

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Class-consciousness in Literature

1.1 Meaning and Definition of Class-consciousness

Class-consciousness is the state of being very aware of belonging to a particular social class and the differences between social classes. It is the awareness of social divisions in society and of belonging to a particular social rank. In other words, class-consciousness is identification with other members of one's own class and awareness of its relationship with other classes. According to Marxist theory, the proletariat will assume class-consciousness when workers realize that they are being exploited by the bourgeoisie; then a proletarian revolution will be inevitable.

Class-consciousness is a category of Marxist theory, that, referring to the self-awareness of a social class, its capacity to act in its own rational interests, or measuring the extent to which an individual is conscious of the historical tasks, their class (or class allegiance) sets for them. Hegel made a distinction between the existence of a class and the subjective awareness of class. Marx argued, however, that a class whose member were not aware of their common relationship to the means of production was not effectively a class. For example, of peasants under feudalism Marx asserted that 'the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class' (qtd.in wikipedia). To Marx, the clearest example of a class characterized by consciousness of class is the modern proletariat, who have identical interests and are aware of this, who are concentrated in cities and who create their own political organizations. Marx

knew, however, that the working class didn't always behave with the sense of solidarity which this analysis implies, and some of his successors became convinced that the working class was incapable, without assistance from outside its own ranks, of developing a consciousness of common interests, expressed in a political organization. Lenin asserted this, while Rosa Luxemburg denied it. Hence Lenin argued for the necessity of a 'vanguard party' with important consequences for the development of socialism in Russia and beyond. The basis of Marx's expectation that the working class would develop the sense of 'common destiny' was his belief that the interests of the working class are identical, they are in constant communication because concentrated in factories and cities, they are subject to the erosion of the differentials among themselves, they are subject to increasing immoderation, and they form an increasingly large majority of the population.

In the event, the working class now seems further away from class-consciousness than they were when Marx wrote. Their interests are less and less obviously identical; they are increasingly differentiated in function and income as technology advances, the spread of prosperity has led more and more workers to cease to identify them with the deprived, and blue-collar employees in private employment are now a shrinking minority in all advanced countries. Much the same has occurred in Communist system –witness the expression of despair of Mao Zedong, faced with the chaos which had overwhelmed his Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: 'who would have believed that the working class could be so divided?' (qtd.in wikipedia).

Class-consciousness, as described by Georg Lukacs's famous *History and Class Consciousness* (1920), is opposed to any psychological conception of consciousness, which forms the basis of individual or mass psychology. According to Lukaces, each social class

has determined class-consciousness, which it can achieve. In effect, as opposed to the liberal conception of consciousness as the basis of individual freedom and of the social contract, Marxist class-consciousness is not an origin, but an achievement. Henceforth, it is never assured: the proletariat's class-consciousness is the result of permanent struggle to understand the [concrete totality] of the historical process.

According to Lukacs, the proletariat was first class in history that may achieve true class-consciousness, because of its specific position highlighted in the *Communist Manifesto* as the 'living negation' of capitalism. All other classes, including the bourgeoisie, are limited to a 'false consciousness' which impedes them from understanding the totality of history, instead of understanding each specific moment as a phase of the historical process, they universalize it, claiming it is eternal. Hence, capitalism is not thought as a specific phase of history, but is naturalized and thought as an eternal stage. This 'false consciousness', which forms ideology itself, is not a simple error as in classical philosophy, but an illusion, which can't be dispelled. Marx described it in his theory of commodity fetishism, which Lukacs completed with his concept of reification: alienation is what follows the worker's estrangement to the world following the new life acquired by the product of his work. The dominant bourgeois ideology thus leads the individual to see the achievement of his labour take a life of its own. Furthermore, specialization is also seen as a characteristic of the ideology of modern rationalism, which creates specific and independent domains (art, politics, science, etc.). Only a global perspective can point out how all these different domains interact, argues Lukacs. He also points out how historical content, which is abstractly conceived as irrational and contingent. Thus, with Kant's rational system, history becomes totally contingent and is thus ignored. Only with Hegel's dialectic can a mediation

be found between the abstract form and the abstract notion of a concrete content. Even if the bourgeois loses his individual point of view in an attempt to grasp the reality of the totality of society and of the historical process, he is condemned to a form of false consciousness. As an individual, he will always see the collective result of individual action as a form of 'objective law' to which he must submit himself (liberalism has gone so far in as seeing an invisible hand in this collective results, making, of capitalism the best of possible worlds). By contrast, the proletariat would be, according to Lukacs, the first class in history with the possibility to achieve a true form of class-consciousness, granting it knowledge of the totality of the historical process. The proletariat takes the place of Hegel's world spirit, which achieves history through the various folk spirits. The idealist conception of an abstract spirit making history, which ends in the realm of reason, is replaced by a materialist conception based not on mythical spirits, but on a concrete 'identical subject-object of history': the proletariat. The proletariat is both the 'object' of history, created by the capitalist social formation; but it is also the 'subject' of history, as it is its labor that shapes the world, and thus, knowledge of itself is also, necessarily, knowledge of the reality and of the totality of the historical process. The proletariat's class-consciousness is not immediate; class-consciousness mustn't be mistaken either with the consciousness of one's future and collective interests, opposed to personal immediate interests. The objective process of history, which transforms the proletariat into a commodity, hence objectifying it, gives the possibility of class-consciousness. Class-consciousness is thus not a simple subjective act: 'as consciousness here is not the consciousness of an object opposed to itself, but the object's consciousness, the act of being conscious of oneself disrupts the objectivity form of its object'(qtd.in wikipedia). In other words, instead of the bourgeois subject and its corresponding ideological concept of

individual free will, the proletariat has been transformed into an object (a commodity) which, when it takes consciousness of itself, transforms the very structure of objectivity, that is of reality.

This specific role of the proletariat is consequence of its specific position; thus, for the first time, consciousness of itself (class-consciousness) is also consciousness of the totality (knowledge of the entire social and historical process). Through dialectical materialism, the proletariat understands that what the individual bourgeois conceived as 'laws' akin to the laws of nature, which may be only manipulated, as in Descartes' dream, but not changed, is in fact the result of social and historical process, which can be controlled. Furthermore, only dialectical materialism links together all specialized domains, which modern rationalism can only think as separate instead of as forming a totality.

Only the proletariat can understand that the so-called 'eternal laws of economics' are in fact nothing more than the historical form taken by the social and economical process in capitalist society. Since these 'laws' are the result of the collective actions of individuals, and are thus created by society, Marx and Lukacs reasoned that this necessarily ensued that they could be changed. Any attempt in transforming the so-called 'laws' governing capitalism into universal principles, valid in all times and places, are criticized by Lukacs as a form of false consciousness.

As the 'expression of the revolutionary process itself', dialectical materialism, which is the only theory with an understanding of the totality of the historical process, is the theory which may help proletariat in its 'struggle for class-consciousness'. Although Lukacs does not contest the Marxist primacy of the economic infrastructure on the ideological superstructure, he considers that there is a place for autonomous struggle for class-consciousness.

In order to achieve a unity of theory and praxis, theory must not only tend toward reality in an attempt to change it; reality must also tend towards theory. Otherwise, the historical process leads its life of its own, while theorists make their own little theories, desperately waiting for some kind of possible influence over the historical process. Henceforth, reality itself must tend toward the theory making it the 'expression of the revolutionary process itself'. In turn, a theory, which has its goal helping the proletariat achieve class-consciousness, must first be an 'objective theory of class-consciousness'. However, theory in itself is insufficient, and ultimately relies on the struggle of humankind and of the proletariat for consciousness: the 'objective theory of class-consciousness is only the theory of its objective possibility' (qtd.in wikipedia).

1.2 Class-consciousness: Markandaya and other Indian English Novelists

Class-consciousness is an essential component of the Indian psyche, it is but imperative that any fiction built on Indian life and society will have to foreground this consciousness in order to be credible and significant. A study of the major works by Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, and Ruth Prawas Jhabvala would show that though Kamala Markandaya's perception of Indian ethos is strikingly similar to that of these novelists, there is, nevertheless, a unique sensitiveness in her novels in terms of the extent, range and depth of perception.

The novelists of the pre-independence era were influenced by Gandhian ideology and tried to create literature of social concern. The general trend of social concern of the thirties and forties finds clear reflection in the works of KS Venkataramani, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Mulk Raj Anand. These novelists chose themes and characters with distinct class-identities. If Tagore shows his interest in the upper classes and the middle classes and

Sarat Chatterjee in the lower middle classes, Mulk Raj Anand is concerned with the proletariat. Through the pen-portraits of the untouchables, sweepers, the laborers, the household servants, the coolies and landless farmers, Mulk Raj Anand exposes cruelty and harassment to the downtrodden. Like Orwell and Maxim Gorky, he has deep sympathy for the destitute and the underprivileged. He attacks the caste and class systems in India. He upholds the rights of the mineworkers, the factory workers, the land labourers and daily wage earners. Both Mulk Raj Anand and Kamala Markandya are concerned with the poverty and hunger of the working class. The theme of hunger is the basic focus in Anand's *Coolie*, *The Old Woman and the Road* as well as in Markandya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *A Handful of Rice*. There is general view of the gloomy picture of the exodus from the village to the city. There are common scenes of the famished, the underfed hungry masses struggling for a morsel of food. The arrogance and inhumanity of the rich and the privileged have been condemned in the same tone as the servility and docility of the laborers.

Anand's early novels present a reflection of actual life lived by the less fortunate, the lowly and the disinherited. *Untouchable* is a story of a young sweeper boy, Bakha who belongs to the lowest rung in the social strata. *Coolie* is a proletarian tragedy of an orphan boy, Munoo who passes through diverse situations — as a domestic servant in an urban middle-class family in Sham Nagar, as a worker in a small pickle factory in Daulatpur, as a labourer in cotton mill in Bombay and as a rickshaw puller in Simla. His father's land is seized by the moneylender, leading to his 'slow death of bitterness and disappointment' (11). His mother soon dies in poverty. The boy's right to life is most brutally and tragically denied to him. As a servant, he is not allowed to play with the children of the master. In the bank sub-accountant Babu Nathoo Ram's house he is warned, 'You are a servant, you must not

play with us' (45). But the innocent boy does not know the barriers between classes. When he playfully bites Sheikha, the Manter's daughter, he savagely beaten up. He is forced in to life of a beast of burden, carrying heavy loads to earn his livelihood. With the help of the elephant driver he goes to Bombay. He sleeps with the pavement dwellers. He is soon disgusted with the intolerable condition of the factory workers in Sir George White Cotton Mills. In Munoo there is deep-rooted feeling of inferiority as he watches people who live in bungalows and wear *Angrezi* clothes. The English people have an impression of the Indian poor as dirty and diseased, and so they deal with them contemptuously. K.V.Reddy aptly observes, '*Coolie* is a sincere protest against the emergence of a new world of money and exploitation and class distinction' (12). When Munoo goes to Simla and works as a rickshaw puller of Mrs. Mainswaring, he is hard pressed and dies of consumption at a tender age of sixteen. Thus the merciless, mechanical rhythm of urban life into which the innocent poor rustic boy is thrust, churns him into death. He realizes the truth, 'The bigger the city is the more cruel it is'(177).

Kamala Markandaya has presented similar conditions of the Indian villagers in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and *A Handful of Rice*. Like Munoo, Val leaves his native place under economic pressure. He gets the news of his mother's death when he is engrossed in his prospective career-making endeavors. In *A Handful of Rice* Ravi goes to city leaving behind his native land and his parents. But he is disillusioned and disappointed when all his attempts to overcome hunger, debt and economic insecurity turn futile. In his own village, his father has to endure poverty due to the corrupt money-lenders, the black marketers, and the defective land and food distribution systems. It is in the city that Ravi observes the big gap between the rich and the poor:

The cost of just one of those motorcars that purred along the marina, he felt, would keep him and his family over half a lifetime. How, he wondered with a burning curiosity, did any one ever earn so much? He never would, not if he sewed a dozen shirts in a dozen hours every day of the week for a dozen years (134).

In the same way, Munoo starts for the city with dreams of wonderful things people speak of the babus, the sahibs, their silk clothes, and delicacies. But when he enters the town he notices some people carrying loads of luggage on their backs. The grand marble buildings surprise him. Master Nathoo Ram wearing black shoes while his own feet lie bare disturbs him. He realizes the contrast between his own starved life and the master and his children wearing silk clothes, warm woolen suit and eating sweetmeat. He broods over his inferior status when he sees his master using modern amenities like shaving razor, radio set, musical instruments and various machineries. Bibiji, the wife of Babu Nathoo Ram, humiliates him and condemns him when he laughs. ‘What right has he to join the laughter of his superiors?’ (31). The hotel boy treats him like an untouchable. He is shocked to find himself misfit and unwanted in the rich man’s world. He accepts his inferior position in society as a slave but observes, ‘There must be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor’ (69). The rich merchants in starched Muslins stand contrasted to the dark coolies in patched up rags. The impressive bungalows of the English residents look down upon the congested hovels of the coolies.

Kamala Markandaya creates a similar situation in *The Coffer Dams*. The company people from England occupy the tribal lands, live luxuriously, seducing them by low wages, bribes and temporary jobs. The technological appliances run by the workers’ sweat bring

profit to the employees, but death and damage to the workers. In *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandya depicts the bitter experiences of Nathan and Rukmani in the city. When they approach the Collector's residence and the Doctor's residence, they are driven out as beggars and servants. They are not allowed to use the main-gate at the front of the bungalows. Munoo is similarly forbidden in the master's house to play with children. This creates utter dejection in the child's mind. At the end of the novel Munoo, like Nathan, dies fatigued and consumptive, of hard work in frail physique.

Both Anand and Markandaya show that humanity is not completely lost. Fellow feeling, a sense of compassion still exists. In *Nectar in a Sieve* food is distributed in the temple. Rukmani rushes to the spot and gets food for both her and the old man. In *Two virgins* the author narrates the scene of poor people given food once a day in the temple arena by the priests. Mulk Raj Anand also points out how human charity is displayed at the shrine of Har Dayal and free food is distributed to the mendicants and the starving ones. Munoo, though a child, reflects, 'Why are some men so good and others bad, some like Parbha and the elephant driver, others like Ganpat and the policemen who beat me at the railway station?' (171).

Prabha, the partner in Ganpat's industrial enterprise is portrayed as a noble character, like Dr. Radcliffe in *The Nowhere Man*, who has sympathy for the poor and the weaker sections of society. Sauda the labour leader works like Kenny for justice to the workers. As Kenny tries to convince Rukmani and the villagers of their rights, Sauda makes the workers aware of their miserable condition. Like Rukmini, Munoo also accepts suffering. There is a common feeling, 'We belong to suffering, and we belong to suffering' (247). The striking coolies are weak, filthy and spineless. Sauda explains to them about their own status:

'We are human beings and not soul-less machines.'

'We want the right to work without having to play bribes.'

'We want clean houses to live in.'

'We want to be saved from the clutches of the money lenders.'

'We want a good wage' (267).

Such inspiring words excite and strengthen the mind of the coolies. They realize that they are deprived of fundamental freedom. They are over-worked and under-paid. About the master's repression and callous attitude Saudas explains, 'The rich and the powerful, the magnificent and the glorious, whose opulence is built in robbery and theft and open warfare, are honored and admired by the whole world' (266). But the humble workers are wretchedly swindled out of their rights. None respects them.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud* Mulk Raj Anand dramatized the tragic clash between indifferent and cruel masters and the Tea plantation coolies. Gangu like Munoo wants to work and to live. Both are victims of capitalism and exploitation. The rich eat and drink and play while the poor laborers are underpaid, underfed and over-worked. Like Sauda, de la Havre, the humanist and social critic consoles and encourages the ignorant and dismayed coolies and inspires them to fight against abysmal poverty, stark cruelty and the dark social forces.

Kamala Markandaya's Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* resents stitching aprons as he feels exploited by the Eve Shopkeeper who pays him eighty rupees per dozen as stitching charges whereas the shopkeeper himself gets from customers one hundred and twenty-five rupees per piece. Apu has patiently tolerated the injustice, but the youngman Ravi is enraged with impotent fury against the rich and reacts violently. The novel ends with a note of passive

resignation as he cannot accept and act in the hooligan Damodar's world of crime and violence.

Anand's trilogy *The Village* deals with the impingement of industrialization on the old order of rural society and the decline of the peasantry as a self-reliant class. The landlord system has been vehemently denounced. The Britishers are condemned as the agents of exploitation. Lal Sing, the youngest son of a peasant family in Nandpur reacts sharply against the injustices the simple rural folk have to put up with. Lal's suffering at the hands of the landlord Harban Sing, the moneylender Seth Chaman Lal, the Sikh priest and his own conservative family provoke angry revolutionary sentiments within him. He is disgusted with the religious orthodoxy of the society for which he feels people cannot progress. He tries to make the tenant farmers aware of their position and unite them against their exploiters. The death of Ravi's son in *A Handful of Rice* impels him to join the revolutionary movement for a handful of rice but the birth of Lal's son symbolizes the rise of a new generation with the hope of freedom and prosperity.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, too, reflects his deep concern at the state of poverty and exploitation in the Indian society. All the novels of Bhattacharya are in fact built on the theme of contrast between the rich and the poor. In *So Many Hungers* (1947) Bhattacharya shows that the famine of 1942 in Bengal was caused by faulty social systems. Samarendra Basu with his two sons constitutes a well-to-do family. The father being an influential man takes advantage of the fluctuating stock market and starts hoarding grains, while the villagers being misguided by the government agents sell all their rice. It results in artificial scarcity and man-made famine. Millions of people die of hunger. The poor, ignorant and uneducated peasants consider it to be 'their fate, as expiation of sins of past lives' (108). There is a

similar reference to the rural people's sense of fatalism in Kamala Markandya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani in a mood of self-assessment speaks to Kenny, 'Yet our priests fast, and inflict on themselves severe punishments, and we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence, and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed'(116).

In *So Many Hungers* there are distressing scenes of the starving and dying people. Children are sold. Girls are allowed to take to prostitution. Kajoli with her mother and brother comes to the city and lives on begging. When it is difficult to manage living with only begging, she thinks of selling her body, but fortunately she finds a path of earning by selling newspaper. In *Nectar in a Sieve* there are harrowing scenes of widespread hunger. Kamala Markandaya shows that nature's ravages and human crookedness cause the misery of poor peasants, but Bhattacharya fixes responsibility on the anti-social cruel traders who create artificial shortage of food. He severely condemns the dehumanized rich people. Like Ira, Kajoli cannot stand the misery of the starving family, but unlike Ira who takes to prostitution and is abused by her father, Kajoli refrains from the heinous profession.

Since Kamala Markandaya's works have been based on the pre-colonial to post colonial era, the reflection of some economical changes and social changes of that world are found in her works. In that very transient world class-consciousness and struggle for survival have become the major theme of her works. So, the society is seen divided into three major classes- upper class, middle class and lower class, and on the other hand traditional and modern people. Old people are continuing their profession but young people, new generation, are trying to get better status. So, they enter to city, seek jobs but again, poor people are ruined in the city. At the same time gender biasness has become the major theme of her

works. Women are dominated in the society. In the changing society, some of the women have changed their role and status.

Kamala Markandya's concern is on the predicament of the individual in a class-ridden society subjected to a process of radical change. The self with its desires, instincts and dream, encounters a world of reality governed by social, economic and cultural forces. The encounter leads to crisis of identity. The self tries to surmount this crisis through resistance or reconciliation, through protest or surrender. In this process of self's grappling with reality, there is anguish and suffering.

Kamala Markandya's fictional world has been governed by an intense of anguish and crisis of identity in class-ridden society in the process of radical transition.

Chapter Two

Classes and Attitudes

2.1 Synopsis of Markandaya's Major Two Works

Nectar in a Sieve

Rukmani gets married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer though she is the daughter of a headman of the village. Rukmani's father spends lavishly on the nuptial ceremony of his elder daughters. When Rukmani's turn comes, his administrative power has been shifted from himself to the newly appointed revenue collector, as a result of which his financial position gets deteriorated. He is unable to meet the demand of the rich grooms. Hence, he hands his youngest daughter Rukmani over to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer. Their early-married life passes peacefully and lovingly with the produce they earn from their labour on the Zamindar's land.

Rukmani gives the birth of her daughter, Ira. Rukmani, though literate, is not free from the prejudice against the girl child. Her reaction at the sight of the first born is, 'What woman wants a girl for her first born?'(19). She sheds tears of weakness and disappointment. She is aware of her husband's desire for a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land. Later she becomes the mother of other five sons.

The happy family of eight members gets into the problematic situation with the failure of crops due to inclement weather. Nathan cannot feed his enlarged family of six children. At the same time, the establishment of tannery disturbs them. Rukmani blames the tannery which invades the fertile, cultivable land. The children's playground also has been invaded. The market price has been raised sky high. The din and bustle has swept away the

peace and calm of the village. The price hike has also affected farmers' wives Kali, Kunti and the shopkeeper's wife Janaki. They suffer from common grief of starvation and undernourishment. Rukmani says, 'No sugar or dal or ghee have we tasted since they came, and should have had none, so long as they remained' (32).

When all their saving is consumed, Nathan and Rukmani approach Hanuman, the rice merchant who heartlessly rejects their prayer for rice. Then they come to Biswas, the moneylender, for rice in exchange of their two silver coins. But he rebukes them demanding more, 'Take it or leave it. I can get double that sum from the tanners'(47). The compassionate English Missionary doctor Kennington (Kenny) raised the protesting and rebellious voice against social inequality and injustice. He asks Rukmani ' Why do you keep this ghastly silence?' 'Why do you not demand – cry out for help... do something?'(47-48). But the villagers cannot cope with the changing social situation. The industrial resurgence snatches not only their land and property but also their sons, promising them employment and better financial prospects.

Murugan leaves his village for the city. He does not return home for long time neither he sends money. Ira gets married to a peasant boy at the age of fourteen. She gets a dowry of hundred rupees in her marriage, the maximum that her parents could offer. But she is abandoned by her husband five years after their marriage because she fails to beget a child. She returns back to her father's home. Thus, she is thrown to a life of degradation and debasement. She does not mind getting corrupted, adopting prostitution with the hope of feeding her little brother, Kuti who was dying of hunger. Nathan's fatherly ego is wounded. He feels shocked at the disheartening sight of Ira's coming home late at night. He helplessly protests against the shameful situation, 'I will not have it said . I will not have you parading

at night'(104). But Rukmani, as a mother can neither protest not object. She quietly endures as she did in her youth when Nahan had extra marital relations with Kunti. She explains passively, ' So we got used to her comings and goings, as we had got used to so much else'(104).

There is a perceptible shift of socio-economic activity from land to the factory and from the village to the city. The village shopkeeper Perumal, Janaki's husband, cannot compete with the shopkeeper's who hail from the town. He is bound to close his shop. The grown up boys, Kunti's son and Rukmanis's son Arjun and Thambi join the factory. They leave their paternal profession of tilling the land for better financial prospects. Thambi explains their stand to his father , 'If it were your land , or mine, I would work with you gladly. But what profit to labour for another and get so little in return? Far better to turn away for such injustice'(56).

When the tannery does not fulfill the demand of the youngsters for higher wages they start for Ceylon to work in the tea plantation. Rukmani's third son Raja is killed with the charge of theft. The youngest son Kuti dies of starvation. The family gets biggest shock of disintegration. It is only Selvam who stays back to work in Kenney's hospital. Nathan and Rukmani start for the city with the hope of meeting their son Murugan. But he is lost in the city. They break stones in the quarry to earn their livelihood. In the temple their belongings are stolen. Thus, disillusioned with the urban world with all its menace of indifference, theft and treachery, they finally decide to return home. But being exposed to cold, hunger and old age, Nathan collapses on the road and dies leaving Rukmani forlorn. Despite all her suffering, her solitary struggle against all odds, she returns to the village with the leper boy, Puli with the hope of curing him in Kenny's hospital. At home she convinces herself looking

at only surviving son, Selvam and daughter, Ira. Ira and Selvam become the objects of her hope in life.

A Handful of Rice

Ravi borns in a very poor family in a remote village. His father and mother grow very little crops that would not be sufficient for six months to survive. Due to poverty Ravi cannot get school education .He helps his parents in their works. When he does not see any ways to live happily in the village, he leaves the village for the city at the age of fifteen.

Ravi reaches the city and wonders at the lives of the city. He dreams of new life in the city. He searches for a job but does not get any. Seeing nothing forward Ravi, in his struggle for survival, meets a gang of anti-socials led by Damodar, the underworld don. He involves in different evil works with these boys. He steals from a tailor's shop and is caught, held up and punished by the tailor, Apu and his wife, Jayamma.

When, at last, Apu and his wife know the fact they take pity on the hungry man and offer him the job of an apprentice in the shop. Now Ravi gets a secure foothold in Apu's house. Ravi is no longer with bad companies now. He works as an apprentice in tailoring. Soon he gets involved in love with Apu's daughter, Nalini. Later he gets married to her and becomes a part of Apu's family.

After marriage he decides to lead a respectable life as Apu's son-in-law. He starts his own new business and settles his family. Nalini gives birth to their son, Raju. After few years Apu dies. After his death Ravi assures the dignified position of the master of the household. But the heavy burden of the entire house, the cost of maintenance of the family and of the in-laws, high price of all commodities forces him into heavy debt. In

addition to Ravi's misery due to the responsibility of maintaining a large family of his in-laws, the growth of the textile mill and machine productions also poses threat to his tailoring trade. He can no more satisfy the rich ladies' demand for the latest dress fashion. He is enraged with the rich ladies who scold him using all insulting and abusive words. He resents stitching aprons as he feels exploited by the Eve shopkeeper who pays him eighty rupees per dozen as stitching charges whereas the shopkeeper himself gets from customers one hundred and twenty five rupees per piece. Apu has painfully tolerated the injustice, but the young man Ravi is enraged with impotent fury against the rich and reacts violently. He cannot sleep at night thinking of the injustice and humiliations afflicted on him. Coming back home he beats up Nalini mercilessly. Next day he repents for the bruise he has caused to her. Nalini silently suffers her aggrieved husband's anger with downcast looks, heavy heart and tensed mind. Day by day, his financial position deteriorates. With this meager earning and rising prices he can hardly meet all his household expenditure. At last, he cannot repay the loans, cannot pay for light and water, and cannot buy medicine for his sick son, Raju, who dies of inadequate treatment.

After Raju's death, Ravi feels helpless, worried and depressed. He thinks of Damodar who might advise him or help him at his disaster. But Damodar sheers at him, 'Go back to your village. It is more your size, you are not fit for anything else'(214). Ravi is agonized by a state of ambivalence between need for money and the conscience that would free him from Damodar's grip. He is condemned as a coward, unsuccessful man, unfit for the city life as he cannot act violently with the agitated mob, loot that granary and become the unholy hero of the day. He withdraws his aggressive mood when he feels convinced that with violence as a weapon nothing positive can be achieved. He cannot accept and act in the hooligan

Damodar's world of crime and violence. Ravi accepts defeat by withdrawing himself from Damodar's impious world of glamour and luxury.

2.2 Classes and Attitudes in Markandaya's Characters

The structure of Indian society has always been governed by a delicate relationship among its classes stratified according to economic status and social roles. From the pre-colonial past to the post-colonial present, India has always retained some form of class-distinction based on cast and wealth. Today while the traditional system of cast is fast eroding, there still exists an insistent distinction based in economic and political power. In terms of this distinction, the Indian society can broadly be classified into three hierarchical levels: the working class, the middle class and the upper class. Though each of the economic classes tends to assure a distinctive identity vis-à-vis its social status and functions, it is not always true that the three classes have very clear and defined boundaries. While the very soul of the working class and the middle class is their aspiration for an upward mobility, the upper class is vastly diverse in terms of life-style, attitudes and social functions. The novels of Kamala Markandaya offer a wide spectrum of characters, places and situations which not only center round the controlling forces of the three classes but also reflect their joys and sorrows, agony and anguish as they negotiate with the challenges and complexities of life and living. In this chapter, a modest attempt has been made to identify the presence of these three classes in Kamala Markandaya's novels, not only as distinct social groups but also as inter-acting and contradictory forces that determine the relationship between self and society.

Interestingly, Kamala Markandaya's early impulse to write fiction coincides with her deep concern with the poverty and squalor, conflicts and suffering, dreams and aspirations of

the down-trodden class. Two of her early novels, *The Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* contain symbolic portraits of the starving millions, the exploited working class who struggle desperately for bare subsistence both in the rural and the urban area. Unlike the African novelists Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Caribbean writer V.S Naipaul who reflect a deep sense of frustration at the disintegration of old order and at the loss of traditional values, Kamala Markandaya shows her firm confidence on the unflinching spirit of the Indian social order to sustain itself through the worst of trials and tribulations. As Uma Prameswaran rightly observes:

It is easy to wring tears of pity for the plight of the peasant, underfed, uneducated, exploited and easier still to rouse anger and contempt for the superstitious and slow-moving masses. They stand there vulnerable and open to every attack, be it indifference, contempt, or emasculating charity. But to evoke admiration, even envy, for the simple faith and unswerving tenacity they hold needs sympathy and skill. Kamala Markandaya has both (92).

Nectar in a Sieve is a vivid record of the hungry rural peasantry whose life is afflicted by the existing social institutions and rituals such as child marriage, widowhood, negligence of female child, slavery, landlessness, homelessness, casteism and illiteracy. The novel centers round the acutely suffering poor tenant farmer Nathan and his wife Rukmani, the narrator of the tale. They represent thousands of uprooted peasants under the pressure of industrialism and landlordism. Among the rural folk there is a clear dichotomy between the upper class, the landlords and the money lenders on the one hand and the poor tenant farmers and the laboring class on the other. Rukmani gives a graphic picture of the farmers' life of hardships, of fear and of hunger:

This is one of the truths of our existence, as those who live by the land know; that some times we eat and sometimes we starve. We live by our labors from one harvest to the next, there is no certain telling whether we shall be able to feed ourselves and our children, and if bad times are prolonged we know we must see the weak surrender their lives and this fact, too, is within our experience. In our life there is no margin for misfortune (136).

People generally learn to live out this misery with calm acquiescence until the onset of real disaster on the land as well as the rural economy when a tannery is set up in the neighboring area. It starts expanding by acquiring cultivable lands of the village. It disturbs the apparently calm and peaceful life of the village. In addition to this man-made menace, when nature acts as a hostile force in the form of draught and flood resulting in failure of crops, the tenant farmers are forced into starvation. Heavy storm causes havoc to the poor farmers but the tannery stands unaffected, and cement holding it together, despite the raging winds; but the workers huts, of more flimsy construction, were 'now only a heap of mud with heir owners' possessions studding them in a kind of pitiless decoration' (45-46).

The ruthless landlord and the merciless moneylenders hardly care to come to the rescue of the starving poor farmers. As a result, they are evicted from their beloved land. When all their saving is consumed, Nathan and Rukmani approach, Hanuman, the rice merchant who heartlessly rejects their prayer for rice. Then they come to Biswas, the moneylender for rice in exchange of their two silver coins. But he rebukes them demanding more, 'Take it or leave it. I can get double that sum from the tanners'(47). This is the curse that the tannery brings to the poor villagers. Nathan pitifully laments:

Now the landlord can wring from us his money and care not for the misery he evokes, for indeed it would be difficult for any man to see another starve and his wife and children as well; or to enjoy the profits born of such travail (77).

The only protesting and rebellious voice against social inequality and injustice is raised by the compassionate English Missionary doctor Kennington. He expresses his disgust at the Indian poor peasants' passivity. He asks Rukmani, 'Why do you keep this ghastly silence?' 'Why do you not demand - cry out for help- do something?'(47-48). But the villagers cannot cope with the changing social situations. The industrial resurgence snatches not only their land and property but also their sons, promising them employment and better financial prospects. The exodus of the rural people to the urban areas contributes to the congestion in the cities, pollution of the environment and imbalance in the distribution of population. The picture of social inequality, exploitation of the poor and unhealthy consequences of urbanization has been painted in Markandaya's works. She shows that not only Nathan's family but also the whole community undergoes similar afflictions. The working class suffers mostly for the economic disproportion, malpractices adopted by the crooked and the social changes. A.N. Dwivedi and Niroj Banerjee comment on Kamala Markandaya's realistic study of such pitiable figures, 'At best, she is a novelist of sensitive individuals placed in certain piquant situations and of their ensuing actions and reactions in the given social and cultural context' (131).

In this bleak picture of Indian social life the darkest zone is the neglected poor woman. In the male dominated society a woman, however, sacrificing and painstaking, is not allowed the right to freedom of speech and human dignity. The woman labourers are paid lower wages than men. They are subject to exploitation and oppression because

of their ignorance and innocence. Rukmani's daughter Ira gets married to a peasant boy at the age of fourteen. But she is abandoned by her husband five years after their marriage because she fails to beget a child. Thus, she is thrown to a life of degradation and debasement. She does not mind getting corrupted, adopting prostitution with the hope of feeding her little brother Kunti. Nathan's fatherly ego is wounded. He feels shocked at the disheartening sight of Ira's coming home late a night. He helplessly protests against the shameful situation 'I will not have it said. I will not have you parading at night'(104). But Rukmani, as a mother can neither protest nor object. She quietly endures as she did in her youth when Nathan had extra marital relations with Kunti. She explains passively, 'so we got used to her comings and goings, as we had used to so much else'(104).

Ira is corrupt in the conventional sense but she can at least buy rice, salt and milk for the sick child. Even though the child dies of undernourishment, Ira's sacrifice and sincere efforts can never be denied. Rukmani accepts this life of suffering as inevitable. When Dr.Kenny asserts, 'There is no grandeur in want or in endurance' she replies passively and ironically, 'what is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the season or the earth, varying only in degree' (115).

Rukmani, though literate, is not free from the prejudice against the girl child. Her reaction at the sight of the first-born is, 'What woman wants a girl for her first born' (19). She sheds tears of weakness and disappointment. Like all Indian women who cherish to be mother of sons, she is aware of her husband's desire for a son 'to continue his line and walk beside him on the land' (20). Moreover, a daughter becomes a burden to the family because of the dowry system. Rukmani herself is the victim who is given in marriage to a landless labour because her father is unable to find a better groom for lack of wealth to

afford good dowry. Rukmani has to face the wrath of the moneylender, the threatening of the landlord for eviction from land and the indifferent attitude of the city dwellers. The only consoling soul she discovers is in Dr. Kenny, the symbol of civilized man's generosity and broadmindedness. Out of compassion for the rural poor, he establishes a hospital. K.R. Chandrasekharan points out how Kamala markandaya projects in the English Doctor 'a good missionary and philanthropic spirit doing his best for a backward country without ostentation or vanity. He also a neutral observer of life in India' (324).

Rukmani returns to her native place with a new self-awareness, new wisdom of the world obtained from her bitter experiences in the city whose unfortunate product is Puli, the leper boy. Like Synges' Maurya and Christian job, she remains calm and composed amidst all losses and sufferings. The novel ends with the return of the native, the glorious figure of the mother sorrow. The sight of her village gives life and enlightenment to her starving and withered spirit. All her past experience recedes into a gloomy reverie.

While *Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of the rural poor, *A Handful of Rice* is that of the urban poor. In both the novels Kamala Markandaya has delineated the story of migration from the rural to the industrial urban centers. As Rukmani's sons shift to the city for their sustenance Ravi, the protagonist, also joins the exodus to the city as the village has nothing to offer him. But to his disappointment the city too has nothing great to offer. As he reflects, It is the drag round the streets and the searching and the wait and the frustration and bearing the pinpricks that the haughty rich always had in plenty for the poor which he had not been able to endure'(27). Ravi in his struggle for survival meets a gang of anti-social led by Damoder, the underworld don. He steals from a tailor's shop and is caught, held up and

punished by the tailor Apu and his wife Jayamma. They take pity on the hungry man, and offer him the job of an apprentice in the shop.

Like Dickens' protagonists Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Pip who depend on their benefactors, Ravi also gets a secure foothold in Apu's house. He works as an apprentice in tailoring. Soon he gets involved in love with Apu's daughter, Nalani, gets married to her and becomes a part of Apu's family. After marriage he decides to lead a respectable life as Apu's son-in-law, terminating his old criminal associations. After Apu's death he assumes the dignified position of the master of the household. But the heavy burden of the entire house, the cost of maintenance of the family and of the in-laws, high price of all commodities, force him into heavy debt. He expresses his disgust and disappointment at his poor and unprivileged condition:

The city was so crowded, rents so high, that even men with decent incomes searched for years, squashing themselves and their families on to whichever relative had managed to secure foothold in some house. It was a little easier for single men, but even sharing a room would cost ten or twelve rupees a month, too big a slice to take out of the twenty he earned (48).

In addition to Ravi's misery due to the responsibility of maintaining a large family of his in-laws, the growth of the textile mill and machine productions also poses threat to his tailoring trade. He can no more satisfy the rich European ladies' demand for the latest dress fashion. He is enraged with the rich ladies who scold him using all insulting and abusive words. He cannot sleep at night thinking of the injustice and humiliations afflicted on him. Coming back home he beats up Nalini mercilessly. Next day he repents for the bruise he has caused to her. Nalini silently suffers her aggrieved husband's anger with downcast looks,

heavy heart and tensed mind. Day by day, his financial position deteriorates. With his meager earning and rising price he can hardly meet all his household expenditure. He cannot repay the loan, cannot pay for light and water, and cannot buy medicine for his sick son Raju who dies of inadequate treatment.

After Raju's death, Ravi feels helpless, worried and depressed. He thinks of Damodar who might advise him or help him in his disaster. But Damodar sneers at, 'Go back to your village. It is more your size, you are not fit for anything else'(214). Ravi is agonized by a state of ambivalence between need for money and the conscience that would free him from Damodar's grip. He is condemned as a coward, unsuccessful man, unfit for city life as he cannot act violently with the agitated mob, loot the granary and become the unholy hero of the day. He withdraws his aggressive mood when he feels convinced that with violence as a weapon nothing positive can be achieved. Thus, the novel ends with a note of defeat and despair. Ravi accepts defeat by withdrawing himself from Damodar's impious world of glamour and luxury. In spite of his shattered ambitions he restrains himself from undertaking violent rebellious actions. *A Handful of Rice* as R.K. Srivastava says, is thus, 'a pathetic cry of protest of hungry and anguished half grown child groping for a path haltingly through the labyrinthine lanes of quixotic dreams and ugly realities, rural poverty and urban plenty, but reaching no where' (174).

Markandaya presents, in her first two novels, a general scene of exodus and the effect of socio-economic changes on the emerging new generations of people. Young men like Murugan and Ravi leave their village with the hope of better living in the town. But their migration leads to unemployment, frustration and immorality. The older generation like Nathan, Rukmani and Ravi's father accept suffering but the younger generation cannot

submit themselves to fate. Ravi protests, ‘ the pattern must have gone on a long time, for generations, because no body objected, nobody protested, they just kept going on and on’ (12). He sarcastically points out how the traditional pattern of honest living leads them to go without food, without wealth and health. He is not only affected by the rural poverty but also by the urban moral sickness.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Nathan, Rukmani and other village farmers represent the working class people. They are poor and believe on traditional profession. They suffer a lot with the failure of crops due to inclement weather. They visit the doors of the rice merchant, Hanuman and the moneylender, Biswas. Instead of getting help they get rude behavior from them. They are used to with dominance and being neglected. The poor working class people believe on their fate. Rukmani in a mood of self-assessment speaks to Kenny, ‘Yet our priests fast, and inflict on themselves severe punishments, and we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence, and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed’ (116). The farmers suffer more after the establishment of tannery. They curse the tannery, which invades their fertile, cultivable land. When they cannot survive with the product of the land, the village youths enter to the city. Like Nathan and Rukmani, Ravi’s fathers in *A Handful of Rice* is a poor farmer. He cannot grow the crops enough to feed his family. So, Ravi cannot get school education, He is compelled to leave the village and enter to the city.

Apu in *A Handful of Rice* might represent the middle class people. He is a good businessman. His tailoring is able to satisfy the customers' demand and earns enough to feed his family. He shows sympathy towards the poor people so he takes pity on the poor boy, Ravi and offers him the job of an apprentice in the shop. But after his death, Ravi, his son-in-law cannot satisfy the customers due to his tactlessness. The growth of the textile mill and

machine productions also poses threat to his tailoring trade. Like Ravi, the village shopkeepers in *Nectar in a Sieve* cannot earn enough money after the establishment of tannery. They cannot compete in the present market.

The upper class people like the rice merchant, Hanuman and the moneylender, Biswas are cruel and dominating the poor people. They have no sympathy for the poor. Even at the time of starvation they reject the request of the poor or they charge more money for rice and other food grains. When Nathan and Rukmani come to Biswas for rice in exchange of their two silver coins, he rebukes them demanding them more, ‘ Take it or leave it. I can get double that sum from the tanners’ (47). In *A Handful of Rice* the rich ladies scold Ravi using insulting and abusive words. They cannot understand his problem. So, the sophisticated people are seen all the time neglecting the poor or the working class people.

Characters of every kind who represent a typical cross-section of India crowd Kamala Marhandaya’s fictional world. These characters are destined to act, speak and think in particular ways determined by their social class. It is this class-consciousness, which is at the root of fictional tension and moral polemics in the novels of Markandaya. Sensitive characters attempt to fight against destiny in the face of anguish and suffering, while most other characters, particularly woman choose to suffer their destiny in clam acceptance of pain and humiliation.

Chapter Three

Gender Bias and Resistance

In recent years, there has been a plethora of theoretical speculations on the problems of woman in her feminine and female identities in the context of social and interpersonal relationships. Many Indian women novelists in English have reflected, in their writings, a sharp concern with the role and status of Indian women in terms of social and familial power. Kamala Markandaya's novels embody a profound and sensitive understanding of the feminine and the female in Indian ethos. Women in her novels fall into two distinct categories: (a) those who acquiesce their traditional social roles and perceive ideal womanhood in terms of being an obedient daughter, a subservient wife, a protective mother and only a marginal participant in decision making, (b) those who militate against the constraints of traditional Indian womanhood, who attempt to assert social and sexual power in the face of socio-moral resistance.

Kamala Markandaya's book *Nectar in a Sieve* exposes the traditional attitude of the Indians towards a female child at her very birth. With the birth of her first-born Ira, Rukmani with tears of disappointment exclaims, 'A girl's body—what woman wants a girl for her first born?'(19). She supports her husband's view that a male child is an asset and a girl child is a liability to the family. But ironically the couple cannot lead a happy and prosperous life even if five sons are born to them successively. Nathan thinks that educating the girl child is sheer waste. In fact, Rukmani's education cannot help her to earn for the destitute family. Ira marries with a dowry of hundred rupees, the maximum that her parents could offer. Rukmani easily reconciles herself to Ira's ill fate when her husband, being accused of

barrenness deserts her. But the irony is that in their abject poverty it is the daughter who helps the family financially. At least she can feed the starving Kuti who dies painfully, slowly for want of milk. Their sons are no longer symbols of hope. Both Rukmani and Nathan lament over the departure of their sons from the land to distant places and different occupations. Their last hope of survival is lost when they cannot trace their son Murugan in the unfriendly city.

Rukmani seems to conform to the traditional image of women embodied in the mythical figures of Sita and Savitri who silently bear all hardships and remain devoted to their husbands. Born of the village headman and married to a tenant farmer below her family status, her good soul speaks of her husband as one 'who was poor in everything but in love and care for me' (8). She feels proud of him, as he is efficient in farming, in maintaining the household single handedly and is a loving husband. Though the knowledge of Nathan's adultery with Kunti in his youth is agonizing, she hardly ever betrays her feelings of jealousy and anguishes. On the other hand, her faith and reliance on her husband remain unabated. She is the symbol of unimpeachable chastity and unswerving devotion.

Rukmani stands by Nathan in times of both happiness and suffering, during bumper harvest and draught. During their abject penury Nathan feels grateful to her and declares 'you are a good wife, ...I would not have any other' (84). Together they suffer misfortunes – the loss of their beloved sons, land, home, humiliations in the town, the grievance of their daughter and final separation. Rukmani exhibits her tremendous power of tolerance and patience when she speaks her last words to the dying husband, 'If I grieve, I said, it is not for you, but for myself beloved, for how shall I endure to live without you, who are my love and my life?' To Nathan's ironical question 'Have we not been happy together?' she replies

confidently, 'Always, my dearest, always'(187). After losing her husband she returns home with the diseased city boy Puli and joins her son Selvam and daughter Ira with a renewed desire to survive. Rukmani is portrayed not only as a devoted wife, but also as a loving, caring and sensible mother, a loyal friend, a helping neighbour, a considerate mother-in-law and a model housewife. As an incumbent of the traditional Indian values of chastity, devotion and integrity, she is genuinely the true voice of endurance. C.T. India rightly comments on this close study of a woman's feelings and thoughts, her sufferings and struggle:

Kamala Markandaya has managed to give full play to a woman's self cast in a relatively unadventurous social milieu... she proves that within the traditional role she can accommodate her other roles as human being (71).

The Savitri metaphor has been ironically used in R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938). Savitri tries to break the mythical image by leaving her home when she can no more tolerate her husband Ramani's extramarital relations. She tries to commit suicide but is rescued by Mari whose wife Ponni advises her to assert her position in the family by handling domestic conflicts with iron hand. Eventually Sabitri returns home signifying the importance of the dark room for an Indian wife who cannot enjoy a life of liberation.

This traditional portrait of woman as Sita or Savitri has not changed even after independence. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai portrays Sita as a rebel against the conventional patterns of life. She is fatigued with the conventional image of a woman. She leaves the city and goes to her father's mansion in the village in search of peace of contentment but finally comes back home with her husband Raman for the future prospect of the children. Thus, Kamala Markandaya, R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai show how

Rukmani, Savitri and Sita represent India woman struggling for their rightful position in the family, which is denied to them in the unjust, harsh and indifferent society.

A Handful of Rice is the only novel of Kamala Markandaya, which begins with love at first sight that eventually finds its fulfillment in marriage. It is the study of the ennobling effect of love of an attractive young woman on a vagabond, unsocial young man who is subsequently converted into a loving husband and a responsible householder. Ravi, like other unemployed young men of his native place migrates to the city to overcome poverty and hunger. But in the city he faces the same problem of meeting the basic need of food and shelter. In search of this he happens to join a group of hooligans led by Damodar. Apu, the city tailor takes pity on the starving young man and offers him a job of apprentice in his shop. Ravi's romantic interest in Nalini, the second daughter of Apu, marks the first turning point in his life. He accepts the job gladly for the sake of Nalini:

Nalini, his girl. He said it to himself sweetly, roundly, and secretly and it filled him with a delicious sense of pleasure. Nalini the girl who could make a man feel like a man even outside the jungle of his choosing, the girl for whom he was ready to repudiate all in his life that was unworthy (33).

At the outset, with Nalini he settles down to happy domesticity. Like Nathan and Rukmani, this newly wed couple lead a happy conjugal life. As is usual in city, Ravi soon develops aspiration for greater physical and material comfort. Fed up with the congested living in Apu's house, he dreams of a big room, a bicycle to move and a comfortable bed to sleep on. Nalini entreats him not to feel envious of the affluent people, to be content with whatever they have. She argues, 'They are a different class Ordinary folk like us can never be like them' (75). This shows Nalini's sense of adjustment and pragmatism. In spite of

being beaten and ill treated by her husband in his drunkenness, she tries her best to bring her wayward husband to the right path. She dissuades him to be associated with the smugglers. When Ravi gets frustrated with non-materialization of his over-spiraling dreams, Nalini acts as a strong and powerful stimulus in helping him withdraw from the gangster's clutches.

It is a crucial period in Ravi's life when he faces the moral dilemma of vacillating between the watchful moral guidance of his wife and the miscreant Damodar's temptations for immense material prosperity. He is in a fix, whether to adopt Damodar's foul means or sustain on honest and hard labour demanded by his wife. Like Hamlet he procrastinates action since he is unable to resolve the tension between the material benefits in Damodar's methods and the moral responsibilities of a good citizen between depravity and conscience. But finally he stands against 'the shoddy morality of a hypocritical society' (217).

Ravi tries to change his financial situation after being rescued by Apu from Damodar's world of moral depravity. But he is soon disillusioned when, after Apu's death he cannot manage the household properly because of his inefficiency, tactlessness and poor dealings with customers. He is unable to meet the needs of his wife. He is shocked most when his son Raju dies. He now realizes that he would rather steal and be rich than beg in the name of self-respect. His deep concern for Nalini induces him to rebel against social distinction, but he contemplates, 'Rebel, and a contract might be lost, the steady wage would be lost, and then what of Nalini? he had to think of her, he had to think of himself for that matter. There seemed to be no answer' (84).

Tortured by abject penury, Nalini quietly leaves her husband after Raju's death and goes to her sister's place. Ravi realizes now that in society, which is so inconsiderate, honesty would mean nothing. He fights against the society represented by the European

memsahibs, the policemen and the rice go downs. After the death of his son, he castigates society, calling it 'Them, Society, Guilty of casual murder' (231). He feels frustrated when he sees no chance of success. As Margaret P. Joseph rightly assesses the situation, Ravi is 'destroyed by a false society, represented by the 'People' 'who think he has no feelings, who give him no privacy, pin him down, actually and metaphorically, who give orders, who have money. His harsh treatment of Nalini, his incest with his mother-in-law, is indirect results of this frustrated rage against society' (62-63). Whenever discouraged and tortured by the world, Ravi finds solace and happiness in his love for Nalini. Ultimately he rejects the path of violence and tries to maintain his integrity for the sake of Nalini. Ravi and Nalini finally emerge, amidst all the hazards of poor living, as intimate lovers who share each other's woes and joys.

Traditionally Indian women feel elated and fortunate enough to beget a son as their first-born. Nalini feels herself supremely blessed when Raju is born. Her sister Thangam feels that she is unfortunate in not having a son. Apu is sorry to have two daughters and no son to assist him in his old age. In spite of such deep faith in male supremacy, mother do not discriminate between sons and daughters when it comes to bringing them up or supporting them in their hours of crisis and suffering. Jayamma never allows Nalini to go with Ravi alone. Ravi fondly remembers his sisters who were closely protected until their marriage. Mulk Raj Anand in *Untouchable* shows how a motherless girl Sohini becomes a victim of molestation. Apu allows his daughters to stay with him even after their marriage. Similarly, Rukmani provides security and shelter to Ira when her in-laws desert her. This security of the girls is threatened when there is a financial crisis. Ravi in abject poverty drives out Thangam's husband from his house. In an outrage he goes to the extent of beating his wife

and ill-treating his mother-in-law. Ira is tolerated even when she turns into prostitute under extremely strained financial condition. In the traditional Indian society, moral depravity of the male is never questioned whereas women always submit themselves to the desires and pleasures of men. Rukmani silently endures Nathan's extra-marital adventures in the interest of a peaceful marital life. As K.S. Narayan Rao remarks:

Markandaya's novels deal with contemporary Indian society, which is a traditional society in state of flux and change, and reveal a spectrum of moral attitudes on the part of the characters that people the fictional world, which include the traditionally moral, the immoral and the amoral attitudes.

Although her woman characters are never relegated to the background and are, in fact, better drawn than their male counterparts, it is usually the men who get away with their delinquent sexual conduct (love, 69-70).

Two Virgins is a poignant tale of two girls growing up in the changing ethos of Indian life that tends to subvert traditional attitudes and is assertive of the freedom of women. As Alice Drum states:

In *Two Virgins*, Kamala Markandaya uses the exigencies of life in the rapidly changing world of a modern Indian village to give fresh treatment to a common human problem and a familiar literary theme, coming of age (323).

In free India women enjoy political right, right to education and to job. Higher education brings noticeable change in attitudes and beliefs. The old order of suppressions of women has yielded place to the new careers open for them. There is a significant shift from an attitude that has denied woman the possibility of being a 'she' a person capable of

achieving individuation ' (Ramamoorthi, 115) to an attitude that seeks to assert a distinct feminine identity.

Indian women have been traditionally portrayed as the paragon of resignation and patient suffering. Binodini in Tagore's *Chokarbnali* (1903) is perhaps the first Indian woman who rebels against the social norms, claiming an identity of her own at a time when widows are socially ostracized. Biniodini is an unconventional, bold character who loves Mahendra, a married man, though ultimately she submits herself to social code of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Lalitha, in *Two Virgins*, assumes a superior air in relation to her younger sister Saroja who is mild, obedient, timid and tradition-bound. Appa is proud of his beautiful girl Lalitha who is given education in Mission High School under the guidance of Miss Mendoza. Her teacher has recognized her talent as an artist. She advises Saroja enthusiastically, 'you have to seize your opportunity before it passes you by, and you have to be quick in your answers, if you want to get anywhere' (77). But Saroja is not so daring and dashing to easily accept her sister's advice. When Lalitha tries to persuade her parents to allow her to join films, they hesitate, as they are not quite sure about her new venture. As an ambitious young girl, Lilitha is strongly inspired by Mr. Gupta, the film director. To the vehement objections of Aunt Alamelu, she retorts, '...These days girls from respectable families act in film, can I help it if an old fossil like you haven't heard?' (82). Finally, Lalitha, the pet of Appa, is successful in seizing the opportunity to become a film star. Looking down upon the rural living, she escapes into the glamorous urban life. But soon she is victimized for her lack of experience and wisdom. Instead of getting recognition she turns into a problem for the parents when there is the need to rescue her from unwanted pregnancy. In utter disgrace she tries to

disappear in the huge crowd of the city, as she does not like to lead a dull and dreary life in the undeveloped rural settling. In R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* Rosie is successful as a dancer, achieves her gold as a careerist whereas Lalitha's identity as a dancer is lost in an illusory world. Anita Desai's protagonist, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* realizes in her middle age the futility of her rebellion against her trapped and subjugated living. Rashmi in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* (1968) is individualist, strong willed, sensitive and intelligent. Her liberated self getting separated from Dillip seems to find comfort and security in another man, Rakesh. Women like Indu in Sashi Deshpande's *Root and Shadows* (1983) and Saru in *That Long Silence* (1988) revolt against parental authority. But too much of autonomy leads them to break marital ties and to engage themselves in extra-marital affairs. Thus, the so-called liberated women ultimately lose themselves in the darkness of an unfeeling world.

In *The Golden Honeycomb* Kamala Markandaya has created some memorable women characters who play significant roles in the freedom struggle. They decide the destiny of the Princely State with their wide social and cultural awakening. The dowager Queen Manjula and commoner queen Mohini with their sharp wit, pragmatic sense and reasonableness can change the traditional system in the political history of the state. They can inspire the younger generation with national fervor. After the accidental death of Bawajiraj II, the young Prince Bawajiraj III ascends the throne of Devapur state. The Mother Queen Manjula practically acts as the power behind the throne. The British Agent and the Dewan cannot exercise their free hand in public or private issues without her knowledge. The Queen Mother observes that the princes are deliberately trained in the pattern of English gentlemen to keep them loyal. She has all sympathy for the poor. She is interested in solving common men's

problems. She does not appreciate her son to be educated in the Western manner. She sets the first royal rebellion by insisting on suckling her own baby by herself, contrary to the royal tradition. In spite of her husband's persuasions, she defies royal conventions. She is unhappy when her son is inclined towards the alien government, ignorant of and insensitive to the problems of the people of the land. However, she is satisfied in selecting a bride for her son according to her choice. As the pretty wife Shanta Devi cannot contribute a son for the continuation of the dynasty, the king Bawajiraj III is granted special assent to marry a girl from the common level of society.

Mohini, the commoner beloved of the king is persuaded by the Queen Mother not to assume the status of a queen. She prefers to be his concubine, a status that guarantees her freedom to bring up her son. The exchange of their views has been dramatically presented:

'You could be a queen'

'I don't want to be your queen, I want to be free.'

'Am I not free?'

'Of course, you're not free,'

'As far as I'm aware –'

'You are aware of nothing. The British have tied you up hand and foot and you don't even know it. Do you want me to be shackled like you?' (32).

Women, in Kamal Markamdaya's works fall into a distinct two fold patterns: those who belong to the economically poor and middle class society and those who belong to an affluent and upper class society. While the former group behaves in traditional ways of quiet and helpless acceptance of pain and suffering, the latter group stands up against injustice to

women and asserts a distinct identity for the Indian women in terms of close participation in social and political events and movements.

Chapter Four

Crisis of Transition

Post-colonial Indian fiction in English embodies various images of the Indian society in terms of its traditional values and practices as well as its changing ethos in the process of its transition from an agrarian to an industrialized and urbanized socio-economic order. While novelists like Anita Desai and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala are basically concerned with the problems of urbanization, Kamala Markandaya is chiefly preoccupied with the problems of tragic encounter between the traditional Indian values and cultural practices on the one hand, and the industrial and urban outlook on the other. This chapter is an attempt at exploring Kamala Markandaya's critique of a) the village b) the family and c) the socio-cultural tensions in the context of an intercultural encounter.

The hierarchy of social classes in Indian villages is based on distinctions of caste and financial status in the context of an agrarian society. As B. Kuppuswamy aptly summarizes:

Since, the village economy is based primarily on agriculture, the ownership of land gives rise to an agrarian class structure. There are the landowners who form the upper-class on account of their wealth and proprietorship. There is the middle-class consisting of the tenants who take the land on lease for cultivation from the landlords, and there are the agricultural laborers who are employed on a daily wage basis by the landlords or the tenants to help them in the cultivation of the land (475-76).

Thus, landowners, farmers and traders constitute the core of the traditional Indian rural community. War and change of regime have, of course, affected the village

communities in the system of land tenure, land holding and occupations. But what has essentially happened is the village life is in the process of far-reaching socio-economic changes in its encounter with urban sub-culture. The landlord in the erstwhile Zamindari system was a rich person who was wealthy at the cost of the poor farmers and workers who were deprived of the basic needs of living. The archetype of the landlord suggests exploitation of the poor by a wealthy villager who enjoys social power. The moneylenders held an important place in the rural economy. In times of natural calamity such as famine, draught and flood, the poor farmers and workers were forced to borrow money from professional moneylenders at a very high rate of interest. Sometimes the villagers pawned their land and house to these moneylenders and more often than not, they never got them back, for they could never pay back the loan.

In post-colonial India, industrialists, factory owners and businessmen are replacing the landlords and moneylenders. Industrialization is seen as the only viable source of wealth for the individual and the country. Mills and factories provide better job opportunity to young people. Transport and communication facilities have led to greater mobility and interaction with cities and the urban folk. It is this transition from the agrarian to an industrial and urban society, which engages Kamala Markandaya in most of her fictions.

Kamala Markandaya's fiction often reflects deep sense of loss and a sad brooding over destruction of the calm and idyllic beauty of the countryside caused by the din and bustle of urbanization. *Nectar in a Sieve* embodies this tone of loss. It is nostalgic depiction of the traditional rural ethos in the perspective of a radical social transition. The blue skies, green plants and running brook have been a perennial source of delight for the villagers. But now birds, sparrows, bulbuls, parrot are hardly seen. The cool silence and tranquility is

disturbed by the clamor of bullock carts with loads of brick, stone and cement. There are references to the milking of cows and goats, churning of butter and milk, planting beans, potatoes, brinjals and chilies. Rukmani is engaged in pounding red chilies into powder, collecting dung for fuel and making dung cakes. The villagers have simple food habits. Their meal consists of plain boiled rice, dal, vegetables and curds. In their good harvest days, Rukmani remembers 'There was food in plenty for two people and we ate well: rice for morning and evening meals, dal, sometimes a coconut grated fine and cooked in milk and sugar; sometimes a wheat cake, fried in butter, melting in the mouth' (13). On special occasions such as celebrations of births and marriages, villagers spend lavishly beyond their means. Rukmani's sister and her daughter after their marriage leave the parents penniless.

In *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya presents a graphic picture of the beautiful nature scenes in the villages. The plantation on the roadside of the village serves multiple purposes. The travelers take rest in the shade of the Banyan trees. Amma is fond of the Tamarind as it yields 'enormous quantities of tamarind for her pickles and for sale' (16). Saroja likes its sweet and sour taste. Chingleput collects tamarind for his recipes. The biggest threat to the rural vegetation comes from the monkeys. They come when the trees are loaded with fruits, the papayas ripening, the gourds fattening on Manikkams's wife's vegetable patch. The villagers struggle hard to save their fruits from the monkeys, in hot days when mangoes ripe. Amma prepares pickle.

In contrast to the peasants' thatched huts and mud walls, the tannery building is made of bricks and cement. Markandaya draws the reader's attention to the villagers' fortitude, courage, uncomplaining acceptance of good and evil alike, their extreme attachment to the land and devotion to their profession. Nathan and Rukmani suffer calamity together. They

experience agony in the city where they receive help from a stranger boy Puli in their starvation but not from their own sons. Coming out of her father's mansion, Rukmani faces difficulties in her husbands' mud hut, but soon she adjusts herself to the situation and assures him, 'It suits me quite well to live here' (10). Initially, Rukmani seems contented with her married life with Nathan's granary full of paddy:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? (12).

But she feels emotionally disturbed when a revolutionary change comes over the village by the establishment of the tannery. She reflects:

Change I had known before, and it has been gradual.But the change that now came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our village, seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye (29).

However, people accept this radical change. When the factory affects agriculture and the cottage industries, people tend to migrate to the towns in search of employment. Chingleput, the sweet maker, the weavers, the blacksmith in *Two Virgins* is still unrelenting, 'No machine, he said, could be fashioned to do what he did, he was not afraid of machines usurping him which was the great fear of the weavers in the village (79).

The young and subtle mind of Saroja is so much disturbed by the change that she secretly but sincerely prays to God 'not to allow machines into their village which would destroy Chingleput and his skills' (80). Saroja in her visit to the city gets so much upset and

bewildered that she wants to run away to her village and never come back to the city. She is assured:

At home there were fields to rest your eyes on, colors that changed with the seasons. The tender green of new crops, the tawny shades of harvest, the tints, of freshly turned earth, you could have told the week and the month of the year by these alone (243).

She is so well acquainted with the well, the fields, the grove, the water meadow and the inhabitants of the village that she never apprehends to be lost, whereas, in the city she gets irritated at the suspicious looks of the strangers and realizes why and how her sister Lalitha gets herself lost there. She feels quiet at home and notices every thing usual and normal when she comes back to her village. There is a note of contentment when she looks at the grain store filled with sacks of paddy, the courtyard properly maintained with sprinkled water and the dust being swept, the buffalo shed and the field itself.

When young men of the village realize that the land is no more reliable in providing them sustenance, gradually they leave behind their hereditary professions and migrate to towns. Rama Jha observes, ‘ Victims of the cash Nexus, they don’t adjust well with the change around them. Rukmani’s whole family is affected by this change. Nathan is in a helpless plight, whereas his sons are leaving for the city’ (164). The tannery is not to be blamed along for the change. The peasants for their traditional intimacy and sentimental attachment as well as their dependence on land, have an instinctive sense of nature’s cycles of creation and preservation. As Rukmani explains:

And whatever extraneous influence the tannery may have exercised, the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather, immensities not to be tempered by man or creations (136).

Nature has been presented both in its beauty and harshness. Nathan's coconut plant is destroyed in stormy weather. Lightning kills people as they seek shelter under a tree. Kali's hut is completely destroyed with the roof blown away and the mud walls crumbled. The rain becomes the symbol of 'disaster and desolation' (45): trees uprooted, paddy crushed, sticks and stones scattered, huts demolished, shops destroyed and cats, dogs and bats dead. Rukmani is aware of the stark reality, 'To those who live by the land there must always come times of hardship, of fear and of hunger, even as there are years of plenty'(136).

In the backdrop of this rural landscape, there is excitement and jubilation at the prospects of better living. Kunti asks Rukmani, 'Are you not glad that our village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town?' (33). She hopes that the shops, tea stalls and bioscope would soon be available in their locality. Kunti, Kali and Janaki feel the importance of the tannery as they confess that the land can no more sustain all their sons. Gradually, the tannery stands as a great landmark of progress. In *Two Virgins* Appa and his sons heartily welcome machines. Chingleput is convinced of the benefit of machine. He finds the town full of machines and the machines work better as 'they spun sugar finer, faster, than he with his prongs. They roasted nuts by the barrelful' (4). Amidst such mixed reactions the traditional village advances towards inevitable urbanization. R.M Varma rightly comments:

With the process of industrialization, there are conflicts, heart burning and troubles, no doubt, but the society changes, and changes it will. Every society will industrialize. In spite of the great resistance offered to it by inherited

structures and others, which may help to keep some of the traditional, cultural aspects of life, still living (31).

In *The Coffin Dams* a small industrial town has been built up on the 'uniform, impenetrable green' (8) of the hillside. In order to construct a dam on the turbulent river, the jungles and hills need to be destroyed. The face of the village is completely changed with rapid construction of the 'workshop and work buildings, loading and unload bays, the car maintenance sheds, the workers' quarters, the engineers' bungalows, the amenity buildings, the water tower, ice and filtration plant, pumping and power stations' (9). But in spite of the ravage of nature by machinery, the inhabitants co-cooperate with the technocrats as both excess rain and scarcity of rain on the land cause havoc. The river cannot help the villagers in the time of draught. In the floods, their mud huts are dissolved and washed away. After the dam is set up, the river banks stand firm in the face of heavy monsoon rains. Hence, Gopal Rao, the Indian assistant admits 'the dams were built for the benefit of the people' (217). Ramesh Chandha rightly points out Markandaya's skilful way of presenting 'a pulsating record of human suffering and cultural consciousness against the backdrop of formidable elements of Nature' (63).

For Rukmani, tannery is a sinister presence, even though she is aware that the real causes of ruin of her family are inclement weather, famine, crop failure, landlordism, money lending system and defective land tenure system. Rukmani is literate and intelligent enough to realize the problems of the villagers brought about by industrialization and urbanization that devastates village economy and communal living. Janaki's husband cannot compete with the city shopkeepers. Chingleput is shocked at the sharp decline of his business. Amidst utter disaster and failure, Ravi finally realizes that one is bound to remain backward unless one

cope with emerging outlook of gross materialism that has already gripped the rural setting. In *The Coffer Dams* in spite of the loss of human lives and sensibility the machines prevail over man for sheer materialistic gains.

Kamala Markandaya's perception of the Indian village is in terms of nostalgia for the rural outlook that valued human and humane consideration as basic to a healthy community. Her observations of the Indian village are informed by an awareness of an emerging social order governed by machines factories, trade and business.

Social scientists S.C. Dube while analyzing the Indian family system points out that 'Togetherness and solidarity within the family are much lauded virtues' (67). In the past when people lived entirely on agriculture, joint families were quite stable with each member participating in the process of earning livelihood. But with the rapid growth of population, agriculture is not more capable of sustaining the family. This causes not only growing poverty in India villages but also a tendency to migrate to cities in search of prosperity. Ravi's father, a tenant farmer cannot provide sustenance to his children. His mother sorrowfully observes, 'One after another they had been forced out, and had gone, three sons, her daughter, her son-in-law, all in turn had boarded the train that bore them away to the city' (26). Similar circumstances compel Arjun and Thambi to explain to their parents about their decision to go to Ceylon Tea plantation. Arjun argues with his mother. 'There is nothing for us here, for we have neither the means to buy land nor to rent it, would you have us wasting our youth, chafing against things we cannot change?' (72). The village youth are impelled to escape the milieu where the rich and selfish Zamindars thrive, agents like Sivaji, cunning merchants like Hanuman and money-lenders like Biswas and Perumal prosper. The old parents like Nathan and Rukmani are left behind with their 'hot and bitter' tears, 'springs of

sorrow' and 'tortured feelings' (72). In *Two Virgins* Appa allows his sons and even his daughter Lalitha to go to the city in search of a more meaningful existence. In *Possession* the Swamy grants permission to Val to leave his village and family with the hope that Val's talent would find scope and opportunity to grow and flourish. In the advanced environment of the Western civilization the unlearned goatherd boy from an unknown South Indian village is able to acquire all modern sophistication and achieve recognition of his artistic talent. In *The Nowhere Man* Srinivas' ancestral house known as the 'Chandraprasad' refers not only to the building, but also to integrated, indivisible family ties. The solid structure is built under the supervision of Srinivas' grandfather, who was ' a Brahmin land owner, descendant of a long line of learned men' (99). He sold his village house and moved to the town with his wife, two sons and two daughters with a view to giving better education to the children. Srinivas has a kind of emotional attachment for the house. Later the family gets separated from the house as Srinivas is forced to leave India under political constraints. But taking refuge in England the family gets further disintegrated because of the racial and cultural clashes. Vasantha's ambitious plans to house the entire family under one roof ironically falls flat when every one of the family gradually falls apart from each other. Thus there is eventually a total breakdown of the joint family.

Dr. Kenny, the voice of modernity, tries to make the peasants aware of the limitations of their conventional beliefs and prejudices. He explains to them the value of family planning and the dangers implied in their faith that having a large family is a matter of honor and pride. Janaki, the wife of the village shopkeeper has seven children. Rukmani feels proud in giving birth to one daughter and six sons. But subsequently under heavy economic pressures the large family disintegrates as the children move out to cities and adopt urban ways of life.

Ravi gets himself separated from his in-laws when he feels suffocated with so many people living on his single income. Contrary to family traditions, young men like Laxman and Murugan chose their own brides without parental consent. Murugan violates the orthodox sexual and family code by whimsically abandoning his wife and children. Nathan treats his daughter Ira harshly and contemptuously when she resorts to prostitution. Like Ira, Ammu, Murugan's deserted wife, justified her immoral conduct as a successful way of living, 'One must live, she repeated, defiant, challenging, sensing reproach where none could be; for it is very true, one must live' (164). Sacrabani, Ira's albino child is the symbol of this attitude: a willing marriage between necessity and free will. Trying to surmount the pain and hunger of poverty, Ira and Ammu drown their conscience in the welter of utilitarian society. Kamala Das in her story collection *A Doll of the Child Prostitute* (1977) presents similar predicament of young, innocent girls. Radha, Sita, Mira, Saraswati and Laxshmi are all victims of poverty who submit themselves to flesh trade with the hope of a materially comfortable living.

Lalitha is also forced to abort her fetus after being duped by the city tradesmen. Ira ventures to defy traditional sense of morality. Her conscience is clear. She justifies her struggle for existence, 'Tonight and tomorrow and every night, so long there is need' (99). Selvam's sympathy, his act of providing shelter to Ira and her son is untenable in terms of the traditional norms of social conduct. Ravi gets into Damodar's crime net to overcome the anguish of poverty and Damodar is an unrepentant bootlegger devoid of any moral conscience. As Iyengar rightly observes, what creates this moral crisis is the existence of:

The insensitiveness of the affluent, their mania for conspicuous consumption, their hardness of heart, the exploitation of small fish by big, the worker by the capitalist, the Apus of the world by the Big shops in Mount Road, and the

internal success of the bootlegger, the black-marketer, the drug-peddler at the cost of the poor, the down and out, the desperate (445-46).

Ravi represents the new generation of young men who cannot stand firmly on tradition nor can fit into the world of competitions. His big dream of living a life of luxury is strongly threatened by his moral scruples. Damodar, who enjoys all earthly pleasures by burglary, bootlegging and smuggling looks at Ravi as a total failure having 'no hear, no lights, no guts' (232). He refuses entry to a man like Ravi with moral dilemma to his underworld. R.K. Srivastava comments:

The competitive world of business becomes identified with Damodar's world of violence, also called a jungle, wherein he had no burden of any family and children, no qualms and no tradition. But Ravi, unlike Damodar, belongs to a jungle of civilization in which he cannot even fight freely because of his sense of honor, and of the respectability of his wife and children (191).

Markandaya's perception of Indian life, in short, constitutes a social order that has created a new form of class-hierarchy: the factory-owner and the wage-earner, the elite class and the illiterate, the skilled trader and the traditional shopkeeper, people aspiring for urban comforts and those clinging to conventional cultural practices. In other words, the incoming of technology has resulted in a clear rural-urban divide leading to a duality of classes- the haves and the have-nots, the exploiter and the exploited.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Kamala Markandaya's fictional world is crowded by characters of every kind who represent a typical cross-section of India. These are characters destined to act, speak and think in particular ways determined by their social class. It is this class-consciousness which is at the root of fictional tension and moral polemics in the novels of Markandaya. Sensitive characters attempt to fight against destiny in the face of anguish and suffering, while most other characters, particularly women, choose to suffer their destiny in calm acceptance of pain and humiliation.

Women, in her novels, fall into a distinct two fold patterns: those who belong to the economically poor and middle class society, and those who belong to an affluent and upper class society, while the former group behaves in traditional ways of quiet and helpless acceptance of pain and suffering, the latter group stands up against injustice to women and asserts a distinct identity for the Indian women in terms of close participation in social and political events and movements.

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Markandaya presents Nathan and Rukmani like characters in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Ravi's father in *A Handful of Rice* to show the working class people who continue their traditional profession and believe on the fate. They curse their ill fate. They do not like to go against the exploiters. But the young people like Ravi and Murugan and other village boys, who are aware of the time, do not like to continue the parental profession and enter the city in search of jobs. They do not like exploitation in the society. Hanuman, the rice merchant, Biswas, the moneyleader are exploiting the poor people or acting as vampire in the society. Women, like Rukmani, Nalini are seen as passive or happy enough to be devoted wives to their husbands. They cannot go against the men. But Lalitha in *Two virgins* is presented as modern women who demands for her right and gets good education. In the time of change, society is seen divided in different facts. Some people are continuing their tradition and do not raise their voice for change but others are in favour of change so they seek new jobs and ask for their right. With the arrival of factories and industries social consciousness increases. As a result, economic and social changes appear in the society.

In one sense, Kamala Markandaya's fictional works reflect a general pre-occupation with class-consciousness represented in almost all major modern Indian novels in English. But of course, each novelist charts their own paradigm of space, time and human action to embody this consciousness. Markandaya's scheme is governed by a global view of Indian socio-economic ethos in rural, semi-urban and urban settings. The time she chooses is one of the crucial transitions from colonial to post-colonial order. People from the urban and the rural India, from inside the country and outside, from the plain land and the hilly land, from the lower class and the upper class, all have been given justice in her portrait gallery. She is aware of the nature of the world and the time in which she lives. Her fictional world is

peopled by men and women of all classes whose self is wounded in the seemingly interminable process of tension and conflict between freedom and necessity, between individual and society.

Markandaya's fictional world has depicted the class-consciousness of the transitional period, colonial to post-colonial, that the people do have not only political consciousness but also economic and social consciousness in the society. The class or status of the people determines their attitudes. The realization of their own class and the awareness of its relationship with other classes leads to class-consciousness. Suffering and intense of anguish lead the people to raise their voice against the exploiter if they are being exploited or they find themselves in a lower status. They think to involve themselves in some work to improve their status politically and financially as well. Here, in Markandaya's works similar consciousness is found in the characters like Ravi, Murugan and other village boys. Since old people are continuing their old profession and cannot raise their voice openly against the exploiters, the society does not have complete change or it is tilted towards the change. The youngsters raise their voice against the exploiters and they are involved in new professions. They no longer are ready to continue their parental profession. They are attracted towards industrialization. They no longer accept the domination of rich people. This very overall consciousness symbolizes the period of transition which would lead the society towards perfection. It would be the foundation or fundamental aspect of social change.

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