Chapter Three

Feminine Response

O woman! in ordinary cases so mere a mortal, how in the great and rare events of life dost thou swell into an angel.

Bulwer.

Women are different from men in their physical and mental make up. A woman's world is a unique entity. She may be fair or dark, rich or poor, Indian or European, urban or rural, traditional or modern. In spite of these differences she has her own response to the world around her when she is exploited. Feminine response is actually the woman's reaction to the world around her, her point of view, the standards and values by which she lives, the goals that she achieves in life and the example that she sets for others. Among the women writers, Kamala Markandaya, has given full orientation to this feminine response in her novels.

Women play a predominant role in all the novels of Kamala Markandaya. She makes woman the narrator of the story and hence the story is presented from a woman's point of view.
Kamala Markandaya's presentation of feminine response is directed towards an objective account of women's emotions, confrontation with the male, relationship with the family and her place in society. It is interesting to study the reaction and response of women to the exploitation syndrome.

The two categories of women characters respond differently to exploitation. The first group of women represents Indian ideals of womanhood. Rukmani and Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Premala in *Some Inner Fury*, Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*, Nalini in *A Handful of Rice*, Vasantha in *The Nowhere Man*, Saroja and Aunt Alamelu in *Two Virgins* and Maharani Manjula in *The Golden Honeycomb* belong to this group. Rukmani, Ira and Nalini form a trio and they are exploited by society. The victims of East-West confrontation are Premala, Sarojini and Vasantha. Maharani Manjula and Aunt Alamelu are elderly women who are suppressed by their westernised family members and hence they try to inculcate their ideals of Indianness in the younger generation. Saroja is unique as an adolescent and she stands midway between the ancient and modern.

The next group of women is characterised by progressive womanhood which is the result of the influence of the West. It is
represented by characters like Mira and Roshan in Some Inner Fury, Anasuya in Possession, Lalitha in Two Virgins and Mohini and Usha in The Golden Honeycomb. These women have mixed sensibility resulting from their intimate understanding of both Oriental and Occidental values of life. They refuse to be tied down by conventional bonds and emerge as the 'New Liberated Women.'

All these women creations of Kamala Markandaya are not feminine stereotypes, they have their own identity and uniqueness. Her images of women caught between tradition and modernity, man and machine, East and West seem to arouse the feminine consciousness. This new awakening makes them refuse to surrender to the man made moral codes. Such daring insistence on freedom as their birthright gives them self-fulfilment in their endeavours.

Rukmani in Nectar In A Sieve is a typical representative of an Indian woman, an embodiment of fortitude and perseverance. At the time of exploitation, her response is threefold - as a devoted wife, as a sacrificing mother and as a hard working country woman. Devotion and obedience, two virtues of women grace her. But her response to life in spite of trials and tribulations makes one wonder at her Herculean strength of mind and Promethean
grandeur. That is why Joseph comments, “the traditional Indian attitude to suffering is summed up in Rukmani” (17).

She received the first shock of her life when she got married to Nathan, a tenant farmer who is a “poor match” to her family status. Social disparity is her victimising factor. She is the daughter of a Headman of the village who is out of power and has no means to pay a lavish dowry for his child. When others ridicule her, she utters passively:

It was my husband . . . whom I will call here Nathan, for that was his name, although in all the years of our marriage I never called him that, for it is not meet for a woman to address her husband except as “husband.” (NS 9-10)

Her feeling illustrates her enduring spirit even as a child-wife. As she is devoid of beauty and dowry, she is forced to marry a tenant farmer who is “poor in everything but love and care for his wife” (NS 8). She had lived in a comfortable home with her parents. Her husband’s mud-thatched house makes her spirit droop at first glance but she feels a sense of pride when she learns that it was Nathan who made every bit of it for her, with his own hands.
She is a symbol of wifely fidelity and always cares for the welfare of her husband.

She is admirable as a mother of six children. In order to bring them up she has to wage wars against man's exploitation. Harvests fail; food is scarce. Ira is of marriageable age and a host of other domestic problems have to be tackled. Even during natural calamities like flood and drought, the Zamindar's agent Sivaji is at their door for the land revenue. Though buffeted both by nature and man, Rukmani's courageous spirit is not impaired. This may be because of her elementary education which enables her to analyse the pros and cons of a situation. The "most prominent feature is her serenity and sense of balance in direst situations" (C.T. Indra, "True Voice of Endurance" 66). Rukmani can be compared with O-lan, a noble, sacrificing and courageous woman in Pearl S. Buck's The Good Earth. The author describes O-lan, "When night came on she entered, silent and earth-stained and dark with weariness" (190). Both Rukmani and O-lan are good wives and great mothers whose ambition is only the welfare of their children. Spiritually they are absorbers of joy, happiness, hardship, suffering, and poverty.

Industrialization upsets the agrarian economy of the
villagers and has an immense impact on the lives of the villagers. It is interesting to note that the Victorian writers were opposed to industrialization in England also. William Morris condemned the advent of industry which destroyed the harmony of the countryside, and Ruskin yearns for a rural society. Kamala Markandaya too, to a great extent shares this aversion to industrialization because it is the exploiting agent and projects her view through Rukmani. The tannery contributes to the disintegration of her family. She recollects:

My sons had left because it frowned on them; one of them had been destroyed by its ruthlessness. And there were others its touch had scathed. Janaki and her family, the hapless chakkli Kannan, Kunthi even . . . . (NS 136)

Misfortunes never come single but in battalions in the life of Rukmani. She says, "In our lives there is no margin for misfortune" (NS 136). Ira, being unproductive, is deserted by her husband. She blames fate for that. Kuti, her youngest son dies of starvation. The final blow comes in the form of a command to quit the land in which they sweated for thirty years. Though she resigns herself to her lot, in one instance she does strike a
It is true, one gets used to anything. I had got used to the noise and smell of the tannery; they no longer affected me. I had seen the slow, calm beauty of our village wilt in the blast from town, and I grieved no more; so now I accepted the future and Ira's lot in it, and thrust it from me; only sometimes when I was weak, or in sleep while my will lay dormant, I found myself rebellious, protesting, rejecting, and no longer calm.

(NS 66)

Though a passive woman and loyal wife, Rukmani takes a progressive and liberal approach when she has gynic problem. A woman without a male issue is condemned and ridiculed by the indifferent society in which she lives. She does not want herself to be substituted by any other woman who could produce a male child. In her desperation she takes a decisive step to consult Dr. Kenny. But she does not disclose this medical treatment to her husband lest he should feel hurt. As Indra points out, "it is not fear or deceitfulness but a calm appraisal of human nature touched by genuine conjugal love" (67).
There are instances where her assertiveness come into the fore. She is a good manager at home and labours hard in the field and shares Nathan's field work as is typical of a woman of her class. In their exodus to the city, Nathan lags behind. It is Rukmani who boldly goes out in the front line to have her share of food. She steps out into the unknown streets of the city, hawking her services as a reader and writer of letters. She faces the death of Nathan courageously. Though a primitive village woman, she refuses to be beaten down. A series of misfortunes succeed only in bending her body, but not her spirit.

Rukmani is a victim of social injustice but she rises far above the situations. She becomes a slave of passion when she comes to know of Nathan's illicit relationship with Kunthi. Rukmani responds in horror, "Disbelief first; disillusionment, anger, reproach, pain" (NS 90). It is this trait of jealousy for Kunthi that humanises her, "but [it] does not debase her essential goodness nor does it put the family in a painful irreconcilable situation" (Indra 67).

As Rukmani is psychologically upset, she mistakes Ira for Kunthi and beats her black and blue. This episode is an indirect attack on Ira by her mother for her moral lapse. But she shelters
her albino grandson in spite of public humiliation. As Prasad observes:

She is not a weakling; she can endure with poise as she can suffer intensely. She is different from Kali and Janaki, the symbols of the commonplace who could reconcile and throw their past with both their hands. She stands clutching in her two hands the memory of the past, counting it as a treasure. ("Fictional Epic" 100)

Although she resigns herself to the will of gods, "she is clearly an autonomous person with a strong sense of her own identity" (Joanna Kirkpatrick, "Women in Indian-English Literature" 125), as a wife, mother and village woman. Rukmani is the mother of sorrows and her life is full of shocks. Her heart is tempered in the flames of suffering and sacrifice and hence she will not accept defeat. She remains a fiercely independent and heroic woman. Prasad aptly remarks, "she is a heroic figure reminiscent of Hardy’s Henchard who claimed that his sufferings were not greater than he could endure or the oldman of Hemingway" ("Quintessence" 161). What distinguishes Rukmani from various other women characters is her invincible optimism and the
inflexibility of her purpose in the pursuit of the needs of life in the face of worst odds. Moreover Rukmani exalts human nature to a new height and shows her indomitable spirit. Even when she is exploited by man and machine she is trying to draw nectar in a sieve.

Like her mother Ira too is a symbol of suffering and endurance. Like most fathers in India, Nathan expects a son as his first born. Contrary to his expectation when a daughter is born she receives scant attention from her father. He needs a son “to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a pulling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind” (NS 20). In the Indian context, a daughter is not a welcome addition in a family even today. Ira is a pretty fair child with dimples and gleaming hair. Even Rukmani does not know from where she has got her looks. She contemplates:

I myself did not know how I could have produced so beautiful a child, and I was proud of her and glad, even when people pretended to disbelieve that I could be her mother. “Here is a marvel indeed,” they would say, and make comparisons with ordinary parents who sometimes bore a child of matchless brilliance;
or with a devout couple who had brought forth a wretch. I preferred to think the plain have their rewards, and this was mine. (NS 20).

Though she looks very different from her mother, she is firm in her stand like her mother. She is young but she has inherited the fortitude of Rukmani. As the eldest and the only daughter in the family, she steps into the shoes of a mother to look after her younger brothers. She is always lending a helping hand to her mother in household and field work. Kali warns Rukmani about the fast growth of Ira and when the mother takes strict measures to protect her she does not rebel. She obeys the mother passively. Rukmani says, “poor child, she was bewildered by the many injunctions we laid upon her, and the curtailing of her freedom tried her sorely, though not a word of complaint came from her” (NS 34).

When her marriage is fixed, she has no say in it. As a daughter she fulfills the desires of her parents. After five years of married life, her husband and his people exploit her by saying that she is barren. Her return to her father's house is a public humiliation. But she does not mourn or wail. She is calm like her mother though her heart is wounded. She accepts the reality of
life. She says, "The reality is much easier to bear than the imaginings. At least now there is no more fear, no more necessity for lies and concealment" (NS 54). After Kenny's treatment and assurance that Ira will have children, Rukmani goes to her son-in-law to request him to take her back. The man replies, "... She was a good wife to me, and a comely one, but I have waited long and now I have taken another woman" (NS 65). Ira has been waiting for her mother with eagerness shining in her eyes. When she understands the bitter truth that her place is substituted by another woman she does not say a word but swallows her sorrow. She never complains. Her mother describes the change in her daughter:

Thereafter her ways became even more strange. She spent long hours out in the country by herself, spoke little, withdrew completely into herself and went about her tasks with a chill hopelessness that daunted me. No one could see in her now the warm lovely creature she had been, except sometimes when Selvam came to her, perching on her lap and coaxing a smile from her, for she always had a special love for him. (NS 65)
She tends her youngest brother Kuti like a mother. She cannot bear to see him starve to death. She willingly sells her body to feed him. Poverty is terrible and sometimes kills the very soul within man. She is questioned by her father about her nightly visitations but he cannot stop her. “Even when Nathan prevents her from following this wrong path, she defies and sticks to her whims” (P. Geetha, “The Novels of Kamala Markandaya: Reassessing Feminine Identity” 133). She is determined to save her family by immolating herself. Finally Kuti dies. Like her mother, she bears the loss of Kuti, her beloved brother silently and bravely.

All odds are against her. She gives birth to an illegitimate son and he is an albino. Ironically Ramesh K. Srivastava comments, “the birth of her son comes when her barrenness would have been most desirable” (“Markandaya’s Nectar in a Sieve as a tragedy” 140). Like Hester Prynne’s living symbol of sin Pearl in The Scarlet Letter, Ira’s Sacrabani is the externalisation of her immorality. Still her motherly instincts embrace him and cater to all his needs. “Pearl was a born outcaste of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants” (The Scarlet Letter 82). Similarly when
Sacrabani is expelled by other boys because of his dubious parentage, Ira pacifies him but with a heavy heart. "She also shows the will power and mental strength to bring forth the Albino child she conceives outside her wedlock" (Geetha 133).

When her parents leave for the city, she decides to live with Selvam. A strong tie of affection exists between them. In her self-determination too she is a replica of her mother, a symbol of endurance, sacrifice and mute acquiescence. Her most important features are her serenity and a sense of balance in the direst situations. Ira surely owes her wisdom, calmness and fortitude to her mother Rukmani.

Experience of victimisation chastens both the mother and the daughter. Too much of suffering in life refines them. They are symbols of heroism in the face of despair. C. T. Indra feels that their spirit of resignation is significantly Indian, it is "endurance tempered by love which does not succumb to frustration nor does it end in bitterness" (68).

Nalini in A Handful of Rice, like Rukmani and Ira, is a victim of social injustice. Apparently she is a passive character but at times she does not hesitate to voice her views on matters relating to family and society. She is an embodiment of virtue, an
obedient daughter, an affectionate sister, a faithful wife and a loving mother. At the first sight of Nalini, Ravi exclaims, “What a girl! Take a girl like that, and half a man’s troubles would be over” (HR 25). She is beautiful but never proud of her beauty, she is humble, soft spoken and good natured. Evils inherent in the social order become manifest in her home. But “Nalini acts as the ennobling influence on Ravi and she appears to be the only sheet anchor of his life” (Geetha 129). The thought of Nalini acts as a restorative on Ravi even when he is lured by Damodar’s underground activities. When Ravi raves against the rich who exploit his class of people, Nalini makes him see the reality of life by her words, “they’re a different class, that’s all . . . Ordinary folk like us can never be like them” (HR 75).

Nalini is very sensible and scoffs at Ravi gently when he says that his needs are too many. She is quite contented and happy with Ravi. When Ravi returns home drunk Nalini warns him. “You are getting high and mighty, putting yourself on a level with high-class folk. How can we ever be like them? Why can’t you be content with what we have?” (HR 75) She is aware of the limitations of the society to which she belongs. Often “Nalini, his wife, brings him down to the level of reality, curbing his seething anger” (Chandra 91) by her
worldly wisdom. She reminds him again and again that the rich are always conscious of their wealth and have a settled sense of superiority over the poor and it is not easy to change them. Nalini hates "the rebellious side of his nature" (HR 162).

The eternal problems of life do not subdue Nalini. Though she has been the only source of joy and solace to Ravi, he slaps her in his anger. She rebels at the male ego and steps out of her house with her children. It is indeed a drastic step that she has taken. But when Ravi comes to take her back, like every Indian wife she goes behind him. Nalini points out his weakness, "You've been corrupted . . . you go into all these big houses, see all these things, it gives you impossible ideas" (HR 75).

Her response to her nieces and her sister Thangam shows that she has a heart full of human kindness unlike her husband whose actions are governed by the ruthless facts of economics. When Thangam intrudes into their privacy, Ravi shouts at her. But Nalini with kind heartedness remarks:

You are always getting at her! What's the matter with you? She's eight months gone and you grudge her even a little fresh air . . . . All this fuss simply
because she's my sister. If it were your sister
would you grudge her also? (HR 100).

As a daughter, she does her filial duties to her father Apu.
She even spends sleepless nights tending her father like Cordelia
in King Lear. Cordelia affectionately cares for her father:

O my dear Father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made! (4.7. 25-28)

Nalini lessens the pain of her father by her soothing words and
tender actions. Unlike her elder sister and brother-in-law who are
ungrateful, she is kind to her father till he dies.

There is a chord of love and affection between Nalini, the
mother and her son Raju. He is a source of comfort and joy to her.
She forgets the wounding words of Ravi on seeing the sweet smile
of her son. Without proper child care and healthy food Raju grows
weaker day by day. When Raju dies of meningitis, the mother loss
is too much for her to bear. There is a storm of sorrow in her
heart but she bears it silently.

In the early years of her married life, Nalini believes that
Ravi is very much attached to her and that he has changed his ways of life for her. But later on he starts quarrelling with her often. For trivial reasons like her purchase of a cute little fan and the stones in the rice, he shouts at her. Nalini puts up with life's hardships and troubles patiently and it is she who makes the normal family life possible. It is through her passivity that disharmony and breach in the family is avoided.

If Ira is a replica of her mother Rukmani, Nalini is a contrast to her mother Jeyamma, who is a clever schemer. She calculates the benefits that her family would get if Ravi becomes her son-in-law. "She outlined to Ravi a husband's responsibilities, the duties he owed to mother-in-law and [his] wife" (HR 55). But Nalini is innocent. The mother is full of base passions, but Nalini is virtuous and morally very strong. It is her moral strength that gives her power to adjust herself and to face any adverse situation calmly. Though a silent sufferer she is a great woman in her own way.

The next trio of women, Premala in Some Inner Fury, Sarojini in A Silence of Desire and Vasantha in The Nowhere Man are tossed between two worlds. There are caught in the midst of Indian tradition and western progress. As there cannot be any
compromise between two cultures which are widely apart, these women hold on to their Indian roots firmly. Their westernised husbands or sons cannot alter the basic Indian roots of these women and their attempts are futile.

Premela in *Some Inner Fury* is a victim of East-West confrontation. She is exploited by her westernised husband Kit who "upholds the authority of the British Raj" (Uma Parameswaran, *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists* 90). She is by nature shy, conventionally and basically Indian in spirit. She bends as far as she can to become a suitable bride for Kitsamy, a westernised Oxford educated man. Hence she accepts the unorthodox process of reverse courtship in which the girl comes to stay with the young man's family in order to be tested and approved by him. Even in her courtship she is exploited by her westernised fiancé. Kit realises Premala's insufficiencies. "To Premala's consternation he is anglicized like the English officers" (Rekha Jha, "Political Encounter" 29).

She takes every earnest effort to mould herself according to Kit's western tastes. Her attempts are in vain and she fails miserably in that endeavour. She realises that she, as a typical Indian, is no match to Kit. Still "their marriage is performed with
a lot of fanfare but it reaffirms Premala's personal simplicity and religiosity” (S. Krishna Sarma, “Some Inner Fury : A Critical Perspective” 106). Once she becomes his wife, the same old qualities of Premala mortify him deeply. Premala is innocent like a dove, a symbol of modesty and utterly unpretentious and universally loved. But it is a pity that she is unable to fit into Kit’s world. As a result she grows lonely and miserable without an outlet for her pent up feelings. She finds relief by adopting an orphan and enjoying the pleasures of motherhood. However, Kit does not approve of her act of adoption.

Govind understands Premala better than Kit. Her heroic attempts to cater to the western taste of Kit win the admiration of even Govind. Mira is a silent witness to the ardour that Govind and Premala develop for each other. But a woman like Premala with her traditional Indian mode of life cannot think of deceiving her husband and taking a lover.

Kit’s distaste for the Indian way of life alienates Premala from him. As she has been brought up in the Hindu conventional tradition, she finds it very difficult to cope with the westernised Kit. Shantha Krishnaswamy comments, “her tragedy is brought about not by timidity - but the very traditional sense of duty and
devotion" (The Woman in Indian Fiction in English 185). Once she fails as a traditional wife, she decides to go her own way. She realises, “the imperfect articulation of their marriage” (SIF 223). It is her inner fury that makes her seek out Hickey, the missionary and his school for the down-trodden, “as substitutes for a fulfilling way of life which her marriage to Kit cannot provide” (Ann Lowry Weir, “Worlds Apart” 79). Her selfless service to assist the missionary and help the poor make her happy and contented.

Her complete involvement in the school makes her take a tremendous risk on herself in order to save the school from fire. This shows her heroism though she is a fragile woman. She is strong in her innate goodness. Iyengar attributes the qualities of compassion and sufferance of Mother India to Premala (440). When Govind hurriedly takes Mira and others to the village in the pelting rain, they are directed to a hut where Premala lies dead. Shortly before her death, she looks transfigured through suffering. Her face has a serenity and a glow. Her silence is more powerful than all rhetoric and her resigned spirit speaks of her measureless strength. She is seized by a new selfless love which has given her new life:

Excitement had sent the colour to her cheeks; and
there was something else, less evanescent, about her too – a glow, a serenity, which had not been there since she had come to live in this city. Yet it was a serenity of a different order – finer, more tempered, as if the dross had been taken from its virgin gold in some unknown fiery crucible – a serenity that does not come, save on the side of suffering. (SIF 222 - 223)

In her attempt to save the school, she is suffocated and burnt to death. Exploitation has not made her spiritless. She has sacrificed her life for the noble cause for which she has lived.

Another woman who is a symbol of ancient tradition and old faith is Sarojini in A Silence of Desire. She is a victim of Eastern faith and Western progress. The novel portrays the response of Sarojini who lives by a strong religious faith, and contrasts it with the western rational approach of her husband Dandekar. His attempts to educate her in the modern ways are in vain because her roots are so deep in Hindu culture and religion that she is not prepared to listen to anything which goes contrary to her faith. In spite of what modern science has to say, Sarojini believes in faith healing and goes to a Swami stealthily, to be
cured of a tumour in her womb. She keeps her ailment and her visits to the Swami a secret in silence because she fears that Dandekar may stop her from going to the Swami. She reveals her fears:

You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You wouldn’t have let me be – no! You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don’t go together, and without faith I shall not be healed. (SD 87)

This faith healing is common in India. Joseph observes, “faith healing goes back to the earliest days of world history and outside India also, has won sanction of diverse creeds” (40).

Despite their different ideological stands, Sarojini and Dandekar have a harmonious relationship and Dandekar considers himself lucky to possess a wife like Sarojini. She is described as:

a good wife . . . good with the children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure
after fifteen years of marriage . . . She did most
things placidly. (SD 7)

The conjugal bliss of Sarojini and Dandekar depends upon the
tactfulness and cleverness of Sarojini as a wife. As man lives in
the microcosm of his family, the matrimonial and filial ties get
either strengthened or weakened by the diverse pressures and
pleasures which beset them. As Robert A. Baron and Donn Byrne
point out:

Sometimes these relationships develop into the
most positive ties and sometimes they degenerate
into cumbersome bonds. There are certain
personality attributes and situational influences
that help increase interpersonal harmony between
very dissimilar individuals to tolerate and
sometimes to like one another. (Social Psychology :
Understanding Human Interaction 199)

This is very true of Sarojini and Dandekar. In spite of their diverse
natures, they have had a peaceful domesticity during their
married life. Lack of communication affects the continuity of the
conjugal relationship between them. Silence on matters of mutual
concern gives rise to an unprecedented crisis which spoils their domestic peace and harmony. “Silence ignites unceasing conflicts, particularly in relation to good and bad, reason and faith, honesty and dishonesty, and Eastern and Western values” (N. Ramachandran Nair, “Anatomy of Silence in A Silence of Desire” 2: 238). Sarojini’s secret visits to the Swami make Dandekar suspect her of infidelity. Ultimately Sarojini breaks her silence and comes out with the truth and justifies her behaviour. She says:

I do not expect you to understand — You with your western notions, Your superior talk of ignorance and superstition . . . . And mine is a disease to be cured and so you would have sent me to hospital and I would have died there. (SD 87-88)

She had been very patient and tolerant in the face of the worst indignities he had heaped on her. Once the cat is out, an intimate relationship and instinctive understanding is resumed. The novelist describes, “Their eyes met and Sarojini smiled slightly: this had happened before. For a moment or two there was a flicker, a sense of their old companionship” (SD 143). Though Sarojini is submissive and traditional till the very end,
she is an independent figure confronting male dominance and superiority.

The same trust in faith healing can be found in Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani's conception after wearing the lingam, a symbol of fertility, along with the treatment given by Dr. Kenny makes one wonder which of the two has been responsible for it. Despite her staunch belief in faith-healing, Sarojini is coaxed into submitting to an operation. "The crux of the conflict between faith and rationalism, [is] a very significant issue in the context of the Indian society today" (Mukherjee 109). Kamala Markandaya does not give any explanation. She does not take sides with faith healing or medical science because similar situations do occur in villages. If a choice is given between a Swami and a doctor, a superstitious patient prefers the former.

Vasantha in *The Nowhere Man* shares with Sarojini her traditional Indian notion and outlook. She is a symbol of things Indian. She is victimised by the cultural polarity of her husband and her sons. There is an essential difference in her outlook and the way of life in her host country, England. As a contrast to her husband Srinivas, she has no sense of belonging to the country of her adoption. She "in her breath and bones had remained wholly
Indian" (NM 39). Her immigrant status does not make her change her outlook or attitude. Her response to matters relating to dress, family and children are typical of India.

Vasantha and her family are exploited by the British. Her family is suspected of subversive activities against the British because the family gets embroiled in the Nationalist Movement. When their house is raided, the English police sergeant’s brutal behaviour towards Vasantha dazes her. Moreover her beloved brother Vasu, a fierce Nationalist Youth died because of the British. Hence she has much antipathy towards the British but she controls herself and silently bears the exploitation of the British.

Even after settling in London, she clings to her Indian identity. She wears saris and cardigans all her life in the damp climate of London and has worn wooden sandals on London roads. She imports Indian perfumes, pickles, chutneys, Gangajal and even Indian earth. Though she is silent and submissive like most women, she is firm in her intention of building a house in London. In India vagabonds shift from pillar to post. So she thinks, “it is time we bought a house and settled down” (NM 17). Srinivas recollects endearingly:
His wife had been the moving spirit behind the acquisition. Left to himself he would simply have continued living in successive rooms and flats as he had done since landing in England . . . . Until suddenly one day there was his wife, the composed Vasantha planted pillar-fashion in front of him.

Not to be got around or overthrown. (NM 16)

It is because of her inducement, the house is bought and she names it Chandraprasad, “after the house in India which Srinivas’s grandfather had built and in which they had all lived” (NM 20-21). Moreover she insisted on buying a house because she had a foresight about the future. As an oriental mother she had definite joint family plans for her two sons Laxman, and Sheshu, the younger son, who “had been the apple of his mother’s eye” (NM 37). The mother’s dream is unfulfilled when Laxman marries Pat, an English girl. Against Vasantha’s desire, they move to Plymouth deserting Chandraprasad.

After a year the eager grandmother Vasantha desires to see the baby. But Laxman, brought up in England and its alien surroundings prevents the visit of his parents on the pretext that the only spare bedroom in their house is occupied by Pat’s
parents. But Vasantha cannot understand the strange English custom that separates mother and son. She asks loudly, “What does that matter? . . . Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere. In a corridor, or the kitchen. Just to see the baby” (NM 35).

Vasantha’s response is typically Indian as she has the joint family habits ingrained in her. It looks ignominious to the western eye. This is the contrast between the first and second generation of immigrants. The sons reflect the second generation immigrant ethos as they are both born and bred there and consider the alien country as their own. It is because of their western notion that they try to exploit their mother. The alien culture widens the chasm between Vasantha and her sons whose filial sensitivity reminds her of the cultural contrast and she remembers generally the sons’ attitude in India towards the father. Unlike her sons who belong to an alien white social class, who deny their Indian connection, the mother refuses to compromise her orthodox Indian ways of living in the British soil. She is irredeemably Indian until the day of her death.

After Seshu’s death and Lakman’s breach from the parental ties, Vasantha longs to go back to India. She says with cagerness
"We must return to our country. There is no reason, now that India is free, why we should not. Nor . . . is there anything, really, to keep us here any more" (NM 36). But she dies as a victim of tuberculosis in an alien land. However, with the acceptance typical of Indian women who are no strangers to sorrow and struggle, she breathes her last assuring Srinivas with her last words that she has been leading a happy married life. Through Vasantha, the novelist explores the human relationship caught in the web of bicultural living with all its harrowing aspects.

Aunt Alamelu in Two Virgins is a rock of Indian tradition. She is Amma’s widowed sister and Appa is younger to her. But she never tries to cross him because one has to show reverence to one’s brother-in-law in India whether he is young or old. She is devoid of any social status because widows are non-entities who have absolutely no position in social gatherings and auspicious ceremonies. They are alienated from the rest of the society. Appa’s petty quarrels with Aunt Alamelu make her sad and she would often take up her bundle to leave the house. But having no other abode, she passively would return before nightfall.

She is a follower of strong moral codes. She is a familiar
figure in the Indian joint family, combining in herself the poor relation, the widow and the interfering sister-in-law. She bears a strong similarity to Dodamma in *Some Inner Fury* and Rajam in *A Silence of Desire*. Aunt Alamelu's emotional tirade is illustrative of her character. Being a widow, she spends most of her time in the kitchen or doing household chores. She does not like Appa giving excessive freedom to Lalitha. She has the ancient notion that girls should be controlled and kept under strict discipline. She is right because the liberty given to Lalitha is considered as a licence to her. When the girls, Lalitha and Saroja want to buy bicycles, Aunt Alamelu remarks, "Bikes, it is scandalous, what do girls want bicycles for?" *(TV 55)*. She does not like Lalitha's Maypole dancing. But Lalitha with the support of Appa exploits her. She is concerned about the degrading morals of the younger generation. Aunt Alamelu fumes when she views the behaviour of the modern young generation closely. She sadly utters:

I know what is going on these days, these days young people think they know best, they have no respect for their elders, they have no respect for anything except their own willful ways, in my days
do you think a respectable girl would have dared
to speak as you do? (TV 82)

She can be called a fundamentalist who sticks blindly to the old
Indian tradition and values. When anybody tries to overrule it,
Aunt Alamelu cannot be quiet.

She is totally averse to the British way of life because her
family is exploited by the West. It is her feeling that western
education has corrupted Lalitha. Moreover Appa’s family was
branded a terrorist by the police. The seizure of their possessions
makes Aunt Alamelu bitter towards the West. Hence she warns
Appa and Lalitha against the influence of the West with its lures,
on the members of her family. It is Aunt Alamelu who foretells the
doom of Lalitha as soon as the westernised film director Gupta
has entered into their house. With great emotion and concern for
her granddaughter she voices the truth, “it was not comfort he
was after, it was something else” (TV 104). But Appa brushes
aside her fears and allegations saying that she has limited
horizons. Kamala Markandaya portrays her as a symbol of
tradition, piety and suffering.
Maharani Manjula in *The Golden Honeycomb* too is an elderly lady like Aunt Alamelu and she is endowed with a strong sense of nationalism. She is a victim of the British in India. She helplessly sees the way the Indians are exploited by the British. Through Rabi, her grandson, she wants to break the cuffs that bind the Indians.

Being the queen of Bawajiraj II, Manjula is painfully aware of the ways and means the British adapted to create a class of Indians alienated from the rest of the countrymen. English education has transformed her husband and son to such an extent that they have become loyal slaves of the British Crown. Bawajiraj III is moulded into a perfect British stooge, to whom the Durbar of Delhi is the most important affair. Manjula observes how her son takes pride in entertaining the British authorities to shoots and hunts. Very enthusiastically he offers his whole hearted assistance to the British. She is ashamed to see her son volunteer his own services to the cause of the British. So she decides to bring up her grandson Rabi “into an understanding of the plight of the people under the oppression of the princely government, the result of court luxury and British ‘protection’ ” (Arthur Pollard, “Kamala Markandaya’s, *The Golden Honeycomb*” 27).
As her son’s servile ways to get favour from the British irritate her, she wants her grandson to grow up as a man with an Indian identity and not a slave to the “banias.”

As she is exploited by her westernised husband and son, the grandmother always keeps an eye on Rabi, her grandson. She carefully puts him under an Indian tutor contrary to the royal practice, because she does not want Rabi to become a brown Englishman like his father. She contributes much to the wholesome personality development of Rabi. She keeps him on her lap and tells stories about the past wars in India and how his grandfather was confined in a room till his death by the British for his spirit of independence. Under the pretext of the tour, Manjula grabs every opportunity to install in Rabi the spirit of nationalism and an identification with his country.

Rebellious blood runs in the vein of Dowager Maharani. When she becomes queen, she refuses to abide by the royal rules and codes. The seeds of royal rebellion are sown by the spirited queen when she insists on suckling her baby herself, repudiating the royal custom. She considers the palace practice of restraining the royal mother from nursing her own child, as an unwarranted denial of basic human right and an act of exploitation. But
Bawajiraj II, a loyalist to the British Emperor persuades his queen to follow the royal practice. Maharani Manjula represents the best of India's traditional womanhood in guiding and shaping the destiny of Rabi who in turn provides peace and progress to the people of his state.

The character of Saroja in *Two Virgins* is unique. She falls neither under the traditional group nor modern, but comes in between the two. Unlike other characters, she is an adolescent trying to analyse the world with her limited vision of life. The whole story is seen through the consciousness of Saroja and it is a female point of view. All instinctive "womanly feelings" are attributed to her. Her sister Lalitha exploits her with her western notions. She calls her a sissy, baby, a mooncalf and an ice cube. Saroja is sent to an ordinary government school to have her primary education. But she has a balanced mind unlike her elder sister. Amma and Aunt Alamelu have influenced Saroja's character and mental make up. Hence she stands firmly on her own feet at the time of exploitation. She is strong enough to resist the urban and western exploitation.

It is interesting to note that in spite of India's spirituality and traditional stability, Indian girls fall a prey to the glamour of
the West. Very naturally Saroja resists all the lures of the West when she grows from village innocence to maturity. Her vision invites all her experiences traditional and modern and as Haydn Moore Williams comments:

She is one of Markandaya's finest and most attractive creations: innocence embracing knowledge, love embracing jealousy, and above all there is the girl's deep love of the village including the widowed aunt, the patient buffalo, her bicycle, and even the monsoon rain. ("Victims and Virgins: Some characters in Markandaya's Novels" 121)

Although she is younger and less beautiful than her sister, she is firmly rooted in her village and its values. From the village companions she has learned a lot and gained experience. The novelist observes:

Saroja liked listening to Chengleput in the mornings while he was cooking and she could watch, before he tacked himself up to his cart. In the evenings she watched Manikkam rounding up his three cows to milk them. (TV 5)
She understands Lachu’s evil behaviour with girls, and Jaya’s corrupting influence on her. She is of a firmer mould than Lalitha and so she does not fall a prey to the evils which abound in society. The births, deaths, sorrows and stress, all add to her understanding of human nature and life in general.

When she is confronted with her family problem about her sister Lalitha’s falling a prey to the enticements of Gupta, the attractions of city life and its consequences, Saroja is bewildered by the ways of the world. Her convictions and moral courage get strengthened. Even though young, she can make a decision. She is not carried away by the waves of her own emotions like Lalitha. When Saroja goes to the city, she is captivated by the urban lures. The presence and actions of Devaraj disturb her. She has erotic dreams. But she never allows the city man to exploit her innocence. She is determined not to yield to temptation. She rejects him and chooses her own way of life within the bounds and restriction of rural society. The novelist avers, “Saroja wrenched her mind off those tracks which were making her dizzy, sought to restore her equilibrium . . . (TV 218). Instead of caring for anyone, Saroja as an obedient daughter and a young virtuous girl, followed her parents which was the proper thing to do. She realises:
The improper thing was to fling yourself at a man, and she knew what came of that, Lalitha was living evidence, Lalitha, Lalitha. It seems to Saroja as if her sister was destined to shape the stream of her life. (TV 221)

As Saroja lives through the constrictions of village life, the younger sister imperceptibly but irrevocably leaves her own childhood behind. She has all her adolescent warm feelings but her natural desires of a woman are curbed by the strong impact of the codes of traditional society. Moreover she learns from the experience of her elder sister, where uninhibited moral freedom will land her. Through the character of Saroja “Kamala Markandaya brings out the conjunction of modernism and traditionalism based on a feminist rationale” (Geetha 135).

From the response of these characters in general it can be concluded that Kamala Markandaya’s emphasis on indianness undeniably remains. She chooses to show the impact of social, economic and political forces which shape the response of various characters. These characters are often caught in the conflict of tradition and modernity, rural and urban, East and West. Hence they voice their dissent and protest, aches and joys, hopes and
despair, defeat and victories. Through their response Kamala Markandaya points out the social injustice, inequalities, and erosion of social, cultural and spiritual values.

The next group consists of progressive women, a contrast to the previous group. Characters like Mira and Roshan in Some Inner Fury, Anasuya in Possession, Lalitha in Two Virgins, Mohini and Usha in The Golden Honeycomb are victims of cultural dichotomy which is part and parcel of the exploitation syndrome. Kamala Markandaya has highlighted two prominent traits in the character of this group. They are the impact of the western education and culture on the outlook of Indians and the conflict between India and Britain arising from the latter’s political dominance over the former. All these women characters are in one way or other exploited by the West.

Mirabai in Some Inner Fury is an educated, sophisticated, westernised young woman. She is the narrator-heroine belonging to a Brahmin family, one who has lost her romantic life with Richard in the political vortex of the Independence struggle. Mira’s response shows how the national struggle causes havoc to the private life of individuals. Mira being the youngest and the ablest is made to accompany Richard on his sightseeing trips. Love
binds their hearts irrespective of racial differences. Their love is born in the Indian soil. Kamala Markandaya plants the sapling of European love in the Indian soil, waters it with unspoken gestures, and manures it with human sympathy. Love blossoms with the true Indian fragrance but never to be united in life; still hearts meet transcending the barriers of colour, caste and creed. Shiv. K. Kumar makes a keen observation:

This liaison with an Englishman is a rude assault on the powerful and seemingly impregnable citadel of convention. But Mira rides rough shod over all social taboos and inhibitions, and goes on long honeymoonish expeditions with her lover, in utter disregard of decorum and propriety. They are sundered only when political and national barriers intervene. ("Tradition and change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 89).

Mira is torn between political agitation and cultural disparity. She realises that they belong to two different races, of the ruler and the ruled. Overcome by her romantic desires, she defies parental authority and as she herself remarks, "... I do not remember having crossed her [mother] before" (SIF 61). She is
aware of the tragedy of the situation that poises her between two worlds, the Orient and the Occident. She says sorrowfully, “For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong” (SIF 285).

As the events develop, Mira realises the danger of loving an Englishman at the time when the Indians shout the slogan of “Quit India.” Entering a town when it is in the grip of Hartal protesting against the presence of the British rulers, both Richard and Mira sense the attitude of the Indians. Mira ponders:

The conventions of his caste were no less rigid than mine: he came of a race which had acquired an empire, to which the people at home were largely indifferent, and of which the people on the spot were largely ignorant . . .” (SIF 159 - 60).

There is a demarcation between “Your people and my people.” Their love is shipwrecked on the rocks of Indian nationalism. “The political drama of 1942 is thus authenticated into their personal drama” (Jha 23 - 24).

On the personal level Mira’s love for Richard is true, but from the political point of view her loyalty to her nation is
unquestionable. When she is to make a choice between the two, Mira and Richard decide for the national loyalties. Hence Mira forsakes Richard for her country. Thus the political situation prevalent in the country exploits them and this results in their estrangement. Richard is an outcast. It is terrible to feel unwanted, to be hated by the Indians. He is a representative of the Englishmen against whom the ire of India is directed. The novelist points out the gulf between the East and the West:

You belong to one side, if you don't you belong to the other. It is simple as that . . . . There is no in between. You have shown your badge . . . but it was there in your face, the colour of your skin, the accents of your speech, in the clothes on your back. (SIF 218)

Williams aptly remarks, “their love is like a small star extinguished in the immensity of the universe, one life sacrificed for the race” (Indo-Anglian Literature 85). Though her heart pines for Richard, she bravely brushes aside her emotion like a true Indian and considers the cause of her people and their
independence. Mira opens her heart pathetically at the end of the novel:

... Still my heart wept, tearlessly, desolate, silently to itself. But what matter to the universe
... if now and then a world is born or a star should die; or what matter to the world, if here and there a man should fall or a head or a heart should break. (SIF 285-86)

With a broken heart she breaks her tie with Richard whom she hoped to marry. Jha comments, "this diseased political structure poisons every aspect of potential East-West kinship" (33). Her youthful fire of fancy is quenched on the waters of nationalism. Her fury fizzles out to merge in the larger fury of the national struggle.

India's contact with western culture and civilization has led to the emergence of a judicious group of people who are neither swept off their feet by their English education nor totally averse to the British style of life. Roshan Merchant in Some Inner Fury belongs to this judicious group which draws inspiration from the liberal and democratic values of the British, and remaining at
heart an Indian and develops a cosmopolitan outlook on life. Her response is really one of love-hate relationship.

In the character of Roshan, in *Some Inner Fury*, the novelist has delineated the liberated woman of the East. Educated on the western values in England, she has a dual citizenship and feels at home in both the worlds. “As she is born in one world and educated in another, she enters both and moves in both with ease and sprightliness” (Chadha, “The Interplay” 29). Roshan who loves India is at home among the Indian masses and also loves foreign perfumes and clothes. “Evidently these are various attitudes found in the Indian society at that particular disturbed period of time” (Sarma 107).

The England returned modern Indian girl Roshan has sympathy for the West and she is on the most friendly terms with individual westerners. The novelist pinpoints:

One thing alone she refused to give up, despite all that Govind could say: she still kept her English friends. She did not agree with their government of her country, they were, she proclaimed more than once, insufferable as overlords, but as
individuals, she insisted, they were pleasing, humane, civilised, charming. (SIF 174)

At the same time she leaves a mark on the people of India with her unconventionality and lovability.

Roshan trusts her own judgment and stands firmly on her own feet. No force can curtail independent identity. She is full of vitality and is her own mistress. This is evident when she replies to Mira, “Of course I’m not sorry! I ‘d rather go to the devil my own way than be led to heaven by anyone else. And I wouldn’t give up being free like that for anything . . . .” (SIF 189). She is very quick in her decisions and does what she feels is right.

Though English educated, Roshan has been a daring socialite. She publishes a paper for the nationalist movement. She persuades Mira to join her paper and through this she finds an outlet for her nationalistic spirit. Her strong patriotic views inspire the Indians to action. If Sarojini Naidu inspired the people through her poems, Roshan inspires the Indians through her journal. Of course her English education has helped her to see the real situation of India and its bondage to the West.

Though westernised, she does not like the West exploiting
her country. So Roshan plays a major role in the freedom struggle. Govind takes to civil disobedience and he becomes a votary of violence and a sort of terrorist. He enlists the brave woman Roshan to support his activities for the freedom of India. When he faces the charge of the burning of the Gazette offices, she cleverly rescues him by swearing that he had been in her house on the night of the incident. To give a face to the lie, she takes the very bold step of staying with Govind, with Mira as a chaperon. She boldly brushes aside the strict moral codes of the time in order to save Govind.

The people of India take part in various national movements tirelessly for freedom. Civil disobedience takes various shapes like the ticketless travel of Roshan. The British government is stung to resentment and tries intimidatory steps such as sending agitators to jail and suppression of newspapers. Roshan when arrested and imprisoned in the service of the nation far from getting frightened or discouraged, experiences a strange sense of elation and pride. “She represents the virile and the wily side of the feminine. Yet she is strong in her goodness . . . and shows tremendous inner strength” (Sarma 109).

It is interesting to note that Anasuya in Possession, like
Roshan who is an off shoot of the East-West confrontation is a sensitive woman. She is a writer of stature and she frequently visits England in connection with the publication of her books. She is quite at home in India and England. As an objective observer, she has the capacity of reconciling the two opposites – the East and the West. She is truly Indian in her outlook and attitude.

Anasuya belongs to a free India after Independence and so she is not submissive. She voices her opinion boldly whenever it is needed. It is in a dinner arranged by the ex-Maharaja Jumbo that Anasuya meets Caroline. She describes the meeting interestingly:

I first met Caroline Bell at a party in Madras given by an old friend of mine, an ex-ruler of one of the smaller states of India who now cheerfully eked out his existence on parties and a pension of seventy five thousand rupees a year. (Pos. 1)

Jumbo, the Indian ruler cannot digest the change that comes over his position in independent India. Used to associating only with the English ruling class he cannot face India. This is the tragedy of the Indian English high class. Anasuya as a contrast is English
educated but not elitist. she tells Jumbo, "... I can always come back here, feel at home with my own family and be received by people like you" (Pos. 92).

After her first meeting with Caroline, Anasuya is compelled to accompany her on an arrack expedition in an Indian village. Anasuya is exploited by Caroline’s British, imperious nature. Caroline dismisses it as “a classic ailment” one which England and India never understood. But Anasuya belongs to a free India and often retorts stiffly. There is a mutual inclination “to pick faults and probe vulnerabilities that lay like a legacy in the blood from the long opposition of her line to mine” (Pos. 133). Anasuya sometimes bears all the irritating taunts at the Indian weaknesses as a typical woman of understanding. At all levels, except personal, the gulf between the two countries is unbridgeable. The fundamental conflict between the two is aptly described by Anasuya when she comments on Caroline’s sarcastic reference to Indian character. Anasuya remarks, “It is a sort of love-hate relationship, don’t you think? Like the kind Britain and India used to have” (Pos. 70). The relationship between Anasuya and Caroline is a symbol of the cultural dichotomy between India and Britain.
Caroline’s seizure of Valmiki, a rustic artist is symbolic of England’s greed for potential material gains from India. Anasuya describes this exploitation as:

Perhaps, indeed, relationship was not the word to describe a forcible possessing which had established nothing so clearly as that there could be no reasonable relationship – merely a straddling of one stranger by another with little out of it for either. (Pos. 70)

Anasuya knows that Caroline will not leave Valmiki. He has become her property and she is the sole owner of him. “People don’t easily give up what they think are their possession. The English never have” (Pos. 192).

In Two Virgins, Kamala Markandaya deals with another aspect of England in India, particularly the effect of English legacy on Indian society and how the characters respond to it. In spite of India’s ancient values and familial stability, Indian girls are victimised by the West. Appa sends his pet daughter Lalitha to the English school paying exorbitant fee because of the opportunities it afforded. The adolescent pulsating with life and with a zest for
living is attracted by the lures and temptations of a glamourous new world. At the school run by Miss Mendoza, a westernised Indian, she learns the gentle art of "deceptions and appearances, as well as dissatisfaction and contempt for her family's simple life-sans refrigerator and other mechanical 'necessities' of Western culture" (Roberta Rubenstein, "Rev. of Two Virgins" 225).

A major subject at Miss Mendoza's school is moral science. But Lalitha's moral decline begins with the headmistress's introduction of a film director to the village. Cinema quickly seduces Lalitha. Exploitation takes the shape of the film industry. It represents modernity and a symbol of urban values. Mehta comments, "It is the story of a country girl who, lured by the glamour of the city, trades away her soul" (307).

Even as a school girl, she is bold and fond of experimenting. What frightens other girls of her age is tempting to Lalitha. Her sister Saroja is frightened by Lachu, the supposed mad man of the village but Lalitha tries to justify Lachu's actions. She says, "He just dallies with girls, didn't Krishna dally with girls?" (TV 20) She does not respect the old values of her village. Her deep interest and involvement in things physical foretell her fate and her doom.
At home she has confrontations with Amma and Aunt Alamelu. But Appa supports her blindly. She never listens to Amma and she hates the advice of Aunt Alamelu. If she had listened to her aunt's advice, her tragic plight could have been avoided. She opposes Aunt Alamelu because she thinks her traditional views are outmoded. She willingly rejects tradition and accepts the modern.

Lalitha's vanity and flirtations reveal her highly sensual nature. She imagines that the world outside the village is a better one. The city seems to be her oyster which she hopes will yield her a pearl. Joseph judges her correctly, "Lalitha, the beautiful flirt is smart and shallow, vain and selfish. She finds the village 'stifling' and 'sparkless' at the thought of the city, for her soul belongs there" (146). Hence she follows her illusions by running away to the city. She makes her decision at the spur of the moment when she says, "You have to be quick . . . you have to seize your opportunity before it passes you by, you have to be quick with your answers if you want to get anywhere" (TV 77). Her abandonment of the village and exodus to the city shows her determination for a change from the old to the new. She opts
tragically for the fate of the "town mouse." K. S. Ramamurti rightly comments:

The novel is on the theme of escape and initiation. The adolescent seeking an escape from the world of strict adult control, the escape from the narrow world of home and village into an under world full of lures and opportunities. ("Two Virgins : A Problem Novel" 41)

She hates the strict moral codes of the village. She wants to be free and so Lalitha succumbs to the temptations of Gupta "because she is too conscious of the freedom conferred by the new social dispensation" (Geetha 134). She goes to the city in pursuit of stardom and is spoilt by the film director who betrays her at an adverse circumstance. She returns to the village after an extended absence, broken in spirit, bereft of both her psychic and physical innocence. Fearing the reproaches of the conservative society she disappears into the depth of the sea of life.

The corrupting influence of western culture on Lalitha's life is represented by Miss Mendoza and Mr. Gupta. They are instrumental in taking Lalitha away from her family. Amma
condemns Mr. Gupta loudly, "... that Western punk ... curse the day he and his ways crossed our threshold" (TV 240) for he has introduced them to tragedy. Lalitha represents the perpetual tendency of modern civilization to seek an escape from the ancient world of virtuous and time honoured traditions to a new world of vices and evils.

Mohini's response in *The Golden Honeycomb* is earthy and Indian. She plays a pivotal role in the affirmation of the continuity of the essential cultural values amid the myriad political changes in modern India. She is an example of a liberated woman who guides Rabi cautiously in order to provide peace and progress to her people, who are exploited in the state of Devapur. Mohini, though a commoner, senses the fact that in a golden honeycomb the worker bees labour hard to feed an idle drone and a queen bee, but themselves struggle for the bare necessities of life. This realization makes her mould and shape her son Rabi as the champion of the supressed Indians in the British rule.

Prince Bawajiraj III falls in love with a common girl Mohini who has some fire in her soul. Taking the cue from the Queen Mother she refuses to be tied down by the conventional bonds of lawful marriage. She is content merely to be the Maharaja's
concubine, "a status that guarantees to her the freedom to bring up their son Rabindranath as she desires" (A. V. Rao, "Golden Honeycomb" 80).

Mohini, though a commoner is a strong character with an identity of her own. Bawajiraj's riches and royalty cannot make her change her mind. She understands the political intricacies of the state. But she does not want the British rulers to exploit her son. She shields him and carefully places him under an Indian Pandit who stimulates the little boy Rabi in the Indian way. She brushes aside the suggestion of educating his son in an English boarding school lest he would become a dummy ruler like his father. She aids, "the growth of Rabi's individual consciousness in terms of cultural awareness - a desideratum to his English education" (A. V. Rao, "Golden Honeycomb" 80).

The trip of Rabi around Devapur is an eye opener to him. As the heir to the throne, he gets first hand knowledge about his country. His mother tenderly makes him realise the suffering of his people because they are exploited by the foreign rulers. This realization leads him to a new awakening of India's pitiable condition and his father's role as an ineffective ruler. Mohini is instrumental in making Rabi the champion of the people.
At the crucial point when there is the protest march by the people, Mohini directs the Maharaja towards his duty. The Maharajah is relying dangerously on allegiance and at the time of crisis he wearily wants to be allowed to live in peace. Mohini reminds him:

All you have to do is go down, to that square there – It’s your square remember, named after you, not Bania Sahib – and tell them you’ll give them the peanuts they’re asking for. They look on you as their father. Why can’t you behave like one? (GH 457)

The non-violent mass of Devapur has finally won the sympathy of the Maharaja only because of Mohini. As against the wish of the British, the Maharaja for once has taken a quick decision of averting the needles massacre of his own people. The final words of Mohini reflect her sense of self fulfilment. She tells Bawajiraj 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. (GH 465)

It is true that Mohini “retains her identity throughout and never allows herself to be controlled by the foreign imperial touch” (Geetha 133). Her greatest achievement is in shaping her son to bring out a new generation more conscious of Indian nationalism, sterner and dedicated in its life and outlook. In spite of exploitation by her westernised husband, her response is nationalistic and ethical.

Usha, the daughter of Tirumal Rao, the Brahmin Dewan of Devapur in The Golden Honeycomb is also of an entirely different cast of a womanhood with a bold, courageous nature. She identifies herself with India and fights for the people against the exploitation of the West. She is every inch a “New woman.” Usha with her revolutionary dramatic performance in her childhood prepares the readers for her leading role in the struggle against the imperial power. She is different even as a child; she loves to hear stories of ancient battles and the rich heritage of her country.

Usha shares Rabi’s democratic ideal and in doing so “she
also puts off the Devan’s Brahmin aversion to Rabi’s family of warrior caste” (Pollard 31). Usha and Rabi are motivated by the same spirit and their goal is the dawn of freedom. Usha is described thus:

A woman of a pared and lucid grace with whom he [Rabi] could talk, or be still, who could move him, and move with him, effortlessly picking up where he left off their common strand. A woman who was at one with him, their lives interlocking at more than one level, with whom it pleased him to feel, he could wait, or not, to come together. In their own country, in their own time. (GH 455)

She not only symbolises the radical aspiration and idealism of an awakened people but also represents the royal commitment to the welfare of the people.

She is very clever in working for her people. She awakens their sensibility of bondage by organising campaigns and attending meetings. She motivates the people to follow the Gandhian principles and teaches them the strength of non-violence. She is very proud to be on the side of the suffering people and assert their spirit of independence. Usha symbolises
Rabi's triumphs. When the British yield to the masses of Devapur she comments, "Yes. A Splendid beginning. . . 'Now what next do you think?' She was radiant" (GH 465). Usha can be rightly called the custodian of Indian culture and maker of the history of modern India. Her response is that of a herald of changing tradition and also the agent of change itself.

The collected feminine response of women affected by cultural dichotomy appears contradictory and ambivalent. However there is a new awareness of fulfilment of feminine identities as represented by these women characters. From their response it is evident what woman in the Indian cultural context aspires to. At the same time Kamala Markandaya does not want her characters to forget their country and its ancient heritage. This amounts to a dual response. It is quite obvious that through the East-West encounter, she tries to criticise her inherited ancient tradition and at the same time tries to renew it. From the ancient traditional roles of the first group, the novelist has moved further in her delineation of women in the second group and made them face the modern predicament.

The feminine response of these two groups projects the various images of woman in the sociological context. The
kaleidoscopic facets of these women impart various vignettes of life. William Walsh observes:

The [various] situations enable the author to reflect on the tensions, the strength and the inadequacies and aspirations of . . . Indian Life . . . . The mixture of moods, the friction of faith and reason, the quarrel of old and young, are beautifully pointed out. ("The Indian Novel in English" 57)

From her Indian women's ceaseless endurance, it is evident what they in their cultural context aspire to. At the same time she does not allow her women to forget their ancient heritage. Whatever the problem caused by native or foreign societies, the man and the woman experience the impact together, although their responses may be different. Both the men and women characters of Kamala Markandaya find themselves at sea when the alien culture and values are forced down their throat. Besides the problem of making both ends meet, keeping body and soul together, they are also rushed off their feet into psychological and emotional traumas. The heart-breaking trauma of the male mind is therefore developed in the next chapter.