

Chapter 3

Tryst with Destiny

C. Subram aniam, in his foreword to *Tryst with Destiny*, says:

Shri S. Gopalan has brought out an interesting book with a rather intriguing title. *Tryst with Destiny* is the famous phrase which Jawaharlal Nehru used in his speech at the mid-night ceremony of transfer of power to India on the 15th August, 1947. For some of us who had the fortune of participating in this historic function these words are still ringing in our ears.

But the old generation is disappearing and a new generation is being bom who have very little knowledge about the historic events behind the transfer of power. Gopalan has attempted to bring back memories to the old generation and to inform the new generation about the great personalities who formed the back bone of the freedom movement in the form of an interesting novel. As the author himself has pointed out except Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji all the other characters are fictitious— the main

characters like Sekhar, Dr. Raman, Swami of the Indian Civil Service, Malini and. Padmini may be creations of the author's imagination but some of them at least bring back memories of some well known characters who were active participants in those days of struggle and action.

The book deals with three distinct periods. The first the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the Indian political scene and the transformation he brought about in the lives of men. He truly made men out of dust. In the second part of the book the scene shifts to the South East Asia when the Japanese invasion had lost its initial momentum and the Japs were facing the utter collapse of their mighty military machine. It is here Nethaji Subhas Bose is introduced into the story and we get a graphic account of Nethaji's activities in the cause of Indian freedom.

The third part shifts the scene to India to the days when actual transfer of power took place. The new characters who had taken charge of the steel frame of the administration are depicted, sometimes with a certain amount of sarcasm and cynicism.

Finally the author reflects the mind of many citizens who are sorely frustrated at the developments in Independent India.

On the whole the book is interesting reading and I hope the public, particularly the young generation, would greatly benefit by a perusal of the book.

I would like to congratulate the author on his imaginative treatment of some of the great national events and characters. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* foreward, n. pag.)

Gopalan is very much a postcolonial writer because he has depicted past events and experiences which are national and historical occasions, so as to assert national identity. For this, he has recourse to not only recorded events of history, but also legends and “off-beat anecdotes”:

I must make it clear that the characters in the story except Mahatma Gandhi and Nethaji Bose (who have themselves become legends) are all fictitious. But I cannot pretend that all the events and situations in the story are also wholly imaginary. For instance, I found in remote villages obscure men who claimed to have observed Gandhi and Nethaji in close quarters and moved with them and could reminisce over off-beat anecdotes and incidents that greatly add to what

may he called our Gandhiana and Nethajiana and I
have tried to press into service some of them
especially in the case of Nethaji. (Gopalan, *Tryst with
Destiny*, preface iv)

Gopalan's *Tryst with Destiny* is a period novel. As such its characters are "expository illustrations of the period rather than living people.'" (Royal A. Gettman, "Types of Novel" 218). Gopalan's *Tryst with Destiny* teems with typical characters from the period of the story who are representatives and stereotypes of the age depicted. This further accentuates the assertion of national identity in *Tryst with Destiny*.

The story starts with the outbreak of the Second World War. Nelson Junior, the son of the proprietor of Nelson & Nelson, reputed machinery manufacturing firm, Earl Robbin and Henry Arthur are mechanics in the camp of an American military unit. Nelson was leaving the university when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. Like all other American youth, he regarded it as a challenge and he volunteered to serve in the navy, which had been his dream. His father, however, was pleased for a totally different reason. "In a way his (Nelson Junior's) choice pleased his father for it enabled him to combine business with patriotism by putting his son in this small team of naval men who were out trying his latest Gadge[t] for amphibian operations in the eastern waters"

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 2), Nelson Senior is a typical neo-colonialist.

Gopalan also projects the clash of ideologies between the colonizer and the neo-colonialist:

All the three [Nelson Junior, Arthur and Robbin] were to guide the British in handling the new Nelson gadgets. The British experts at the spot were from the outset sceptical of the utility of the new-fangled ideas in these waters where the Japanese had broken through with their rough and ready weapons and vessels which they found had to be tackled by brawn and not brain. The British had also come to take the view just at this time that the Japs were winding up and not likely to display their pyrotechnics again and so the Nelson should take their gadgets back home. It was to resolve one of these ideological hitches that their two commanders had been called away some where and the three youngsters had to face an unexpected situation. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 2)

The unexpected situation is the appearance of a Japanese plane, probably reconnoitering over the coastal areas. They watch the plane climbing down towards a nearby coastal village, probably to drop something, may be “some bloody infiltrators or at least a bomb in the village there.” So the three men decide that

they should investigate, even at the risk of being later pulled up for leaving the station without permission. They decide to go out in the steam boat, unaware of the weather forecast that “there would be a cyclone in this coastal area just about this time.” The storm bursts and their boat capsizes (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 3-6).

In true postcolonial fashion, Gopalan celebrates the fauna of his native land in the process of describing the dawn in the village of Nadukkadu:

Grey light slowly threaded the foliage. Birds, which heaven knew where they hid from the fury of the storm, now hopped about chirping and flapping their wings. Soon in the dense wooded area light fell in patches through clearings and made intricate patterns below where the fauna was now astir, the fleet foot deer in comely herd, the ever nervous turkey awkwardly alarmed over nothing, the vain peacocks strutting and preening on their gorgeous trailers, the wild horses grazing in packs, not to speak of the chattering mo[n]keys jumping down and climbing up, and endlessly interpellating the rest of the world with irrelevant questions. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 6-7)

Their two Muslim cooks, Rahim and Sultan, exemplify the world of the colonized. The natives are menials, intended for

“Washing and cleaning things.” They are also attracted by the plane and immediately run across the sands to their “masters bursting with the news,” the typical role of the colonized (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 3). They launch out in a boat and are caught in a cyclonic storm while crossing a lagoon. Nelson reaches the house of Chandrasekar, a landlord of Nadukkadu (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 5-9).

The elite among the colonized not unoften “spoke back” to the empire. Sekar, while musing on the communicative felicity of Nelson Junior, muses also on the manner of the English:

Like most educated Indians Sekar had spent a life time acquiring the English language. He had reached the top of his profession as lawyer b[y] speaking what he felt was the best English. But not unoften, he had found difficulty in making out what the English judges said. Either they mumbled or grunted. Some of them snarled out in clipped accents at unoffending Indian lawyers. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 11)

In Gopalan’s postcolonial discourse, the country is a metaphor for the world of the colonized and, in *Tryst with Destiny*, he describes in poetic language the beauty, the gaiety and the vivacity of the N adukkadu camp and how the colonizer feasted himself on all these:

There was something in the air here which could not be resisted by them and that was why even staid administrators often went berserk in Nadukkadu camp. The picturesque surrounding, the plentiful game at hand in the woods, the fascinating variety of fishes straight from the sea, the moon- light dances at the beach, the barbecue parties inside the jungle, [sic] the midnight hunts, the endless swimming and other exercises naturally turned their heads. The normal routine of their work at headquarters and the oppressive heat in which they had to do the work provided a moral justification for them to relax at Nadukkadu.

In the opinion of successive generations of English Collectors who laboured hard at Tanjore bearing the white-man's burden, the village of Nadukadu was created by God for their recreation and delectation. The first Englishman who rode to the village at the head of a Survey party to penetrate the thickly wooded area and lay a road and a railway line right up to the sea and who was wholly prosaic and hard headed broke into poetry quite spontaneously in his first despatches which contained lyrical descriptions of the beauties of Nadukadu, especially its fauna and

flora..[sic] He reported that as he rode from one end to the other, making slow progress with his party and cutting through the jungle over a considerable distance approaching the sea at the land's end, he was thrilled by the sights that greeted him. According to him, when he approached the sea shore, he felt that the skies were resting on the gentle, little waves of the shallow waters, the' blue of the heavens arching over the blue of the sea in milk white vertical stripes athwart the skies. He also spoke of the fishermen returning in the morning in their boats and spreading their nets on the beach with their huge catches of endless variety of fish. Earlier as he rode through the jungle, black bucks, spotted deer, bisons, wild pigs, nimble ponies, flocks of peacocks; wild fowl and partridge, scattered in all directions in a brilliant riot of colour at the sound of their hooves. But what prevailed with his bosses in expeditiously sanctioning plenty of funds for the road and railway line was not his lyrical description of the place, but the fact mentioned by him at the end of his dispatch that Nadukadu abutted into the Palk Strait and was separated from Ceylon across the sea by less than twenty miles.

Since those days for more than one hundred and fifty years, Nadukadu had served as camping ground for the rulers. The denizens of its woods and sea had pleased their palate without fail. But notwithstanding all the gaiety and sumptuous food during camps, the regular camping quarters retained their austere look and rigours of the pioneering days and lacked nearly all amenities like electricity and running water. The grim structure covered by tiles served as their camping place and the higher authorities set their face against sanctioning funds for making it attractive or even comfortable presumably in the forlorn hope of discouraging luxurious [sic] living. But the Nabobs, especially married Collectors and Police chiefs found the building too small and inconvenient and prevailed on the railway authorities to keep a bogie consisting of first, second and third class compartments loose-shunted at the siding of the railway line laid up to the sea in the village. The compartments were always equipped with electric lights, fans, dining section and European style bathroom with running water so that the visiting dignitaries and their women could stay in comfort and disport themselves at the beach or hunt

games in the woods. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 13-15)

Mrs. Green is the typical colonizer with all the British prejudice against the subject race of the colonized, as exemplified in her advice to Richard Grim, the Collector of Tanjore District: ““You must be careful [sic] with these native servants and bearers. Unless you work them all the time, they put on fat and stop doing anything”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 18). Worse still is her sneering at Anglo-Indians: ““Do you think I am one of those things, an Anglo-Indian as they call them? No, no, I am not a Chichi”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 19). This is real postcoloniality.

Richard Grim, the strict and unsocial District Collector of Tanjore, is transferred to Allahabad and Mr. Swami is ordered to join as the Collector in Tanjore. Richard Grim, though an Englishman, speaks in favour of Indians. It is reported that “when he addressed a College Union in the district he quoted from Bernard Shaw and Harold Laski about equality of races and colour prejudice. A report of his speech made elder English Administrators at Madras raises their eye-brows in disapproval” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 20). Grim typifies many English people like Annie Besant who could not stomach the colonizer’s attitude and method of administration.

In fact, when the British Superintendent of Police at Tanjore proposes to disperse a political meeting by opening fire, Grim

countermands him, He regards dispersing an unarmed crowd of citizen by opening fire to be “wholly un-English.” Such views being harboured by a representative of the colonizer are unpalatable and unacceptable and so Grim is transferred to a station in North India, whereupon he resigns and goes home to England (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 20-21).

Swami is used by the British against his own countrymen with absolute faith in his loyalty:

The British rulers had no hesitation in transferring Mr. Swami, I.C.S from Allahabad all the way down to Tanjore as the most proper man to deal with the situation although he was an Indian. They had absolute confidence in him in view of his very loyal record. In fact in the Indian Civil Service it was well-known that he was more loyal than the King himself with a record of repressive action against his own countrymen which was unsurpassed by his fellow-servants. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 21)

On the day of the storm, at about midnight, when the storm is still blowing, a messenger comes to deliver a message to the Collector— a military telegram received at the nearby telegraphic station. The telegram states that a Jap plane dropped parachutists at Nadukkadu at 7p.m.and directs the Collector to track them. The daffadar reports that just as the storm was subsiding, a man came

to the railway compartment and asked him in Tamil if there was a bus service to the nearest town, that he replied in the negative and that the man instantly vanished into the darkness and rains (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 26-27).

Swami's reaction is typical of the brainwashed colonized subject:

[t]he news that a stranger was seen here about, spoke to the Collector's peon and was allowed to go scot-free would invite the displeasure of the government. This was the first time in his career that Swami became nervous that the government would think he had done less than his duty. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 27)

Against all the racist prejudice of the likes of Mrs. Green, Gopalan projects the colonized natives as noble creatures. Arthur and Robbin, tossed into the sea by the fury of the storm, reach a hump of land, where they see a dozen natives warming themselves by a crackling fire. Although one of them laughs at the dripping white men, saying with native pride, "There is no doubt that our pond had given them a good ducking...." They let them dry and warm themselves by their fire and they become good friends of the Americans overnight. In the morning the natives transport the Americans in their own boat to their island station. On alighting, Robbin and Arthur warmly shake hands with the natives.

Gopalan's explanation is appropriate: "They liked them for their simplicity and guilelessness" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 28-29). When the Americans offer the natives currency notes, the "poor men" stoutly refuse to take them. And one of them proudly asks, "What for do we want your money? ...We have not done anything for you⁵" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 29).

Accompanying Arthur and Robbin in a launch to fetch Nelson Junior from Nadukkadu, the native fishermen Moula and Kokki show the Americans the rich variety of marine creatures in a swamp: the thirukkaival (stingray) the jelly fish, the dhobi's crab. They also see a brilliant display of birds: the flamingo which migrates from the Rann of Kutch, the pelican, the spoon-bill the painted stork and the cattle egrets. They get to see man-grove plants and innumerable tiny single-celled creatures which float in water and, when disturbed, leave phosphorescent wakes in the water (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 32-35). Moula astounds the foreigners by narrating a tale about his ancestor:

"You may not know that the sands in this region are treacherous. It is all quicksand. If you stood for half an hour in one spot, you would find yourself going down and down. The boat would be swallowed up by the sands in half an hour. In the olden days, centuries back, my ancestor was a King of the fishermen. Once a big King from the interior land

came with a huge army to attack him as he refused to pay the customary tributes. All our folk started weeping. They all declared that my ancestor was doomed and had no chance against such a huge army. Do you know what happened? Our king welcomed the invaders with their king and made them set camp in the sands for the night. He supplied them food and drinks. In the morning our king went and stood over them and laughed and laughed till his eyes bulged and popped out. The quicksands had swallowed up the whole lot of them as they lay sleeping after gorging themselves with food and drink”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 35-36)

Thus Moula and Kokki play Caliban to the two American Prosperos. As for Gopalan, he delights in parading the natural riches of the colonized land and projecting the two neo-colonists as impressed and enthused.

Sir R. Venkataramani, the Advocate General of the Government of Madras, is suddenly called out of Madras City by the death of a relation of him in his village. Since he has to go suddenly, he cannot tell the judges in advance. The next day all his juniors appear in court and the oldest among them rises and prays for an adjournment of the case. The judges refuse to adjourn the case (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 38). What follows is a typical

illustration of the colonizer's racial prejudice and superiority syndrome:

“Who died?” asked the Chief Justice.

“His cousin, Your Lordship” replied the Junior.

The Chief Justice turned to his brother judges on the Bench and said in a judicial whisper “I too had a cousin, but I had never seen him.” The three judges exchanged amused looks. The implication was that in India they made too much of these relations.

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 38)

When the anticolonial spirit spreads, even a favoured appointee of the colonizer will dare the Empire, as is illustrated by Sir Venkataramani's nationalist outburst:

He electrified the country by flinging his knighthood in their face and resigning from his position as Advocate General [.]. He also retired from the profession. His charge against the British rulers was that after the war they had grown arrogant and tyrannical, and broke every one of the promises made by them to the subject country while in trouble and on the whole gave India a very raw deal. To the astonishment of his colleagues he entered politics and lead the movement for home rule for India. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 39)

Sekar himself, at one stage, is a firm admirer of the colonizer:

Sekar, even after Venkataramani's open show down with the British, maintained his view that the British stood above all others in adherence to the rule of law. The Shavian gibe that the British in India were a very pillar of justice only so long as the dispute was between the natives but started nodding and leaning the moment there was a dispute between an Indian and Englishman was not accepted by him. He had studied under English professors and admired their manners and outlook. According to him the British would not deny India's claim to self-rule the moment they became convinced of India's ability to rule herself. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 39)

Sekar's seduction by the colonizer's culture extends to the point of a predilection for mimicry:

He set great store by the English language. He always envied people who could pronounce English like an Englishman and not rattle away without accent like most Indians. He found that students educated in English convent schools picked up their accent and were also very smart. Consequently he lost no time in putting his son Raman and daughter Padma in a

leading convent school where they learnt the language without effort and spoke it as it should be spoken.

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 39-40)

Gopalan claims superiority for the culture of the colonized the colonizer's in terms of generosity and humaneness:

Sekar's household became a large one, Though he had just two children, there were a number of others who lived under his protection. The English Chief Justice who had never met his cousin would have been horrified at the sight of cousins, nephews, nieces and distant relations crowdd [sic] into the Noa's Ark of his household. Sekar's wife Seethamma belonged to a big family and her parents reared a large crowd and naturally she never grudged to extend her household to take in every conceivable relation. Her goodness and benevolence became proverbial and Sekar never declined to do anything she wanted.

Notable among the many persons growing under Sekar and Seethamma was Krishnasami. Swami was a little older than Sekar's son Raman. Few knew that Swami was not Sekar's son nor in any way related to him but merely the son of a friend. They ate, dressed

studied and lived as if they were all his children.

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 40)

Swami is an outstanding example of the colonizer's influence on the colonized, because he has turned out to be the opposite of his father:

Swami's father Narayanan was a devoted disciple of Dr. Annie Besant. He became a leading spirit among her followers. He retired as a Deputy Collector just when Dr. Besant launched her Home Rule Movement against the British rulers. He wholeheartedly joined the movement and started living with his fellow disciples for whose upkeep he contributed all his earnings.

Narayanan was a close friend of Sir R. Venkataramani. His self sacrifice was admired by the veteran lawyer. It was commonly believed that he was acting under Narayanan's influence when he renounced his title and lucrative career to live like an ascetic. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 40)

Debates are an inevitable part of the postcolonial process. They help to lead to national identity. In Sekar's large household, debates are quite common and often acrimonious, with some participants taking a pro-British stand and others, particularly the younger generation, taking a nationalist stand. Tilak, Besant,

Cnndhi and SuhrRmnnifi Bharathi are icons, Swami, however, is an exception:

The exception was, of course sami who always believed in thinking for himself. He was not exactly a conservative but wholly pro British. He was in his teens and his ideal was the Indian Civil Service. He believed that people should be governed with a firm hand. He had no doubt that Indians were still impractical and unfit to rule themselves The surrounding in which he had spent his early boyhood days started a reaction in him against all patriotic and religious sentiments. When those around him chanted with Sivaraman the patriotic songs of Bharathi. Sami reacted by holding aloof. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 43-44).

Gopalan describes one of the debates in Sekar's household:

On one occasion a bitter wordy duel raged over an incident just reported in the newspapers. At a glittering ceremony in the Benares University attended by the Viceroy, Princes and rich politicians and presided over by Dr. Besant, a new comer in Indian Politics called Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi violated all conventions and made a highly challenging speech. No one in India had dared till then to speak in

front of a Viceroy and in such fearless terms. He squarely denounced the British rulers for shutting their eyes to the stark poverty and misery of the people who could not afford the cost of a single function like the one they were holding. He condemned the Princes for their extravagance at the expense of their hapless subject who could not afford one square meal a day. He advocated simplicity and a democratic approach in dealing with the country. Dr. Besant tried to stop Gandhi from speaking and finally Gandhi had to stop in the middle. Those who followed Besant rose and spoke attacking Gandhi with indignation. Gandhi's calmness both at the function and later in defending himself and his mild manners only further exasperated his critics who had lost their temper and never recovered it.

“What does Gandhi know of Indian conditions” said Sankaran a distant cousin of Seethamma and an employee in a British firm. “He may know something about Indians in South Africa. We have to observe some decorum, at such functions”.

“But don't you admire the man's courage?” shouted Sivaraman. “You must remember that Gandhi is an Indian and has every right to talk as he

did. After-all Besant is an English woman. Where is all her home rule movement today? Over night she became frightened by British battalions and beat a retreat”.

“I will never agree that Besant became afraid,” retorted Sankaran. “She is still writing in her New India to popularize her ideals and educate the people. This is the only civilized way to do things. She is a great soul’¹.

“It is indeed a pretty way to gain home rule by publishing distorted versions in her paper to suit her purposes.” said Sivaraman. Why did she not publish the full explanatory statement issued by Gandhi? I tell you today, Gandhi speaks the language of the people. He is an Avatar. People like Besant can never understand him or us. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 44-45).

The boy teacher of Hindi from North India, Raghuvar Dayal, represents the patriotic zeal spreading across the colonized nation under the direction of Gandhi:

The Pandit wore a coarse hand spun cloth which came to be called Khadi and a cap in coarse white cloth which came to be well known as Gandhi cap. He was hardly twenty, fair and lean and with a ready

smile on his lips whenever he spoke. He kept spinning on a wooden wheel called charkas[.] Some of his students were spinning on similar charkas Spindles of coarse yarn lay beside him. Some of the students were taking down notes as he dictated while spinning.

The Pundit stood up on seeing Sekar,

“Namasteji” said the Pundit advancing towards Sekar with folded hands. “I am Raghuvar Dayal, a volunteer teacher of Hindi. It is Mahatmaji’s order that I should be here. I had to come all of a sudden. The gracious lady has been good enough to accommodate me here and provide for my stay”.

“I am glad to meet you” said Sekar. “What is your father?”

“He is a lawyer in Allahabad” he replied. “He gave up the profession to work under Gandhiji. Our whole family is now devoted to this kind of work under Gandhiji.”

“You are still a boy” said Sekar “What were you doing?”

“I was in the B. L[.] Class last year when Gandhiji’s call came; I came out in response to the call”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 47)

Raguvar Dayal represents Gandhiji's challenge to the colonizer's linguistic hegemony.

Gopalan narrates the change in Indian politics to record the march of postcoloniality:

Politics in India changed from a fashionable hobby of high brow intellectuals to an all time pursuit by all and sundry. Gone were the days when once a year polished speeches embroidered with choice quotations from Milton, Mill, Gladstone, Bright and Marley, were made calling on the English rulers not to be un-English in India. A new leader speaking a new language, simple, earnest [sic] straight and without decorative frills, had come on the scene and the whole atmosphere had changed. Here was a man who challenged all that was traditional in Indian politics, the long orations, platitudinous resolutions, periodical genuflection and burning of incense at the altar [sic] of power and what may be called the begging bowl attitude. Here was the first popular confrontation with entrenched foreign power. Hereafter it became a demand by a people aspiring to be free. His clarion call for non-cooperation with the British, power electrified the whole country at once. Don't have anything to do with Courts, Schools

Colleges and offices established by the British Refuse to Co-operate with the Government at all levels. Be ready to sacrifice all that you have for the country. Don't be afraid of imprisonment. The country outside is itself a vast prison under the British. Stop living in clover. The country will be free in a year.

In response to Gandhiji's call many Government servants resigned their jobs regardless of consequences. Lawyers abandoned practice. Students discontinued studies. They all came into the open, into the street to follow the man on whom the country had spontaneously conferred the title of Mahatma or great soul. He was not mere Gandhi any more, he came to be called Mahatma Gandhi. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 49-50)

Sekar takes no more than an amused interest in the movement. He has no time for politics. Moreover the Government has offered him the coveted post of Advocate General of the Government of Madras. It is expected that he will soon be knighted. At this juncture, his mentor Venkataramani suggests that Sekar should receive Mahatma Gandhi at the time of his impending visit to Madras. His mentor's suggestion lands Sekar in psychological trauma—a feature of postcolonial literature:

Sekar was in a quandary. He was at the pinnacle of his profession. A glittering prize coveted by all lawyers was offered to him and there was no reason why he should not accept it. Gandhi was a revolutionary agitator in the eyes of the British rulers. Sekar would be taking a plunge into politics by agreeing to receive Gandhi as suggested by his venerable senior, Venkataramani. At this hour he had none to turn to for counsel. His beloved wife Seethamma had passed away all of a sudden a couple of months before. Earlier Sivaraman her brother had died after severe stomach pain which had plagued him all his life and soon after his wife too followed him, though she was quite hale and healthy. Sekar was affected by these sad events but he found solace in his all- absorbing work. What would Seethamma have advised at this critical hour? If he shrank from the suggestion of his senior, what would his respected senior, who had himself sacrificed all that mattered to him in life think of him? (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 51)

However, subsequently, Venkataramani himself chooses to receive Mahatma Gandhi, but places Sekar's name on the list of prominent men for an interview with Gandhi. When Gandhi

learns that Sekar is the prospective Advocate General of Madras, he doubts if he is likely to come. But Venkataramani emphasizes that the movement requires men like Sekar. Gandhi insists that his appeal is to the people, the ordinary man in the street, though he does not spurn the big and the educated men who may come in (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 50-52).

Sekar's meeting with Gandhi is epiphanic:

Sekar had seen Gandhiji's photo in one or two newspapers. He had an idea that he was very thin, on account of very abstemious habits and unimpressive. His face had always struck him as that of a peasant giving no inkling of intellectual power. This was the first time he stood before the Mahatma, who was sitting on the floor with legs crossed. Sekar also sat down.

After a brief introduction, Gandhi said "I have been told that you are a very busy lawyer. Naturally it must be very difficult for you to come away at this hour."

Sekar realized that this was an implied reference to his unpunctuality. He would have started offering excuses which would have emphasized that he was a busy man. But when he opened his mouth, he found himself saying: "You have come over such a distance

and you are spending so much time not for your sake but for the sake of others including me[.j Your time is more precious than mine. What is my work compared to yours?”

“Mr. Sekar is already a convert” said Gandhi.” He is making a very valuable admission. He has said in so many words that his job is not above his country. But, Sir, I hear from Ramani that you are mentioned for the Advocate Generalship. This is hardly the propitious hour for us to meet”.

Sekar’s reply to this question would decide his future forever. Which did he value more.? [sic]

“I am not enamoured of any job after meeting you” said Sekar decisively. “I would not have come if I had rated it higher”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 53)

Sekar takes to politics with a real nationalist zeal—the hallmark of an intellectual in a postcolonial society, providing guidance and setting new trends:

Sekar became a household name in politics also. It was not difficult for him with his incisive intellect and legal acumen to tower above most others in the field which he now entered. The rulers could not but take note of his interpretation of the law in condemning their actions and they had to come out

with specious logic to justify them. He made himself not only the acute brain behind the popular movement but also the conscience keeper of its supreme leader who was really in need of a lieutenant who would not blindly give him allegiance nor be afraid of frankly expressing his views.

A large crowd collected around him and had to be fed and kept in good humour. The house that for half a century had been humming with legal deliberations now hummed with spinning wheels and strident discussions. Sekar saw early enough that all this human energy should be harnessed for constructive work instead of running to waste in barren talk and idleness. He therefore lost no time in formulating schemes for a new type of job oriented education, for a network of cottage industries to make villages self-sufficient and for tapping scientific talent[s] by providing scope for research. He threw his palatial house open to the public for housing these activities. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 55-56)

Gopalan narrates the course of the non-cooperation movement to illustrate the uneven course of postcoloniality:

All leaders including Sekar were arrested for illegal activities and sent to jail for long terms. Their

followers were also arrested in due course. But the rulers found that repression made the movement more popular. With the leaders placed behind the prison bars, the masses acted on their own without guidance and indulged in violent acts in a few places. The powerful rulers were for a while nonplussed and were bent on crushing the movement with an iron hand when all of a sudden Gandhi whose non-cooperation movement dazzled the world called it off. He dec[l]ared that the people failed to understand his basic creed of non-violent struggle to free them from the foreign yoke. He would never compromise with his ideal that the means were more important than the end and he had no use for freedom won by violent means.

Bitter controversy raged in the country over this action of the great leader, whether he was right or wrong in calling off the movement. Frustrated men asked in dismay whether Gandhi was a political leader and not a religious or spiritual reformer. Angry men formed ginger groups and declared they would go it alone against the wicked rulers who derived unexpected help from the most unexpected quarter just when they were at their wits' end for survival.

Politics in India passed into doldrums. Students went back to schools and colleges. Lawyers who had given up their profession resumed practice. Non cooperation died of suicide. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 56-57)

Coming out of jail, Sekar refuses to go back to law. He moves to his ancestral village of Nadukkadu and takes to farming: “Here he started to live mainly with a view to putting into practice his educational and industrial schemes. He tried to organise the local peasantry to engage themselves in worthwhile pursuits besides agriculture to keep them occupied all the year through.” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 57)

After a few years Gandhi launches his second movement, called the Civil Disobedience movement. Sekar is called out of his retreat and is jailed. When released from jail at the end of the Civil Disobedience movement, he returns to Madras. Shortly after, Swami tops the I.C.S. examination. He has to go to England for two years for training. Sekar is reminded of his wife Seethamma’s dying wish that Swami should marry their daughter Padma. But Sekar is hesitant because Padma and Swami do not agree on anything. However, an accident moves Swami to a hospital, where Padma is practically his nurse. Every day he comes home with comments on Swami’s brains and his freedom from shoddy sentiments. This provides Sekar with an opening and he suggests

that Swami should wed Padma before leaving for England. Padma just blushes. Swami and Padma become man and wife (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 58-61).

Swami's two year sojourn in England subverts him completely and he displays all the symptoms of mimicry:

He was in England for two years. At first he wrote a few letters and. then altogether stop writing. When he returned to India he was posted in the United Provinces according to his own choice.

His life in England made him a total misfit for India. He dreaded going back into an Indian household and hobnob with a crowd of cousins and uncles. So while Sekar and Padma were eagerly waiting for him to return to Madras he proceeded from Bombay to the United Provinces.

His career in the Civil service [sic] in the province was one of smooth success. He fitted into the job like a nail in a plank. Sooner than others in the service he was placed in independent charge of a district which seldom happened to an Indian under the British. He was not popular with the Indian colleagues who found in him an unpatriotic streak. He seemed to go out of the way to insult national sentiments. This may have put him high in the esteem of his British masters. It

certainly put him low in that of his fellow Indians,
(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 61).

For one long year Swami makes no effort to contact Padma or Sekar. So Sekar goes with Padma to Allahabad, where Swami is serving as sub-Collector, Padma tries to wriggle out, but Sekar persuades her to go with him. At Allahabad they are informed that Swami is at an up-country camp and may take a few days to return . So they go all the way to the remote camp. When informed of their arrival, Swami sends word for them to wait at the headquarters. Reaching Allahabad, Sekar wants to wait for Swami, but the furious Padma does not wish to wait to take a humiliating answer from him. She explodes: ““He has become a Burrah Sahib. There is no place in his heart for people like us.”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 62)

Sekar accepts Padma’s decision to leave Allahabad by the earliest train for Madras. At the railway station they learn that the next train is at 9 A.M. next morning. They spend the night at a miserable hotel. In the morning, they leave for the station, telling a Madarasi servant where they are going. With great difficulty, they find seats in a second class compartment. When the train moves a daffadar running up to their compartment and announcing the arrival of his master, asks them to get down. They can see Swami standing near the station master’s room and looking into the compartments. Sekar is not sure if they are right in going away,

having come all the way. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 63). But Padma takes a firm decision, which is weighted with extreme personal alienation:

“Why does he come here when he did not care to ask the daffadar to escort us to his bungalow at Allahabad” asked Padma. “Do you think it is out of love? I have no doubt he counted on our leaving and is merely worried over what he should do in case we stayed on and darkened his door. The news conveyed by the Madarasi servant, that we were leaving by this train, must have come as a great relief to him. Father! I did not want to come here. I have heard how these men returning from England feel about their own family, their own parents and wives. They are simply ashamed of the whole lot. But we are not ashamed of ourselves. Let him lead his life and let us lead ours.”
(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 64)

Gopalan satirically describes the arrogance of the British colonizers in South East Asia and how it was punctured like a balloon:

In Malaya English men and women lived completely cut off from outside world. Incredibly they failed to sense what was coming until it burst on them with a bang and they had to surrender to it with a whimper.

The Japanese attack actually caught them in the midst of their rivalry and frivolity, cricket matches and cock-tail parties. Those who believed that the Naval Base at Singapore was invulnerable to all attack by sea were all of a sudden face to face with the hideous reality that it was vulnerable both by sea and land.

On the eve of the Japanese occupation, the ruling classes in these islands were not far different from the lotus-eaters so vividly portrayed by the poet. They were languishing like tired eye lids upon tired eyes. But on one point they were alert and stood steadfast. They held to the old sharp cleavage between the privileged rulers and the ruled in every walk of life. Apart from the local native population, the immigrants from India were the untouchables in their scheme of things, their pet aversion. But curiously the ruling elite and the planters put up their noses not only against the natives and Indians but also the white men who did not fit into their caste system. These were the Americans, Australians and Canadians who were looked down upon, especially the Americans whom they called Yanks. No doubt these Americans were white all right and not exactly the lesser breed

without the law but they were less equal, (Gopalan,
Tryst with Destiny 65)

The myopic Whites do not invite Nelson to their all White parties. The blue blooded keep him in psychological trauma. In spite of this Nelson grows into a millionaire by his contribution to mechanizing the world. The ruling class criticizes Nelson by recalling the proverbial business mindedness of the American. Nelson makes lots of money but yet he is considered less equal socially. He feels insulted by the British racist behaviour. He looks for an occasion to take revenge for not being invited to their club. When they arrange a big party at the Governor's residence, he engages all the butlers, servants and bearers for a rival party, and everyone deserts the all-White British party to attend the colourful party arranged by Nelson:

He held a rival function on the same day and at the same time in a posh public place to which he invited people of all complexions and for which he engaged all the available butlers, bearers and servants including those booked for the gubernatorial tamasha who at the last moment deserted the all-white for the colourful party staged by Nelson. The result was that the lords and ladies wrung their hands and cursed Nelson for being so spiteful. For the first time, they

regretted that they had not taken him seriously.

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 67)

Japanese businessmen are interested in Nelson because his gadgets outdate those their leading firm called Rubber Bee, which who enjoys a monopoly among planters. A competitive spirit prevails in trade and business between the Japanese and Nelson in Singapore. Nelson stays in the Sea View Hotel. The proprietor of Rubber Bee convinces Edward Mack the proprietor of the Sea View Hotel, to appoint a Japanese girl named Saki to steal Nelson's manufacturing secrets. She poisons Nelson in mild doses and he develops a persistent stomach pain, which is attended to and cured by the Indian doctor Raman. He diagnoses the ailment and finds out what caused it. He asks Nelson to dismiss Saki at once. Nelson's rival Rubber Bee advertises a novel device for extracting rubber efficiently. Now Nelson realises that Dr. Raman's suspicions regarding Saki are well-founded (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 67-71).

However, Nelson's device is safe because there is a catch in the diagrams. Rubber Bee is not aware of this. Nelson thanks Raman and holds him in high esteem. Nelson persuades Raman to leave Singapore in the face of the Japanese invasion but he declines his offer. The resistance of the poor makes Raman refuses to desert them:

The event the Japanese landed in Khottabaru and later bombed the Naval base. A plane flew over from New York to take Nelson home. Naturally Nelson offered to drop.[sic] Dr. Raman in India. But the doctor politely refused the offer. He explained that the local Indian and Malay population expected him to lead them in the crisis as he was respected by the Japanese sections of the population too.

“Do you think that the Japanese will not harm Indians if you remained and talked to them kindly?” said Nelsonf.]

“Not at all” said Dr. Raman. “I have seen enough to realize what is in store for the poor people here. But I think I and a few others can organize these people to resist and not be subjected. I have a few plans for presenting a united front. To come away with you is to desert them”.

“I am not convinced that you can move the hearts of the Japanese” said Nelson. “I am unhappy that you are stubborn. But I want you to promise that, as long as it is possible, you will try to contact me when you are in trouble” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 72-73)

The British forces melt like snow in East Asia. The Whites leave the countries through monopolised transports. The cruelties

inflicted by the Japanese on the natives and the Indians are witnessed by Raman in Singapore. Raman regrets that the local people are demoralized and so he is unable to effect unity. At this stage he remembers Dr. Basho, a popular dentist with whose cooperation Raman thinks of effecting unity: “The local population could form a league under his leadership to negotiate with the Japanese military machine and arrive at an understanding for ensuring fair treatment and avoidance of needless slaughter” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 74).

Dr. Raman aspires for Indian Independence. So, he collects all the abandoned Indian soldiers from all over East Asia with the help of the Japanese. In the meantime Subash Chandra Bose forms the Indian National Army in Singapore and shifts its headquarters to Rangoon, appointing Dr. Raman Health Minister and the backbone of the organization. The INA comes to Indian soil through the Burma border. But it is short-lived because many of its leaders die in bombings (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 73-75). However, Netaji is determined to carry on the struggle:

But Netaji did not yield to the prevailing gloom. The war in Europe might be over. The German war machine might have collapsed. Japan too might fall. But the INA would not surrender. Their job lay inside India. These were Netaji’s brave words to the soldiers whom he had with great difficulty rescued and

reassembled in Rangoon where he still had his
Headquarters. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 76)

Bose's alternative strategy is to defeat the British using the opportunity by getting external support. Raman doubts Bose's plan for an alternative programme. Bose says: "The Japanese have no doubt that Russia will declare war on them any moment and stab them in the back'" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 80).

Bose thinks that the vulnerable position of the British can be taken as an opportunity to defeat them with the help of Japan and America. Bose sends Raman to India while he proposes to leave for Russia. Raman is advised to meet Nelson with whose help a negotiation will be held with the American President (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 75-84J. Bose says:

Nelson is now in India, actually in Delhi just now, as the personal envoy of Truman. The Japanese Prime Minister is confident that Nelson is in the inner counsels of the President and one of his top advisers. So the Military Authorities need not be approached. The proposal is that you go to India at once. Saki will fly you to your native district. You will land there to avoid attraction. I know you come from Madras from a remote district with a sea coast. I did not know till yesterday that you are Sekar's son. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 84)

Bose wants a man like Sekar to come to rule. Bose knows Raman's father Sekar well as a close associate of Gandhiji . Bose praises Sekar as a terror to the Treasury Benches and adds:

“If ever India becomes free, Sekar is the type of man who should come to rule. But the chatter boxes around Gandhiji will take all the plums. Now where is he?”

“I do not know” said Raman. “When I left my home before War for Singapore, he was in Madras. The sea shore place you refer to is called Nadukadu, a village where my father has his landed property”.

“Saki will drop you there in the sea shore village, what did you call it, Nadukkadu”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 84-85)

Saki, the Japanese ace, is empowered to pilot the Japanese plane. Saki shows flying tricks to Raman and the other passenger, Manian. They wonder at her talent. She finally drops them on land near the village of Nadukkadu: ““Look at this map. It is somewhere there! It is island's end, a dot of land by the sea. I am dropping you both right now. Attention! Strap on your parachute. Unfold it”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 89).

When Raman lands, his leg is injured. He reaches Dr. Murali's house. Murali has a daughter named Malini, who is a medical student. As Murali attends to Raman's injured leg they

converse about the photo which is kept safe by Malini. Raman does not know the whereabouts of his father and sister. This is an instance of a postcolonial feature, place and displacement:

“I sent this photo to you with my letter. I also sent one to my father. Now do you know where they are, my father and Padma? They were both in Madras when I last heard from them before the war.”

“They are in Nadukkadu in the house at the water front” replied Murali. “Your father has entirely remodeled it. It is such a nice bungalow.”

“Good Heavens! Are they in Nadukkadu” exclaimed Raman. “I did not know. I am glad I did not know. Nothing would have been more disastrous if I had stepped in there than here.” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny*. 93)

Malini is empowered as an intelligent medical student, who is preparing for her examination. Raman comments:

“Obviously, you are reading for your examination,” said Raman. I could hear the famous passage from Bailey which you just now read aloud: ‘Bones are not filled with red marrow but with black ingratitude.’ Very cynical but perhaps not untrue. Who is your lecturer in Surgery?”

“Dr, Hande is our lecturer”, said Malini. “He had studied in England. We think a good deal of him. He is very popular.” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 97)

The cook then interrupts Raman and Malini. He says that Krishnan, the old Congress leader, has come to invite Raman for a meeting as the guest of honour to reward him for his service to the INA in Singapore. Raman remembers Krishnan who was a public speaker in his school days. Raman meets Krishnan but refuses to attend the meeting as he is indispositioned. Raman is disgusted to see that the people of India have still not changed. It appears as though the war has not come to India, since the cruel experience of war can cast a chastening influence. Raman’s remark makes Malini recall the words of Churchill: ““Churchill is reported as saying that we in India are living a sheltered existence under the British umbrella and have been spared all sufferings”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 101).

Raman is unable to attend the meeting as he has not yet recovered fully. In the meantime, two armed men come to Murali’s house in search of Raman to arrest him, because he landed in Nadukkadu by means of a Japanese plane. Since his condition is bad he is taken to hospital by the armed men. The meeting arranged by Krishnan is prohibited by the authorities. Krishnan and his friends argue that the meeting is arranged only to honour Raman, not to conduct a political session. The tales of Raman’s

Bufferings spread in and around Tanjore and the people condemn the British conduct:

They were holding a big meeting at Tanjore to welcome Dr. Raman. The old friends of his father joined together to honour him. They had arranged to hold the meeting in a meadow where such meetings were now prohibited. Those who defied the ban could count on trouble from the authorities. But they explained that the purpose of the meeting was not political but solely to honour the Doctor who was very popular and had returned home safe braving terrible ordeals.

The story went round that Dr. Raman managed to reach home by walking through jungles, swimming across streams and fighting robbers and wild canibals. Some Indians had already returned by this Burma route to tell terrible tales of their ordeals. It was bruited abroad that all this had to be endured as the Whites monopolised all transports available by land, water and air and threw all Indians to the wolves. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 103-04)

Raman is arrested and hospitalised. The crowd collected for the meeting is dispersed when armed police attack them after the order comes from the Collector Swami and the D.S.P. The police

chase the crowd and attack them. Swami sees the ground which is usually used for arranging such meetings and orders the Deputy Collector and the Tahsildar to plough the ground:

Next day Swami with his Deputy Collector and Tahsildars came to the spot. He ordered them to engage men to plough up the whole maidan, fence it and plant it with green manure trees.

The Collector's hobby at present was agriculture. He had a panacea for growing more food. He was convinced that what the people lacked was green manure. He had always advised that wherever there was open space it must be grown with green manure. Thus the spacious maidan was turned into a protected plantation to achieve the double object of preventing public meetings and growing more food.

(Gopalan. *Tryst with Destiny* 105-06)

Women are dependent on men and men exploit them. This is a typical postcolonial metaphor of the colonizer and the colonized. Gopalan inserts another story within the main story. A carpenter named Chandran is the Headman of Nadukkadu. He robs the properties of Parvathi, his sister-in-law. Parvathi is the wife of Manian, a member of the I.N.A., who has gone to Kuala Lumpur to make his fortune. He has been sending money regularly for Parvathi, who is living with her sister, who is married

to Chandran. Chandran has been utilizing the money to enrich himself. Chandran quarrels with his wife in a drunken mood and tortures the two sisters:

Earlier in the night the husband and wife had a quarrel the usual one whenever Chandran returned home drunk and started beating her and the children. Invariably on such occasions, she never failed to charge him with his inequities against her sister and her husband. This night Chandran returned late from the Collector's camp after a halt at a toddy stall and fully drunk. He picked up quarrel [sic] with her during which she accused him of robbing Manian and Parvathi of their wealth and behaving treacherously to them. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 109-10)

Displacement plays havoc with the fortunes of Manian's family. Parvathi's father tries in vain to salvage their fortunes:

Vali had married away his two daughters and was thinking he had not a care in the world. No doubt he felt a doubt whether Manian acted wisely in trusting Chandran with his moneys but his daughters were all praise for his elder son-in-law Chandran and his relatives and he had concluded that there would be no trouble. But slowly news about Chandran's misdeeds reached him and he was convinced that

Chandran was enriching himself at Manian's expense. He wanted to warn Manian and wrote to him but his letters never reached Singapore. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 111)

Finding herself in a hopeless position, Parvathi goes to her father with her son. It is there that Manian meets her after having visited Chandran who had told everyone that Manian was dead. Manian says that everyone warned him to be careful against Chandran. He tells them about the INA and that he has come on a mission at the command of Netaji and to drive the British out of India. Parvathi and her father are disappointed that he has not come back to live with his wife and child. His father-in-law fears that none can drive the British out of India. He asks Manian to file a suit against Chandran in order to recover all the lands so as to live happily with his wife and son. Frustration and uncertainty prevail in the life of the colonized people (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 112-13).

Out on the road Manian runs into Ramasami who was known as Ramsen in Singapore. Manian understands that Ramsen is a true Indian because he provides proof of Raman's stature in Singapore:

“You can't drive the British out. That is why I always remember the brave stand Dr. Raman made at the Cathay meeting. Some men did not understand him

and wanted to shout him down. But. he braved them all and opposed the resolution declaring war on America. He said, ‘I can understand that we are up against the British. But what have we against America, the only friend of freedom in the world? I can’t believe the Japanese are going to be our saviours’. That is how the Doctor spoke. No one ventured to talk like the Doctor in those days. Netaji turned red in the face.”

“But believe me, Netaji loves the Doctor” said Manian. “As you know the Doctor could have reached India in no time. He had the help of the American who offered to take him by air to Madras. But the Doctor said he wanted to remain behind and brave it out for the sake of the people in Singapore. He fought every inch of the ground with the Japanese to protect the Indian population. Though he openly differed from Netaji on every issue of moment, Netaji honoured him as his advisor. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 115-16)

The patriotic Manian and Ramsen are arrested by the police on suspicion but Ramsen is released later at Tanjore. He does not have money to go back home. So, Ramsen collects money from the public by singing sarcastic songs against the British:

Valiant people of this city,

Harken to my song!
Of the Police be not afraid:
Are they not our kith and kin?
Only when they rush here,
Let us change the theme a little!
In Java, Borneo, Sumathra,
In Burma, Thailand and the Straits,
In every clime they had their way,
Mister White and Misses White;
Dancing, prancing, day and night,
Eating, sleeping, kissing, prattling,
Drinking like the fish always,
Lived they in their paradise.
Too much eating, too much drink,
Made the tall Whites soft and useless,
When yellow fever overtook them
And the Yellow Doctor had to come.
Who could, cure the ailing White men,
When they caught the yellow fever,
But the tiny yellow Doctor had to come.
Who could cure the ailing White men,
When they caught the yellow fever,
But the tiny yellow Doctor
Diving from his Bamboo plane?

Down he tumbled with his pills

And cured them of their wretched ills. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 118)

Ramsen's singing represents the use of native resources to rouse the people against imperialism. Moreover, Ramsen's songs underline the historical fact that the British are not invincible, for they show them running for their lives. When some members of the secret police ask him to sing pro-British songs, Ramsen does so, but once the policemen leave, he reverts to his anti-British theme and resumes singing:

You must see the Whites all rushing,
Frightened from their All- White clubs,
Quite like White rats from a burning ship,-
You must see them screaming, sobbing
And scampering in their boats and cars!
All the seas were White seas,
All the streams were White streams.
All the trains pulled White loads
All the boats but White boats,
Air, Water, Land, all blocked for blacks!-
Leave the blacks and Browns to devils.
They could manage with the Yellow.
Keep the boats and trains for Whitemen-
Clear the roads for them.

Hungry Indian coolies,
Tattered Indian soldiers,
Dying Indian Women,
And Wailing Indian Children,--
Keep them off the White paths,
What a plague they are! (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny*

119)

Ramsen protests to the policemen that he cannot sing the praises of the British:

“When the Japs occupied Singapore, Doctor Raman organised the Civil Population including Indians. He fought for our rights, every bit of it. One day, the Japs sent for the Doctor and asked him to broadcast to the Indian Nation that the Japs were treating us nicely. But the Doctor refused. The Japs did treat us all right then. It was only later that the black marketeers and the Quislings made our life unhappy. Yet the Doctor refused. Do you think I will betray those who suffered with me by singing the praises of the British?” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 122-23)

In the whole process, Ramsen provides historical data that cannot be otherwise furnished, fulfilling the role of the troubadour, the native folk singer, who contributes to the establishment of national identity. Visiting Raman with his

daughter Padma at the hospital, Sekar hears Ramsen's excellent and brave ballads, which refer to Raman's great deeds in Singapore also, and enquires about him and wants to know how he knows Raman and also all that happened in Singapore. Ramsen meets them at their hotel that evening and tells the entire story, about how he joined the mission in Singapore and how he returned home via Burma. He also says that Raman and Manian have been sent to India to carry out a new INA mission. Sekar says that all have become impossible because I.N.A. men are being arrested and Netaji is said to be lost or shot down:

“All that has now become impossible” said Sekar.

“The allies have won. The Japs are surrendering.

Leading I.N.A. men have been captured. They are all in the Red Fort at Delhi. The wonder is that Netaji is still speaking on the Radio as bravely as ever before.”

“Did you hear the Radio this evening? It appears that the plane in which Netaji travelled is either lost or shot down. There is some confusion in the announcement. It is said that the plane is lost or shot down. What about Netaji?” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 124-25)

Meanwhile, Nelson Junior recovers rapidly and moves out on crutches to watch the harvesting operations. He sees men and women carrying sheaves and threshing them manually in the hot

sun. They thresh the sheaves on the level ground and throw them on a mound. Then they measure the paddy till night. This time-consuming process gives him an idea for an agricultural gadget which will help in harvesting (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 125-26). The innovation of the agricultural gadget is a metaphor for alterity:

Then suddenly an idea struck him. He thought that a mechanical contraption or gadget could be perfected to serve the purposes of agriculturists in India. In his mind he worked out the outlines and details of a gadget while observing the operations. It was just then that he heard the voices of men approaching the place.

“Hi”, said Robbin and Arthur together.

“Hi” returned Nelson.

“Do you want to turn a peasant?” laughed Arthur.

“I am glad I drifted to this place” said Nelson. “I find myself perfecting in my mind the outline of a gadget for mechanical instead of manual harvesting. My father will be immensely interested in the project and I propose to write to him with a diagram of the harvesting gadget I want to make” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 126)

Innovation for advancement is a typical postcolonial feature. Nelson's friend Arthur asks him whether his aim is to mint money by selling that machine, forgetting that the type of soil available is slushy. Nelson is ready to invent a gadget suitable to any kind of soil. So, he draws a sketch with his crutches on the ground and shows Arthur the outline of the gadget: "Do you notice that my machine never rests on the soil?" said Nelson. "It floats all the time it harvests. I have therefore called it by an appropriate name, unless the Senior wants to give it a different one. I have called it the Hover-reaper" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 127).

Nelson Junior and Arthur come to Sekar's house, where Murali is talking to Sekar and Padmini. Murali enquires of Nelson about his health. After a while they leave Murali's house. Murali now tells Sekar and Padmini about Raman's arrival at his house with the limping leg. He also says that they need not worry about Raman because he came to him at night. Sekar and Padma do worry about Raman, though Murali tries to reassure them. Padma is an intelligent woman and she can perceive Raman's critical position:

"But, father, if he proves that he came to negotiate as an emissary of Bose for surrender of Japan, don't you think his case may be viewed from a different angle?" questioned Padma. The Allies have won the war and they may take a generous view about helpless subjects

actually abandoned and stranded outside India”

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 128).

Sekar argues with Raman whether the I. N. A.’s mission is to wage war against the British or to protect the life of the people abandoned by the British. Padma supports Sekar’s argument and says that it is time to save the unfortunate men like Raman and others, implying that Raman should not lead the organisation. Sekar supports her and replies that Bhulubai, an active member of the organisation, can lead the defence and save the life of many people. Murali differs from them because he has faith in Raman and hence, says: “I am sure Raman has a special case to plead as a Doctor.... He can prove that he was able to prevent mass murder of the local population at the hands of the Japanese by organising the people and using his influence as a Doctor” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 130).

Raman is arrested but hospitalized under the custody of British soldiers. Nelson Junior and his friends visit Raman and ask about his health. He says that he is all right. When Nelson wants to know about the INA, Raman praises Subash Chandra Bose:

“We were not Collaborators [sic] at all. We were essentially an organisation to keep the Japanese in check on the one hand and on the other use the opportunity presented by the War to liberate our

Country [sic]. But for the INA there would have been mass murder of the local population as well as the ¹ poor Indian soldiers abandoned by the British in the occupied areas. It was Subash Chandra Bose popularly called Nethaji that helped to wield [sic] them together in the face of great odds..." (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 135).

Nelson Junior now tells Raman that Japan has been atom-bombed and has surrendered. He adds that his father will help if Raman asks. He assures Raman that his father knows political personalities and even the American President. They will heed the words of Nelson who is the greatest industrialist in America. But Raman says:

"I am just one of the many Indians who are going to be tried. I am told that the British have already rounded up many of them in the Red Fort at Delhi. I may assert that not one of them is guilty in any sense. Each one of them was thrown to the wolves by the British when they themselves safely evacuated. These Indians had to protect themselves. I am content that what happens to them happens to me too." (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 136)

Soon after the Americans leave, Murali and Malini call on him. They complain that the British officer outside asked them so many questions before allowing them in:

“What else do you expect?” asked Raman. “From their point of view am I not an enemy? The wonder is that they are allowing these interviews at all. I have no doubt that you know the latest news. Japan has surrendered. What little sense there was in my mission is now blown off with Hiroshima”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 138)

The political situation in India has slightly changed during the war. Seven provinces were ruled by Indians with the British colonizers’ assurance that they would not interfere in their rule. Sekar wished them to continue in power. But they resigned and British Advisers are back in power. It is ridiculed even by school children as a great blunder. An Englishman who is a descendant of Kipling is one of the British Advisers at Madras.

War time propaganda gave him plenty of opportunity to kiple. As the years passed he came to the firm conclusion that the Indian masses were ideal subjects under their benevolent rule. Except for a few sporadic futile acts of sabotage in 1942 like disrupting traffic and communications which were confined to isolated

areas, the people as a whole appeared to prefer British rule.... (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 143)

All this is part of history and makes for authenticity, making the subject people's struggle for liberation a part of history. Kipling decides to educate the people of the Madras province of the benefits of British rule. He goes to Tanjore and asks Swami, the District Collector, to arrange a meeting and a moderator to translate his speech into Tamil. Padmini is appointed moderator, not by Swami but by Kipling. It embarrasses Swami because his prestige does not allow him to speak with Padmini. Swami requests the Chief Secretary, Sathu Menon, whom he has known since their training period, for a transfer. Sathu Menon convinces Swami, saying that he has to be lucky to have Padmini as his wife: "One should feel quite happy over the situation. By the way, now that you speak of it, is it not the same girl who wrote to you that charming letter which you threw into the W.P.B. and which I had the good luck to retrieve and read years ago at Oxford?" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 153-54). The apert of the British requires a third party to tell him the value of his own wife.

The audience is waiting for a long time. To while away time the organizers arrange a girl to sing songs. She sings some popular tunes and a song composed by Bharathi, which carries a message of quenching the thirst for freedom. The audience applauds her lustily when the Adviser ascends the dais. Swami

understands that the applause is for the girl and not for the Adviser, The meeting begins (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 158-60). The Adviser speaks in a mumbling accent, but Padmini translates to the audience very clearly and adds that “he thinks so”⁵ at the end of every statement:

“The distinguished Adviser is our guest to-day.” she spoke. ‘We are bound to receive what he says with respect. We have the greatest respect for him. But how can. we Indians plead guilty to the charge of ingratitude? Gratitude must function both ways. We owe a lot to each other. There is such a thing as biting the hand that feeds” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 160).

The Adviser’s speech is a tremendous hit due to the free translation by Padmini. He asks the Chief Secretary, Sathu Menon about his speech and asks him to get the feedback from the public.

“I was really wondering all the while how it would go, said the Secretary very carefully. [”] It was not the same thing as talking to the Oxford Union. There you can afford to scintillate with bon mots from Oscar Wild and the like. Here in India you have to talk at the crowd and not talk to them. You did that very successfully. I am afraid that after a few more

speeches like this, you will turn out to be a mob orator. ["] (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 161-62)

Sathu Menon takes his wife Kamala and Padmini to Nadukkadu after the meeting. They reach Sekar's house past nine in the night. There Sathu Menon sees Sekar for the first time and thinks his manners and behaviour prove that he must be a politician with a difference. They enjoy the pleasant place well. The rapt description of the landscape is quite enchanting:

Sathu Menon was not exaggerating when he praised the scene. It was a brilliant moon light night. The moon hovered over the heaving sea that gently broke on the shingles less than a mile away, like one gazing at his own image. In the distance the slow country boats, sailing forth and back, appeared to stand still; like painted things on a painted ocean. Faint voices of fishermen alighting with their catches for the day reached them wafted by the winds. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 163)

Meanwhile, Chandran perceives that he is no longer complete master of the area. Unknown to him a stranger named Ramsen has been stirring up the peasants in favour of Kannan, the son of Manian, the real owner of the entire estate. The peasants are encouraged to withhold the paddy after the harvest:

Paddy was selling high. A little delay in the division of the produce at the threshing floor as and when the harvest of the fields was made would enable them to sell all the paddy and keep all the cash. Once the paddy disappeared, even Chandran would be helpless. So the tenants grew interested in the family quarrel and started espousing the cause of the young man. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 171)

The political situation in India is precarious because British rule gets weakened by the Quit India Movement. The I.N.A. prisoners are in a better position due to this, and another reason is that Churchill is not voted back to rule. This situation is conducive to Indian Jurists to get INA men freed from imprisonment. At this juncture, Sekar is called upon to defend the prisoners by party men. Along with the trials political progress also takes place in the country. The imperialist power slowly embraces defeat. India is inexorably striding towards Independence. Although the British are about to quit India the Red Fort is still teeming with I. N. A. prisoners. The interim Government is delaying to dispose of the cases (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 172-74).

Raman is admitted in the military hospital once again for a stomach ailment. Sundar Dayal, his doctor, takes a great interest in him and gives special treatment as he is a staunch admirer of

Nethaji. Moreover, Raghuvar Dayal, the brother of Sundar Dayal, once stayed with the family of Sekar before taking up the career of a journalist. Raghuvar is totally against the partition of India. He dares to say:

“Gandhiji differed from Nethaji because Nethaji did not subscribe to non-violence. Gandhiji has always stood for freedom for our country without shedding blood. But how can the plan for vivisection of our land avoid the bloodshed which Gandhiji dreads? It is like trying to make omelettes without breaking eggs. To be sure we are not going to shed the blood of any enemy of ours. We are going to shed the blood of innocent men, women and children of this land of ours for the benefit of our power-hungry politicians who want to cling to power at any cost.” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 177)

Sundar Dayal is interested to know the name of the herb for bone-setting. So, he asks Raman about it. Raman answers his question enthusiastically by recalling the name of the herb as Malini named it. Sundar understands from the way he tells about the herb and Malini that Raman loves Malini:

“I am sorry. I forgot to tell you the name” said Raman.

“I think she called it Gopuram Thangi. In Tamil Gopuram is tower. Thangi means a support or prop.

But the name has nothing to do with the size or use of the object. She told me that any country or native chemist could easily identify the herb if you mentioned the name”. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 178)

Raghuvar Dayal takes up the case of Raman and prepares the background materials for the trial which is to be held shortly. Raghuvar says that, except the evidence of Saki, the Japanese girl, all other evidence will help him to win the case. He asks Raman a few questions about Saki and her business with Nelson. Raghuvar asks if Raman has anything to do with Nelson’s business. Raman denies it and says that Nelson is an impulsive and generous man. Asked about Netaji, Raman says: “He was deciding to move into Russia.... He gave me his reasons for doing so. According to him Russia could be persuaded to help India in her fight for liberation. Of course, I differed from him”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 186).

Harischandra is a popular daily in English and Hindi, whose editor is Raghuvar Dayal. It brings out the democratic news bravely without fear. It inculcates the reading habit among the people. Even the bitter experiences of leaders are published in this daily:

The name Harischandra he gave to his paper was itself very appropriate. His sole object, he declared, was to expose the falsity and ambivalence of those in

power, whether they were white or brown. The motto that stared at his readers in bold print at the top of his paper was the cynical Bismarckian advice “Don’t believe anything the rulers say until they deny it”.
(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 187)

The preparation for the trial is on. Raghuvar and Bapuli, another lawyer, collect information about Nelson. The trial is held at the Red Fort. The Prosecutor and the Judge argue with each other and at last the Judge decides that Raman is innocent and hence declares that he is set at liberty. Not knowing that the trial is over, Sekar and Padmini leave for Delhi and take a room in the Empire Hotel. Sekar rings up to Bapuli and comes to know that the case has ended well. So, Sekar congratulates both Raghuvar and Bapuli on having argued well in the case so as to get Raman acquitted honourably. Bapuli calls them to the newspaper office to make a press statement. Sekar walks into the office and sees Raghuvar Dayal, and understands who he actually is. When Sekar wants to introduce himself, Raghuvar Dayal says, “How can you say that?” Rising, Raghuvar Dayal touches the feet of Sekar: “How can I ever forget you or that great lady, your wife and all that you did for me?” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 193).

Britain declares that it will quit India by August 1947. Englishmen of the ICS retire from the service. Indian officers are to fill up those vacancies. Sathu Menon is one among them. He is

chosen *to* be the Secretaiy in the Home Department, Sathu introduces Sekar's family to his father-in-law, Chandra Menon who is a retired ICS officer. He has published many books, the latest one being a travelogue about China. Chandra Menon shares his experiences with Sekar, who also has travelled much like him. Chandru Menon speaks in favour of the British and even says that if the Indian Act of 1935 is followed the partition could be avoided. He is wise enough to say that Gandhiji does not support it because he has not read it fully: "“You know Mahatma Gandhi is the only man in our midst who admits a mistake when he sees it. He recently confessed that he had not read the Government of India Act till now and that it offered the best plan”" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 197).

Political debates are a typical feature of a postcolonial ethos. Sekar laments the wise man's mistake that has occurred in getting freedom. Chandru Menon wants full autonomy to the Hindu and the Muslim provinces which will produce a different outlook in the next generation, Sathu Menon interrupts and says that the Cabinet Mission should insist on women's role because they will govern better. Their talk on comparative politics provokes sad thoughts among them. Padmini says that the Constituent Assembly will enact fundamental rights, safeguards, and guarantees: "“But all dictators have started with such paraphernalia,”" says Chandru Menon. "“Lenin was the only man

who had the honesty to blow up the pretence. He locked the doors of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution makers took to their heels. But our men are too mild to do so now”” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 198).

Raman is now free to decide to go back home to resume his practice. But, for two reasons, he is unable to go: he has to see Manian acquitted; and he loves Malini very much. Sekar prefers to stay at Delhi, for the political weather is so inclement that he has to support the leaders. There is a quick change. Chandran happens to become a Minister with an important portfolio, whereas Sekar doesn't get a place in the Cabinet. Ramsen and Kannan are in jail. They are charged with offences against the property and person of Chandran. But, quite unexpectedly, they are released (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 200).

Manian has been arrested on a false sabotage charge. Raman defends both Manian and Ambrose, another prisoner who is said to be of the INA, and has been put in jail at Bangalore. Raman ridicules that the government yields to the Commander-in-Chief for convicting such skilled young men. But luck decides their release because the Judges delay their spot-inspection:

And by the time they had finished their travel and spot inspections and got ready with their voluminous notes, the mid-night hour of 15th August 1947 struck.

The old Commander-in-Chief would no longer be pleaded as an impediment to the liberation of the prisoners in the Red Fort. They were all set free.

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 201)

Raghuvar Dayal is appreciated till he sends the British out. After that the Indian leaders cannot tolerate his courageous, independent and incisive writing. Raghuvar's journalistic skills are not meant to mint money but to fight against power mongers. Every issue of the daily *Harischandra* bears articles against the bogus people. Raghuvar dares to say that the Mahatma is under pressure to accept the Viceroy's views. Raghuvar is not happy with the freedom obtained: "Who says that India won a bloodless freedom? Our men now occupying the palaces in Delhi could make no such ridiculously false claim after all the violence and bloodshed into which they have plunged us" (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 203).

People in the villages are misled on the eve of Independence Day, 15th August 1947. The people behave like animals. Mahatma Gandhi is unhappy because a thoughtless decision of the politicians has made people kill one another. Swami has to lose all his significance overnight, his dreams shattered:

The I. C. S[.] had overnight lost all its significance. In life he had no other interest. Had he been right? Had he acted rightly in abandoning his wife as he had

done? For the first time the utter untenability of his attitude and action came on him with a pang. Was it worth living? For the first time he came to agree with Gandhi that it was not worth living. But for totally different reasons. (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 206)

Swami is appointed Secretary to Gandhiji. He is closely associated with Gandhiji. One day he has to tell Gandhiji about his married life and about his wife Padmini. Gandhiji understands that he is the son-in-law of Sekar, who is his intimate South Indian friend. So, he writes a letter to Sekar, asking him to meet him immediately (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 209-10).

The story then moves to Malini and Raman. Malini researches on bone fracture, collecting details from the Saraswathi Mahal Library in Tanjore and her paper is selected and she gets a scholarship to pursue higher education abroad as Dr. Prasanna, Malini's Lecturer in Surgery reports to Murali:

“The medical world abroad has taken due notice of her performance as you will presently see. Now, after that paper, Malini did something much more concrete. After a reference by me to the value of herbs in treatment, she wrote a paper on indigenous methods of bone-setting in cases of fracture. In this paper she had identified not only a herb I had referred to but also a few other similar herbs. This she did by study of

manuscripts available in a local library here founded by a famous Maharashtra King of Thanjavur called Serfoji. Her treatise on this subject is currently exciting great interest. She has actually painted the herbs she had identified in her work.” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 212)

The freedom movement brings Gandhiji a tragic feeling. The irony of freedom to India is that it faces violence and bloodshed due to communal clashes. Gandhiji feels bad and so he observes a fast unto death. This strong weapon works well. People realize their mistake and agree with Gandhiji. He gives up the fast. Afterwards there is no violence and bloodshed. Swami predicts that something untoward is going to happen to Gandhiji caused by miscreants. Gandhiji never fears death and so refuses security from the government. In the company of Gandhiji, Swami understands the value of life. At a meeting with Sathu Menon, Swami admits the sea-change in him after he gets acquainted with Gandhiji. The next day, at a prayer meeting, someone pulls out a bomb in front of Swami and hurls it on the dais where Gandhiji is praying. Swami is hurt in the bomb-blast and is rushed to hospital (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 223).

Sekar and Padmini arrive in Delhi with Malini. Raman is waiting at the railway station to receive them. He tells them that Swami has been seriously injured in the bomb-blast at Gandhiji's

prayer meeting. Sekar and Padmini rush to the hospital. Raman takes Malini to her interview. Sekar and Padmini see Swami in the hospital and assure him that he will recover soon. After visiting him, they meet Gandhiji. The security personnel do not admit them at first. When Dey, the doctor who gives treatment to Gandhiji, sees Sekar, he shakes his hand and welcomes him and says that just then Gandhiji mentioned his name because he needed a constitutional clarification. Then the security personnel understand that Sekar is an important visitor. They allow them to see Gandhiji, who is sitting cross- legged and turning the spinning wheel. Gandhiji feels very happy to see them. He speaks to Sekar's daughter and tells her how nice Swami is. Gandhiji says that he had a miraculous escape just because of Swami:

“Swami is a gem of a man” spoke the Mahatma. “But all cannot judge or understand gems. Some gems are not flashy. He has always shown his love for you in a peculiar manner. He has shown it by running away from you and you don't know how far he had to run to conceal his love?” (Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 229)

Swami is reunited with Padmini, thanks to the effort of Gandhiji. The story ends in an unexpected situation. Malini is selected to go to New York to pursue research with a team of scientists. Murali sends her after marrying her to Raman. Raghuvar Dayal brings Murali the happy news that he has been

selected by the INA Committee to go to New York to seek the treasure of the INA. The INA Committee members gather at the airport in New Delhi, besides Krishnasami and Padmini, and see off Raman and Malini. The INA men shout “Jai-Hind” when the flight takes off. As the shouts of Jai-Hind fill the air, Raghuvar says:

“Jai Hind sounds ironical in my ears”.[sic] remarked Raghuvar Dayal as they all turned back. “We are sending two of our best brains out of our country. We have no use for them. To them, Jai Hind should mean that India is an excellent country to be out of.”

(Gopalan, *Tryst with Destiny* 233)

Prema Nandakumar says:

The action in *Tryst with Destiny* is confined to a few years preceding 1947.... A host of characters walk through the book including a generous American and a fanatic Japanese. Sub as Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi come to the stage to put across their views. The Thanjavur country side leaps to life as we wade through mud and slush, watch fishes and birds and admire harvested sheaves threshed in bright sunshine..... The dexterous symbolism of legs lamed in accidents ties up with the limping progress of independent India.... Drunkards and money-

grabbers have become successful politicians while
life- energising talent is drained out of the country
It is heartening that Mr. Gopalan's English moves
with the steady gait of garnered wisdom... (qtd. in
Gopalan, *Kunjaram Hills*, wrapper, n.pag.)