again, and guns came into use . . . Policy goes on being changed. What I am driving at is he who possesses more destructive weapons will win. It is shame indeed to say that a particular weapon should not be used. Poisonous gas, deadly bombs and lethal germs will be used to destroy (the enemy). That is progress! . . . (Sampoorna Krithikal 1: 741-742).

The paradoxical practice of forming and deploying peace keeping forces, such as, the Indian Peace Keeping Force sent to Sri Lanka a few years back, is only a recent development. But the lines quoted above make it clear that Basheer had foreseen this funny situation years back.

In the absence of a strong opponent the United States of America behaves as if it were the World Police. Under the pretext of trying to restore and maintain peace the US has been engaged in committing ruthless atrocities on weaker nations. Azam Saeeed, a US

citizen based in Connecticut has confessed in his article "The Consequences of American Foreign Policy":

> We wanted the Shah of Iran to be our 'policeman' in that part of the world; so we supported him wholeheartedly in repressing his people. We did not like Sukarno, the founder of contemporary Indonesia, for his socialist leanings; so we helped Suharto to rule and loot Indonesia for 30 years. We groomed Noriega, the Panamanian dictator, and then invaded the country to capture him when he became an inconvenience (19).

And it is a thousand pities that the United Nations Organization has become a puppet in the hands of the US. On many an occasion the world has witnessed the UN officiating at a great many brutal and criminal deeds of the US. That is why Edward S. Herman has pointed out in his article "Global Rogue State":

> Nothing illustrates the global rogue's (the US) lack of principle, and propensity to unilateralism better than its treatment of the UN and the World Court. When the UN or the Court have failed to serve its

> purposes, the global rogue has assailed them, refused to pay its dues (in violation of the law), withdrawn from the UN organizations (UNESCO and ILO), and simply ignored a UN consensus or Court ruling. The US has used the UN as a cover for its own agenda, but not allowed the UN to function where its positions were inconsistent with that agenda (1-2).

The speech of Chathankeri Manakkal Sankaran Namboodirippad is a satire (in advance) as well on this lamentable and appalling plight of the UN and the modern world.

In short, remaining rooted to their respective soils Narayan and Basheer have tried to tell the stories of their own people, and while doing so they have depicted the basic aspects of human nature authentically and elegantly so as to stir the minds of readers everywhere. Both these writers have delineated universally acceptable characters and portrayed human pleasures and predicaments quite realistically. Hence the argument that "We can do with English literature all we need to train the sensibility of the young" and the question "With all the wealth of English literature why should we waste

time on the second rate?" cited by C.D. Narasimhaiah as the ones put forward by certain anglophiles in order to belittle the regional literatures of India, are proved to be ridiculous (An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry xx).

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