CHAPTER II

Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and

Kamala Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb*

*There is such a thing as stability in motion, immutability in flux. The more*
*I think about the matter, the more convinced do I feel that nations acquire*
*a sort of monumentality in their passage through history.*

(Nirad C. Chaudhury, *A Passage to England*)

Novel as a genre is the outcome of various social causes. Yet, essentially, it is the outcome of the colonial situation which involves the encounter of two or more cultures, languages, world views and episteme. It is basically rebellious in nature and reflects fragmentation and loss of unity implicit in the movement of society from traditional to industrial, rural to urban, collective to individualistic and colonial to non-colonial. It flourishes particularly when there is change in social order and/or political structure and consequent world view. M.M. Bakhtin opines, “The novel has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questioning,
ever examining itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality” (qtd in Juneja 107). The emergence of the novel in India, Africa, African America and the Caribbean is a direct consequence of the development of colonialism/slavery/racism. The colonial novelist, native or expatriate, is almost always engaged in thematising the colonial intrusion or the confrontation of two cultures. East-West encounter, therefore, keeps his attention engaged most of the time. Both the native and the expatriate novelists are concerned with the plight of the disturbed colonized. While the expatriate novelist is more concerned about the economic and political exploitation of the colonized, the native writer’s chief concern is with the emotional exploitation of the colonized and the assertion of his manhood and culture.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, the novel in India was popularized by Bengali novelists like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and several others. The novel in India and the tales which preceded it were written in the contestatory colonial space where the native writer defies the cultural supremacy of the colonizer. Indo-Anglian literature became post-colonial in form and content when it dissociated itself from the King’s English and from respecting European canons. The Indian novel in English and in other languages usurped the hegemonic dominant discourse available to the English novel produced in England. This confrontation with the West results in different reactions among different native novelists. The novelist in his novel may adopt a mock-heroic defiant attitude towards both the East and the West, he may challenge the western authority with a spiritual authority or he may try and redefine the past of his people to assert that the natives too had culture much before the coming of the Europeans with their self-proclaiming civilizing missions.
Colonial space hybridized by isolation and alienation of the colonial outsider is tested and contested on the grounds of the historical. The novel of the colonial consciousness particularly contests the positionality of history as the “master narrative” to demystify and dismantle it to situate the historical in the political, social, cultural and economic life of a community. History no more remains a monolithic collection of facts and their hegemonic interpretations. The writer of a historical novel uses it as an instrument of self-discovery through which he finds his roots, his identity and that of his people. Writing in 1850, Alessandro Manzoni argued that novelists were different from historians because they give “not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history” (Manzoni 67-68). This, perhaps, is the only key to understand the fiction of the past. According to Juliet Gardiner editor of What is History Today? (1988), past is no more “a jigsaw which will one day be complete” (qtd in Juneja 59). It is now a dialogue with the present. Laurence Lerner observes that history is a narrative and like a literary narrative it is a “blend of observation, memory and imagination.” Hence the “historical reality is a special case of fiction, as speech is a special case of writing … and nature a special case of culture” (qtd in Juneja 59).

Many Indo-English novelists in their novels have turned to the past as it is in the historical novel only that the actual day-to-day problems of life can be encountered, analyzed, exposed, challenged and rectified. These novelists while writing about past events make a deliberate effort to trace the deepening mood of nationalism as well as to cherish the memories of the bygone days. Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller and Kandan the Patriot heralded the way of the postcolonial novel in India. Unfortunately, in
these two novels, the political message was too obvious and the books read more like political pamphlets than like works of art. The new and original style in Indian literature written in English was developed by Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan in the 1930s and each in his own way. Although they probably never read it, these three novelists answered the call of *The Beacon*, a Trinidadian paper which asked for cultural emancipation: “One ought to break away as far as possible from the English tradition…. One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and other islands to see what slaves we still are to the English culture and tradition” (qtd in Pandey 11-12).

These three writers wrote their novels in the 1930s when India was still a colony of the British but their style and content is undoubtedly post-colonial. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their book *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* write:

‘Post-colonial’ as we define it does not mean post-independence or ‘after colonialism’ for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality which colonization brings into being. (117)

Acceptance of an Indian way of writing in English and Indianization of the novel as a form of literature is what makes the works of these three novelists post-colonial in style. They called for the decolonization of English language and Raja Rao, in particular, did not consider it to be an alien language. He considered it to be the language of “our intellectual make-up — like Sanskrit and Persian was before — but not of our emotional make-up” (Introduction, *Kanthapura*). In no uncertain terms he proclaims:
We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

This question of the foreignness of English has also bothered novelists from other countries whose language and culture suffered a setback during colonial rule. Chinua Achebe, the famous Nigerian novelist, in his essay “English and the African Writer” claims:

‘Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?’ Certainly yes… if on the other hand you ask: ‘Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?’ I should say, ‘I hope not’. It is neither necessary, nor desirable for him to be able to do so… I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in communication with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (qtd in Juneja 135)

The impact of Western education brought about a kind of national awareness which led to the rise of nationalism and finally to the freedom movement. The freedom struggle, though over, did not relegate the protest themes into the background. On the contrary writers have often returned again and again to this theme. The two works which have been undertaken for study in this chapter although do not exactly deal with the freedom struggle; share a common backdrop, that is, national awakening and the rise of
nationalism. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and Kamala Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb* deal with the awakening of national sentiments in the remote areas of the country. The protagonists of both the novels jump into the nationalist movement with fervour yet both Moorthy and Rabi are just specks in the whirlwind of Independence struggle. Both of them do not play any significant role at the national level. Keeping these similarities in mind, an analysis, of the use of history in these novels, will be done.

Raja Rao, acknowledged as one of the great Indian novelists, is the author of five novels— *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and His Moves* and two collections of short stories— *The Cow of the Barricades and other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose and other Stories* (1978). Rao’s *Kanthapura*, a much acclaimed novel is primarily the story of a village known as Kanthapura. However, Kanthapura is just not one village in the old State of Mysore; it is India in microcosm for “what happened there is what happened everywhere in India during those terrible years of our fight for freedom” (Narsimhaiah). Rao at once launches a confrontation between the language that is alien and the life that is native. In fact, Rao whose initial writings represented Macaulayan English, brought drastic changes in his style and thus produced literature in an alien language yet native in style. Rao admits that his earlier writings were in Macaulayan English and he thought it was good. But his wife thought otherwise and advised him to give up writing if he had to write that way. It was then that he started writing in Kannada. He wrote a novel in Kannada and then started writing in English again. This way he was able to leave behind his Macaulayan English. He started translating his Kannada texts and began to find the richness of the English Language.
Written in an enchanting style, *Kanthapura* is the story of a small south Indian village caught in the whirlpool of the independence movement, under the influence of Gandhian ideas in the 1930s. Published in 1938, *Kanthapura* captures the psychology and the ideology of the Gandhian movement. By this time India was in the thick of the freedom struggle and Gandhi’s demand for the release of the people imprisoned during civil disobedience resulting in Gandhi-Irwin Pact 1931, followed by Government of India Act, 1935, introducing provincial autonomy in place of diarchy and prior to that in 1929 at Lahore, the resolution of complete independence and the decision to observe 26 January as Purna Swaraj Day, form the background of the novel. Set against this political background, *Kanthapura* gives the reader an insight into the condition in rural India where the masses were oppressed both by caste hierarchy and the political power structures. It was in these conditions that Gandhi mobilized the masses, awakening them to a realization of their own strength and to their latent aspirations for freedom and equality. Gandhi was the first and the only leader of his kind to mobilize a mass movement by establishing a set of ethics, setting the moral tone and demonstrating the values like *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* in his own behaviour. As a post-colonial text, *Kanthapura* focuses on the encounter of the two cultures and shows how while countering the imposing culture the weaker one redefines and reinterprets its tradition while it seeks its identity. Raja Rao deconstructs the myth of the power of the foreign ruler, views resistance as an enabling strategy and examines in detail the meaning and practice of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. This position of resistance can be viewed as the beginning of the process of decolonization in the sense that it questions the cultural impositions along with the political authority.
Though the novel is set against a backdrop of political awareness and struggle, it incorporates a number of characteristics from traditional Indian life and culture. Raja Rao presents a realistic image of life in an Indian village community with its belief in old traditions, customs, rituals, superstitions, caste system; heavy reliance on religion and local deities, manners of speech and address, and with the help of the elderly narrative voice gives an oral flavour to the tale, in the *Puranic* style, with “story within story”. Juneja in *Post Colonial Novel* comments on the use of the *Puranic* style by Indian writers in the following words:

The *Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, in the Indian tradition, are the two *itihasas*. To listen to *itihasa-purana* is considered an act of piety by the Hindus. *Itihasa* in Sanskrit literally translated means, “*ity ed*” — “was thus”. In Hindi the word today means history. This has led some scholars to claim these epics as histories. Traditionally, these “histories” have been re-written and interpreted by a host of writers in many languages of India. These writers have used varied forms to rewrite these “histories”. (17-18)

So, when Raja Rao rewrites a *Sthala Purana* in *Kanthapura*, he employs *Puranic* techniques, that is, the technique of legendary history, of Sanskrit narratology. He not only subverts the form of historical novel, but extends the limits of the individualistic novel form to express the consciousness of a whole village in the collective “we” of the narrative voice of Achakka, the old woman narrator. History for her is not a linear progression of events in a chronological order or retelling of great events, but a poetic awakening of the people who figure in these events and of gods and goddesses, who bless
them in absentia. India’s freedom struggle for her becomes a re-enactment of the Ravana-Sita-Rama myth and also the myth of the Devi. By weaving these epic myths, folk tales and rituals, Raja Rao tries to raise a socio-political theme to epic dimensions. The story is narrated by an old grandmother, who reminisces about the glorious past of her village long after the actual events had taken place. Like an inveterate myth -maker she links the gods and goddesses with historic figures. Mahatma Gandhi is Rama, while the Englishmen or their brown agents are the soldiers of Ravana’s army.

Kanthapura is situated high on the ghats, high up the steep mountains on the Malabar Coast in the province of Kara. The village had twenty-four houses which like all Indian villages, too, is divided according to caste and occupation of the villagers into a Brahmin quarter, a Potters’ quarter, a Weavers’ quarter and a Sudra quarter. The socio-economic condition of the people is evident from the houses they live in. Postmaster Suryanarayan has a double-storied house; Patwari Nanjundia has a veranda with the rooms built to the old house with glass panes to the windows; Kannayya House people had a “high veranda with a house generations old, but as fresh and new as though it had been built yesterday”; Pock marked Sidda has a “real thothi house, with a big veranda and a large roof”; and the Patel has a nine beamed house (9-12). People know their place on the social ladder and move accordingly until the placid routine of the village’s occupants is disturbed by irresistible forces. The people lived a conservative life with orthodox beliefs and superstitions. They said their prayers in Kanthapureswari temple which was famous for social and religious gatherings. Different characters of the novel are introduced to the readers with the status, occupation, temperament, habits and physical features of these characters. There is Postmaster Suryanarayan, Patwari
Nanjundia, Waterfall Venkamma, Snuff Sastri, Temple Lakshamma, Front-House Akamma, Coffee-Planter Ramayya, the temple people, the Fig Tree people, Beadle Timmayya, Pock marked Sidda, Corner-House Moorthy, Old Mota, One-eyed Linga, Jack tree Tippa, Nose scratching Nanjamma, Advocate Ramaswamy — the three pice advocate, Sankara the Ascetic and walking advocate, Rice pounding Rajamma, Husking Rangi, Gold Bangle Somanna, Gaptooth Siddayya and many more. These adjectival appellations, peculiar to the Kannada culture not only individualize the characters but also show the kind of familiarity that exists in an Indian village where everyone knows everyone else and refers to them in a manner that “immediately establishes their identities” (Bhattacharya 249). Though there are a number of characters in the novel, yet there is no central character and by keeping no central character, Raja Rao makes the village itself a character which is revealed through the consciousness of Achakka, who represents the communal consciousness of the village and fuses the disparate experience of individual characters into one common vision. This vision is represented through the character of Moorthy, popularly called Moorthappa, who is in the Indian tradition of the holy vagabond or a saint figure. His way to renunciation is through action. Being young and college bred, he strives hard and has to go a long way before he can attain the equanimity of a Sanyasi. He performs his Karma by fighting against the colonial forces through Gandhian methods of truth and non-violence.

The action of the novel begins when Corner-House Narsamma’s son Moorthy comes across a half-sunken linga hidden in the earth. The innocent villagers decide to consecrate the linga and raise a temple to protect the god. Bhatta, who enjoyed great popularity in the village, performed the consecration ceremony. Then the villagers decide
to celebrate their annual festival like *Sankara-Jayanthi* and the old and learned Ramakrishnayya reads out the *Sankara-Vijaya* day after day. The villagers would also discuss *Vedanta* with him in the afternoons. *Harikathas* are also organized in the village on Parvati’s winning of Siva and on the sojourn of Rama and Sita in the hills. Moorthy also goes from house to house to collect money to celebrate *Ganesha-Jayanthi* and Jayaramachar, the famous *Harikatha* man, was invited to narrate the stories of gods. Jayaramachar describes the story of Siva and Parvati. The novel primarily projects the Freedom Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi, to liberate Indians from the imperialistic hegemony of the British. Therefore, a great importance is lent to *swaraj* which is compared with the three-eyed Siva. Siva is the three-eyed and so too is *Swaraj*: Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim Unity and *Khaddar*. Jayaramachar personifies India as the goddess of wisdom and the very daughter of god Brahma. He pays the richest tributes to Mahatma Gandhi who is considered a superman and compared with the gods Krishna and Rama. Jayaramachar says that it is Mahatma Gandhi who can slay the serpent of foreign rule. People are with him. They follow him as they follow Krishna the Flute Player. He tells the villagers that the Mahatma advises that we should harm no soul, love all, Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God, speak the truth and be not attached to the riches.

The Skeffington Coffee Estate was situated near the village and was owned by the British who were exploiting the poor Indians working as coolies in their employment. The poor illiterate Indians were satisfied with the meager wages that they got as labourers and they never resented against their exploitation. It was only through the efforts of college-going young men like Moorthy that the people began to acquire a little
awakening. They began to realize that their lots could be better if they acquired political freedom. Moorthy, therefore, becomes the torch bearer among the inhabitants of Kanthapura. After a few days, policeman Bade Khan, is sent by the British Government to live in Kanthapura to watch the political activities of the villagers. Moorthy enlightens the villagers about the teachings and aims of the Mahatma. Most of the villagers such as Dore Shastri’s son Puttu, Postmaster Suryanarayan’s sons Chandra and Rama, Pandit Venkatesha and Swami’s sons Srinivas and Kittu and Seenu all throw away their foreign clothes and become the followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Jayaramachar is taken away by the policeman but his expulsion causes uproar in the village and the Gandhian movement gains strength and momentum. Rangamma’s house turns into something of a Congress House. Books on Gandhian thought and spinning wheels are piled there and Moorthy inspires the village women to spin cotton during their free hours in the afternoon. He explains to them that the British buy yarn with ‘our money’ and this money goes across the ocean. He tells them that they should utilize the cotton produced in their country.

Moorthy visits the houses of the Pariahs and distributes spinning wheel and a seer of cotton to spin the yarn to each one of them. Bhatta was the only one who did not associate himself with Gandhian activities. Since he was greedy and money-minded, he saw no monetary benefit in political or social activities launched by Moorthy. He lent money to poor villagers at exorbitant rate of interest and the illiterate villagers mortgaged their land to him. He had become the richest man of the village and owned much land in and around Kanthapura. He was narrow-minded and orthodox. He condemned Pariah’s admission in colleges for studying Sanskrit and throwing open temples to them. He supported the Swami who ruled the innocent and credulous villagers and opposed
Mahatma Gandhi for trying to remove untouchability. On the recommendation of the Swami, Moorthy was excommunicated from his Brahmin community for freely associating with the Pariahs. Moorthy’s mother is much worried and upset on the excommunication of her son but Moorthy is undeterred by all this and continues mixing up with Pariahs and works for their social upliftment. One day Moorthy has a vision of God-beaming Mahatma Gandhi. He felt that the very skin of the Mahatma seemed to send out a “mellowed force and love.” In his vision Moorthy sees a vast sea of humanity which had gathered to listen to the great man and there were shouts all around “Gandhi Mahatma ki Jai! Jai Mahatma”. Then Moorthy listened to the Mahatma saying in perfect silence. “There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all” (40). Moorthy decides to serve the Mahatma as his disciple. Moorthy’s mother is unable to bear the pain of his excommunication and soon she dies of the shock.

Meanwhile, at Skeffington Coffee Estate, the English officers ill-treat the laborers and subject them to all kinds of humiliation and physical torture. They paid meager wages to the workers — a two-anna bit for each woman and a four anna bit for each man. They sometimes used guns and pistols to control the rebels and traitors. Even if an officer killed an innocent coolie, he was acquitted by the Red Man’s court. The estate was also infested with snakes and its climate caused fever. Many workers died of snake-bite and some of them died of bad climate. The young officers would molest the Indian women. Moorthy enkindled awakening among the people. He even confronted policeman Bade Khan and his motivation lends a wave of awareness and boldness among the Kanthapurians:
“Why should not Pariah Ranchamma and Sampanna learn to read and write? They shall.

What is a policeman before a Gandhi’s man? Does a boor stand before a lion or a jackal before an elephant?” (62)

At this point Raja Rao introduces spiritualism in the novel and mixes the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi with Moorthy’s spiritual enlightenment. Under the guidance of Moorthy, the inhabitants of Kanthapura established the Congress Panchayat Committee. Twenty -three persons enlisted themselves as members and five rupees and twelve annas were sent to the Provincial Congress Committee as membership fee. Moorthy being the true disciple of Gandhi was elected President of the Congress Panchayat Committee of Kanthapura to work with trustworthy members like Range Gowda, Rangamma, Rachanna and Seenu. The news pertaining to the establishment of the Congress Committee at Kanthapura along with a photograph of Moorthy was published in the newspaper. The innocent villagers hailed this news with a spirit of enthusiasm and cheerfulness. They felt that they were recognized by the Mahatma himself. Most of the members pledged their loyalty towards Moorthy and resolved to work for him. When Bhatta heard of the Congress Committee, he said to himself, “Now this is bad business ” (83). He was an orthodox Brahmin and he disliked the Gandhian principle of mixing with the Pariahs. After a lot of reflection, Bhatta found that he was not alone to oppose the Congress. Rangappa, the School master, Devarayya and the Swami, they all were also against the pariah business. Bhatta thought of Venkamma and an auspicious idea struck him: “I shall find a bridegroom for her daughter, and she will be always with us, and what with her tongue and her tail, she will set fire where we want ”
He felt that Advocate Seenappa who had just lost his wife would be suitable for Venkamma’s daughter. Seenappa was thirty-four and had three children but looked younger than his age. Venkamma would be glad to have an advocate as her son-in-law. The villagers assembled and rejoiced on the prospect of the imminent wedding of Venkamma’s daughter. Suryanarayan’s wife Akkamma, Ratna and Satamma all sang songs and admired Bhatta for his wisdom and far-sightedness. Moorthy was not invited and he felt neglected. As he was excommunicated from the community, he kept wandering by the riverside. “When dusk fell and evening came, he stole back home, hurried over the meal that Rangamma served, spread his bedding and laid himself down, thinking, how is one an outcaste?”

In this section of the novel, Raja Rao describes the religious beliefs of the inhabitants of Kanthapura. Kartik came “with glow of lights and the unpressed footsteps of the wandering gods” (87). The people believed that the gods walked by the lighted streets, “blue gods and quiet gods and bright-eyed gods” (87). For them Kartik is a month of gods and as the gods pass by the Potters’ Street and Weavers’ Street, lights are lit to see them pass by. The people were jubilant to welcome the gods. But their cheerfulness was marred by the interference of police which had raided the house of Moorthy. There was a lot of noise in Rangamma’s house where Moorthy lived. Moorthy’s room was thoroughly searched. The policeman was standing beside Moorthy with a notebook in his hand. In the middle of the room, there was a heap of books and charkhas and cotton and folded cloth. The trunks were laid open and boxes were slit through; the villagers saw from a distance that Moorthy was nodding and smiling. The police inspector ordered Bade Khan to arrest Moorthy. This command was greatly resented by the people. There
came forward Range Gowda and Mad da followed by pariah Rachanna, Madanna, and Lingayya. They all cried and tried to intervene. The Inspector got so furious that he waved his lathi. Rachanna came forward and said, “Hey, beat me if you have the courage” (89). A word spread in the whole village that the policemen were taking away their master Moorthy. Men and women came from all the streets and surrounded the police Inspector and shouted, “Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai.” In the quarrel that ensues between the protesting villagers and the policemen, tempers flare up and the policemen beat the women and insult them. Range Gowda is unable to bear the humiliation of the women and gives a bang on the head of a policeman. Now the policemen beat the whole of crowd and arrest seventeen men of Kanthapura.

After Moorthy’s arrest, enthusiasm of the people did not decline and Sankar, the secretary of the Karwar Congress Committee, decided to convene a meeting to muster the strength and support of the people. In this meeting, there were speeches about the significance of charkha, ahimsa, Hindu-Muslim unity and upliftment of the untouchables. The people decide d to boycott the fattened Brahmins like the Swami who were paid by the Government. They resolve d to follow the saint Mahatma Gandhi who had given up land, lust, honours and comfort, and dedicated his life to the country. Through newspapers the people learnt that Moorthy was implicated in a false case and sentenced to six-month imprisonment. They pray to the goddess Kenchamma for early release of Moorthy and the abolition of the British Government. Finally, when Moorthy is released, he addresses the inhabitants of Kanthapura and tells them that Mahatma Gandhi had undertaken a pilgrimage with eighty-two of his followers to the Dandi Beach to manufacture salt. As Mah atma started the Dandi March, thirty thousand men, women
and children gathered at roadside to have the supreme vision of the Mahatma. The people of Kanthapura were hopeful that the Britishers would now grant them freedom and there would be no policemen in Kanthapura. But most of the inhabitants of Kanthapura were very much excited over the pilgrimage of Mahatma Gandhi. They gathered on the river side and shouted, “Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai!”

Next day, the news flashed in the newspapers that Mahatma had taken a handful of salt after his ablutions, and he had brought it home and then everybody went to the sea to prepare salt. Cartloads of salt began to be brought back and distributed from house to house. Every day thousands of men would go to the sea to make salt and they were beaten back and put into prison. The people of Kanthapura were excited to march to the sea like Mahatma. They were only waiting for orders from the Karwar Congress. The village women thought that the Mahatma was like, “the Sahayadri Mountain, blue, high, wide and the rock of the evening that catches the light of the setting sun” (127) and that Moorthy was the small mountain. They were awaiting the call of the Sahayadri Mountain. The call of the Mahatma never came. The Karwar Congress Committee sent a messenger to convey that the Mahatma was arrested on the charge of manufacturing salt. And so, “Don’t-Touch-the-Government Campaign” was to be started in letter and spirit. The inhabitants of Kanthapura under the guidance of Moorthy decide that they would not pay the taxes even if the Government attached their lands. They also resolve to picket the toddy booths to deprive the Government of its income. But Moorthy advised the people not to be violent and harsh with the Government officials who came to collect taxes, from them. They also decide to form a parallel government in place of the British government to run the administration. Next day, one hundred and thirty-nine people of Kanthapura
assembled and marched out to Boranna’s Toddy Groove under the leadership of Moorthy. But the policemen attacked the processionists with lathis, arrested them and took them away in lorries in different directions and left them at odd places in the forest so that they faced hardships in reaching back home. Men were separated from women. The women were left in the middle of the jungle. They, however, displayed marvelous courage under the patronage of Rangamma. While returning home, the processionists were greatly admired by the people of nearby villages for their courage and patriotism.

Now the British Government decided to collect revenues from the farmers. The farmers were served notices which they refused to pay despite beatings and humiliations by the police. The satyagrahis barricaded all the roads, lanes, paths and cattle-tracks to prevent the entry of police into Kanthapura. The next morning police entered the village and beat women and children mercilessly. Almost all men are arrested; women are chased everywhere and molested. The Government officials arrive and attach the villagers’ fields for their failure to pay the revenues. The Non-Cooperation Movement had acquired strength and momentum in whole of India. In Karwar too, banks and courts were closed. Only khadi was sold. There were regular processions, picketing and prabhat pherries by Congress workers. Although millions were put behind bars yet they pledged allegiance towards the Mahatma. Meanwhile, in Kanthapura, men and women were making preparations to participate in the field of Satyagraha in the name of Satyanarayan Puja. A large procession led by Ratna marched through the streets shouting “Satyanarayan Maharaj ki Jai!” and in their excitement they shout “Vande Matram” and “Inquilab Zindabad”. The police start showering lathis on the unarmed Satyagrahis. Yet the Satyagrahis march forward. The Red Man’s soldiers fire and several innocent men
are killed. Shot after shots ring out and man after man fell down. Thus, the struggle ended with the miserable plight of the Kanthapurians.

Only thirty satyagrahis were left alive. They marched towards Maddus and there they were warmly welcomed and hailed as the great freedom fighters of India’s struggle for independence. These freedom fighters were now settled in Kashipura to cherish the memories of their sublime sacrifices in the freedom struggle. Later, all the arrested satyagrahis were released including Moorthy. Ratna soon leaves for Bombay after she receives a letter from Moorthy. The novel ends with the news that Mahatma Gandhi was planning to go to the Red Man’s country for negotiations about Swaraj and the novel ends on an analogy:

They say the Mahatma will go to the Red Man’s country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy. And Ram will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed…. (183)

Kanthapura, as a novel, is an expression of the Indian sensibility. It is at once local, national and universal in its appeal but the aspect of Indian consciousness reigns supreme. Language becomes a medium for expressing the complexity and the uniqueness of Indian lifestyle. Raja Rao, in a subtle and oblique way, presents the changing rural and national scene of India, East-West encounter, mythical past along with a number of characteristics from traditional Indian life and culture. Religious myths form an integral part of life and psyche of Indians and Rao not only recognizes this aspect but also weaves it convincingly into the narrative and structure of the novel. The Harikathas, woven by
Rao into the matrix of his story, are undoubtedly an essential aspect of Indian cultural experience. Thus Raja Rao’s use of language and his style are both unique and original and he uses them creatively to convey the Indian sensibility and the Indian intellectual make up and succeeds in doing so. M.K. Naik is quite apt in saying that “in Raja Rao’s hands the language has shaken off all trace of foreign acquisition and begun, to assert its inalienable rights as an independent idiom” and calls “Kanthapura a fine example of the genuine Indo-Anglian novel with its sensibility, its form and style — all rooted firmly in the soil and drawing sustenance from it” (qtd in Bhattacharya 279).

*The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) clearly and decisively establishes Kamala Markandaya’s reputation as a leading novelist in English today. The novel is not only her best imaginative effort to project the development of national consciousness but also her most ambitious and brilliant work of art. It reveals at once her extraordinary sense of conscious realism and historicity, unmatched in Indo-English fiction, and only rarely evident in contemporary British fiction. Although Mulk Raj Anand and Manohar Malgonkar have attempted to portray the lives of princes in their novels — *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) and *The Princes* (1963) respectively — they seem somewhat incomplete in the artistic reconstruction of the decline and fall of the institution of monarchy which dates back to the time of unrecorded history of ancient India. Markandaya’s novel, in contrast, creates a sense of history in the reader’s mind by depicting the events that rocked the State of Devapur for three generations. She, therefore, achieves a sense of historical continuity — a quality of tradition — while recording the tribulations of fortune that befell Devapur, a representative princely State. She describes the details with meticulous care and delineates the characters with a
sympathetic attitude. Markandaya shows exemplary respect for the recorded facts of history but uses them with a stunning irony and biting economy of phrase in dramatizing the saga of princely patriotism and the growth of individual consciousness. Since the structure of the novel is dramatic, it is divided into three parts each introduced by an epigraph. “The whole story is fixed in a framework of history by a prologue that quotes from Lord Randolph Churchill, and an epilogue that refers to the accession of the princely states to the Indian union after independence ” (Joseph 88) . The inventive imagination of Markandaya confers upon the central drama of the usual pomp and pageantry of an imperialistic regime, the unique value of a symbol whose explosive educational potential is certainly not lost on the precocious sensibility of Rabi, the crown prince of Devapur. Also integrated into the design of the novel is the growth of Rabi’s individual consciousness in terms of cultural awareness — a desideratum in his English education.

*The Golden Honeycomb* divided into three parts sums up the trials and tribulations of our country under foreign rule through a succession of moving events, pitiable strikes, and round-the-clock agitations and lockouts. It is undoubtedly Kamala Markandya’s memorable *fait accompli* in which she turns her all-absorbing mind to the momentous historical events shaping and affecting India’s fate during the British regime. This historical novel, precisely speaking, follows a certain chronology in recording the dates and years of these events, and reflects the spirit of the age faithfully. A.V. Krishna Rao believes:
The variety and complexity of the achieved content of her novels represent a major trend in the history of the Indo-English novel. In her novels, Markandaya not only displays a flair for virtuosity which orders and patterns her feelings and ideas resulting in a truly enjoyable work of art but also projects the image of national consciousness on many levels of aesthetic awareness. (Rao 77)

The period covered in the novel stretches from the end of the nineteenth century, to the nineteen-twenties. Bawajiraj III is born in 1870, King Edward’s Coronation Durbar was held in 1903, the Maharaja fights in the Great War, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 is mentioned, the Salt Tax, the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and the spread of the Gandhian movement also finds a place in the historical setup of the novel. The tragedy of Bawaji Rao I, the people’s king condemned to die in solitary confinement for his spirit of independence, paves the way for the crowning of Bawaji Rao II, a distant relative bearing the same name — Bawajiraj. He is brought to the palace with his wife Manjula and crowned the king. The seeds of royal rebellion are sown by his spirited queen, Manjula, when she insists on suckling her baby (born 1870) herself, repugnant to the royal customs. She perceives the palace practice of restraining the royal mother from nursing her own child as an unwarranted denial of a basic human freedom. Bawaji Rao II, nothing if not a loyalist to the British Emperor, persuades his queen to accept not only his love but also his value system. The queen, nonetheless, nurses a grievance and helplessly watches the Prince (the future Bawaji Rao III) grow into a greater loyalist. In due course Bawajiraj III is married to Shanta Devi, the daughter of a neighbouring princely state, and has four daughters from her. But soon Prince Bawaji Rao falls in love with a commoner — Mohini — who, having taken her cue from the Queen Mother, refuses to become the
queen to Bawaji Rao III but feels content merely to be his concubine, a status that guarantees her the freedom to bring up their son Rabindranath (born 1895) as she desires. Since Rabi is the illegitimate son of the king, he cannot succeed to the throne unless the Viceroy gives his official consent.

Bawajiraj III has received European education through English tutors, and has attended the Chief’s College, the Military Academy, and the special coaching in civil administration under an experienced I.C.S. officer. He is, therefore, well-suited to carry on British interests even at the cost of his own people and their resources. He acts as an intermediary between the rulers and the ruled. He sometimes feels the progressively growing levies and restrictions on his people, but is helpless to offer them any relief. In spite of these weaknesses, Bawajiraj has subtle positive streaks in his character. He is a fond lover of his family and his subjects. There are individuals for whom he can sacrifice all, such as Mohini and Rabi. He never says a word against his mother. He counts on the devotion of his people to him. He knows that the Dewan is a man with an unquestionable record of sincerity to the State and of honest dealings with one and all. Mohini is one person before whom the Maharajah is helpless. In any argument with him, she often emerges triumphant. Though she loves him deeply, she has the guts to face him and convince him of the validity of her point. She does not like his unflinching loyalty towards the foreign rulers. She tells him that the Britishers are here for their financial and territorial gains, and that they are least interested in the uplift of the Indian populace. Her strong views are also shared by her son, Rabi, the Pandit and the Dewan. The powerful, irrepressible Dowager Maharani, Manjula, is also on her side. She enlightens her grandson at times and fuses into him anti-British feelings. Similarly, the Pandit and the
Dewan are deeply attached to Rabi. The Pandit injects nationalistic feelings and thoughts into the boy and prepares him for the fight ahead. The Dewan, Tirumal Rao, is a shrewd person entirely devoted to his Maharajah and to the people of his State. He is one who can be favourably compared to the Englishmen in talent and manipulations. So was his father, Narsimha Rao, and so were his sharp ancestors. This illustrious race of Brahmins is conscious of its intellectual superiority over others in the given surroundings.

Rabi born as Rabindranath in the Palace of Bawaji Rao III to Mohini, his concubine, grows before the readers’ eyes. He gets his early education and training by Panditji, and develops ideas and tendencies prejudicial to the British and at times to the Maharajah too. Unlike his father, Rabi is taught by an Indian tutor on the insistence of his mother. He does not attend the Chief’s College or the Military Academy. But he learns a lot through his tutor, mother and grand mother, about the golden past of his land and about the heroic deeds of his ancestors. He has the opportunities to mingle with the commoners and their children in the palace grounds as well as in the open countryside, one of them being the sweeper’s daughter, Janaki and another, Das, a servant’s son.

Naturally, Rabi develops as a contrast to his father. While his father is identified with Salt because he does not protest against Salt Taxation, Rabi is identified with Water, as he undertakes to build a dam for his people. He does not like the rotten British Raj, which relentlessly pursues the ‘divide and rule’ policy. He is devoted to the Dewan, but is opposed to the Agent. He visits the Delhi Durbar along with his father and other members of his family, but he is not worried about the official or princely duties there, as his father is. Rabi is in for a rude shock when he sees his adored father, hitherto a powerful sun in his eyes, bow to the Viceroy, and back away like a lackey. After the Grand Durbar, Rabi
develops a fondness for Sophie, the daughter of the Resident, Sir Arthur Copeland. As Rabi grows up he witnesses the lopsidedness of the privileges enjoyed by the palace and Residency on the one hand, while on the other, the common people suffer under the hardships of famine and drought. Sir Arthur Copeland breaks the news of the Viceroy’s decision of accepting Rabi as the heir apparent of Bawajiraj III. Bawajiraj is delighted at the news but Rabi is not particularly overwhelmed by the news. He is mature now and realizes that the whole concept of princely states and their British-approved rulers is little more than “a fragile golden honeycomb”.

They soon leave for Shimla for a sojourn and from here they decide to proceed to Bombay to receive the delivery of a fleet of Rolls-Royce cars which were ordered earlier. But Bombay is troubled these days due to strikes of mill-workers and dockers. The royal family has no experience of facing such a tense situation, and the Maharajah and Rabi get injured seriously in two separate incidents. Rabi gets wounded when he joins a group of striking labourers on Chowpatty Beach and the procession is lathi-charged by the police. While the Maharajah recovers at the Imperial Hotel, Rabi is looked after by a mill-worker Jaya in her hut, where he has his first experience with a woman. She not only nurses him back to health but also teaches him about love. Rabi also has a first hand experience of the dreary life led by the poor.

The royal family then returns to Devapur, where, too, the national awakening has made its inroads. On his return Rabi’s intentions are firm, he is determined to improve the lot of the people of his state. In contrast to Rabi, the Maharajah is so loyal to the Empire that he raises a force and leads it to the Western Front during the World War I.
He shows his mettle there and wins awards for his gallantry. He takes the opportunity to get Sir Arthur Copeland reinstated as the Resident of his State in place of the stubborn and offensive Mr Buckridge. Markandaya weaves into the main plot two other sub-plots involving the other two institutions, namely, the story of the Agents and Residents Sir Arthur Copeland as well as Mr Buckridge. Meanwhile, the national awakening grows very sharp and tense in the state of Devapur too. The Indian masses are in no mood to cooperate with the foreigners, who levy heavy, new taxes on them day by day and render their lives miserable. In Devapur, too, things seem to be going against the Maharajah who does not resist these taxes and harassments; and the Resident, who is the representative-head of the Empire. Rabi is on the side of the masses. He derives strong support from Usha, the youngest daughter of the Dewan. Usha once stages a subversive play showing the rulers as monsters to the horror and distaste of the Resident (Mr Buckridge) and the Maharajah. But Rabi and the Dewan like it immensely. The people become totally restless. The Maharajah, the Resident, and the Dewan realize the change of time. Mohini, Rabi and Usha — the symbols of Independence — emerge triumphant at long last, as India attains Independence on August 15, 1947. Bawaji Rao III, blissfully ignorant about and shamefully insensitive develops in the end an awareness of his responsibility for the people of the land. His identity lies in awareness and acceptance of his responsibility for his people at the end of the novel, which is indeed but a splendid beginning of the people’s struggle for freedom in the State of Devapur. Manjula and Mohini play pivotal roles in the affirmation of the continuity of the essential cultural values amid the myriad political changes in modern India. They represent the best of India’s traditional womanhood in guiding and shaping the destiny of Bawaji Rao III and Rabindranath who,
in their turn, provide peace and progress to the people of their state. The Dewan is, in the whole process of running the state, a vital link between the King and the people. As a matter of historical fact, it is the Dewan that has more often than not played a key role in the development — or the lack of it — in the princely States of the British Raj. Tirumal Rao can therefore feel the pulse of people more easily than Bawajiraj III and advises the King in anticipation of the coming events. Sir Arthur Copeland, the British resident, is probably the nearest approximation to Forster’s Fielding in *A Passage to India* (1924) in his mental make-up but not in his political capacity. In sharp contrast to Buckridge, Sir Arthur Copeland never precipitates matters even under the gravest provocation, as evident in his unequivocal advice to the Maharajah when confronted by a determined band of Stayagrahis demanding tax concessions. Usha, the Dewan’s daughter, and Rabindranath, the heir-apparent, make a perfectly compatible pair as comrades in their peaceful march towards the dawn of freedom. They not only symbolize the radical aspirations and idealism of an awakened people but also represent the royal commitment to the welfare of the people. They are at once the custodians of culture and makers of history in modern India. They are not only the heralds of changing tradition but also the agents of change itself. Encouraged by Rabi’s ambition to serve, the Dewan dreams of a new dawn when his countrymen will have an education “rooted in the country’s history, geography” and not the type the British are handing out to them, aimed at producing “clerks and petty officials”. He imagines a time when no Englishman would “ever look down upon, nor dare to mullet,” Indians.

*The Golden Honeycomb*, Markandaya’s *magnum opus* to date, is a matchless metaphor in Indo-English fiction. Thoroughly researched in respect of the facts of history
and tightly packed with details, the novel is technically perfect. It opens with the farcical scene of a futile British bid to make a victualling bania as the Maharajah of the State of Devapur, contrary to the traditional practice of choosing the King from the princely caste. The familiar design that marks out a typical Markandaya novel is revealed in this novel too, as when the action is ironically circled off in the end, with Mohini’s final words to Bawaji Rao III:

For Once in your life you’re behaving like a father to your people. You’re actually letting them keep a fraction of what’s theirs, instead of grabbing the whole lot for yourself and your bania friends. You ought to be pleased for their sake. (465)

In fact, everyone is pleased with the outcome, though each has his own reason: the resident for avoiding a really awkward confrontation with a mass of non-violent people led by the prince himself; the Dewan for the vindication of his earlier stand against unfair taxes; Rabi and Usha for being able to stand by a suffering people and assert their spirit of independence; Mohini out of a sense of self-fulfillment; the Maharajah for averting needless massacre of his own people; and finally the people themselves for being able to win the sympathy of their Maharajah. Although the language of Markandaya’s fiction merits a special study in itself, it needs to be said here that in this novel Markandaya’s language has a certain late Victorian flavour which none the less fits in admirably because the period of narration spreads over the Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian periods of modern Indo-British history. The detailed description of the Durbar
of 1903 in New Delhi, for example, is elaborate and evocative of the imperial
gorgeousness and splendour. It is Rabi’s point of view:

But now they are standing, while their Excellencies advance, or rather are borne
in state, in the living palanquin of their attendant suites, to the central dais
surmounted by the resplendent domed pavilion.

Slowly and with infinite precision the glittering procession progresses,
along the immaculate aisle, up the crimson-carpeted steps to where, on a gold
embossed carpet, under hangings of Roman splendour, the silver Thrones
await….

There is a silence. It wakes everyone up….

Then suddenly a lot begins to happen. There is fanfare from the trumpeters. The
Guard of Honour presents arms. The Royal Standard is hoisted and flutters at the
top of the flagstaff high above the arena. The Band plays ‘God save the King’ and
the salute is fired. It is an Imperial Salute: 101 guns…. (158-59)

Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb* is a representation of the bourgeois class,
the princes of India, who alienated themselves from the common man of the country by
their manner of thought and style of life. Even the protagonist of the novel, Rabi, is
disillusioned by the incongruities involved in the concept of the princely states and the
role of the rulers. This alienation and disillusionment is the direct result of the search for
identity. Critics believe that the search for identity is a recurrent theme in Indian Writing
in English as the writer often feels alienated from his society and suffers from “cultural
schizophrenia” for he is himself in search of an identity. S.C. Harrex relates this search specifically to Markandaya. According to him, her novels deal with “different predicaments of identity…each…affected by the East-West clash of codes that is part of modern India” (qtd in Joseph 11-12). According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, writers who have been abroad, are “made aware of their Indianess as well as of the difference in the two systems of values: one rather acquired, the other inherited and taken for granted” (67). Markandaya though places her characters in a typical princely state of India yet she fails to bring familiarity to the location. Devapur is hardly recognizable as Narayan’s Malgudi or Raja Rao’s Kanthapura. Similarly the individuality that the characters can assume through local speech and phrases or mannerisms is absent in her novel. The dialogue fails to impress us as being natural and consistent as in the case of servant girl, Janaki and the Bombay mill-hand, Jaya. Markandaya, in fact, is able to absorb to the full “the idiom of the English among whom she lives, even to the extent of using colloquialisms unfamiliar in India. She is not in touch with the colloquialisms that are ever developing in the English language in our own country” (Joseph 209). Her concerns, though, are genuine in highlighting the plight of Indians under the British rule and to some extent she tries hard through her works to undo the harm caused by colonialism. Her confident use of the language of the masters to convey Indian themes and situations is another feather in the cap. In the light of this discussion, it may be said that Markandaya’s literary sensibility projects itself in this novel as an acute, if ambivalent, perception of the different and distinct forms of national consciousness. Her contribution to Indo-English fiction lies in her capacity to explore the vital, formative areas of individual consciousness that project the images of cultural change. She may not be one
with the day-to-day lifestyle of the common Indians, particularly in this novel; still she is aware of an all-encompassing national consciousness. This consciousness has always prevailed in her other novels but *The Golden Honeycomb* does very little to justify her claim of Indianness.
Works cited:


