Chapter Five

Summation

Exploitation Syndrome lies dormant in the fictional corpus of Kamala Markandaya. Through this syndrome the novelist exhibits her disapproval of existing injustice, social inequalities, exploitation of various kinds, cruelty of man to man, irrational attitudes, disintegration of the individual, erosion of human values and colonial imperialism. As a lady who has great concern for social upliftment, she passionately protests against unequal distribution of power, privileges, property and social resources. She raises a powerful voice against racism and the atrocities perpetrated on humanity.

The novelist deplores inhuman disruption of the village in the name of progress by raising a tannery which symbolises an external agency, the cause of environmental and ethical pollution. She presents realistically the striking changes that have been taking place at the social, economic and cultural spheres in the pre and post Independent Indian rural society in the wake of industrialization. She, as a highly committed writer, seldom fails to voice her genuine
concern for the loss of human values. Like Thomas Hardy who has expressed in his novels his deep humanistic concern and anxiety for the loss of human values due to large scale industrialization, Kamala Markandaya exposes the social tremors caused by the wide ranging industrialization and modernization, in her novels.

Her rural world represents all Indian villages with their social structure, agrarian economy, superstitions, traditions and customs. It is these villages that are affected by the exploitation syndrome. The real Indian village-folk who are continually victimised at that time still continue to exist even today. The vivid details of how the village is exploited is so evocatively described that the Indian way of life comes fully alive. The socio-economic divisions of the village give a veritable picture of the traditional Indian village.

The villages in India are molested by deep-rooted social evils which often get repeated in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Symptoms like landlordism, hoarding, black-marketing and class distinctions operating on the village community lead to the exploitation syndrome. These perceptible forces jeopardize the blissful and harmonious life
of the village. The tradition-bound peasant society disintegrates on the physical, emotional and moral plane. The tender human bonds which existed among the members of the agrarian society have started disappearing.

(With the advent of industrialization, introduced in the form of a tannery in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the quietitude and peaceful atmosphere of the village are disturbed. The intrinsic harmony within the family and the society disappears slowly. The tannery stands for modernization, exploitation of the poor labourers, dispossession and finally the uprooting or the complete destruction of the village community. It also represents a mercenary society in which humanitarianism is valueless.

The image of a serpent in the garden of Eden exemplifies the theme of exploitation. The tannery rears its ugly head like a serpent into the rural settlement, devouring its green open spaces, polluting the pure and clean atmosphere and tempting the innocent villagers into greed and ambition. One of the saddest results in the village is the moral degradation.)
Textile industry is the cause of Apu's ruin in A Handful of Rice. The ready made shop "Eve" exploits the poor tailor depriving him of his due wages. The fashionable shops sell the readymade garments for a very high price and the shopkeepers get a huge amount as gain. Ravi is furious against the society which is the cause for his suffering in the city. It is a common thing in nature that the small fish is devoured by the big one and the big one by the biggest. Man is no exception. By exploiting the weakling the fittest survive. The weak always go under. Though much is spoken about the equality of man as man, class distinction always keeps the poor and the rich apart. The novelist deprecates the devitalized and degenerated social system which has nothing to offer for the betterment of the poor. Markandaya indirectly emphasises that India must reorient her social life on a new basis.

Kamala Markandaya's novels are authentic records of the stern rule of the sceptre which oppresses the sickle in various ways. "Sceptre" stands for power, authority and rule. It always soars high and places the people belonging to the lower strata of society under its thumb. "Sceptre" symbolises
the British who rule the Indians with very strict codes. Industrialization and western technology are ways in which the British exploit the natives in India. The peasant families in *Nectar in a Sieve* get dislodged and they are diseased and dislocated by economical exploitation.

"Sickle" represents the peasants, the labourers, the tribals, and also the native rulers. These people are often cruelly treated, mercilessly chased and terribly traumatised. They are underpaid and their wages are meagre. They struggle hard to make both ends meet. The fruit of their toil goes to the master and they moil in utter poverty.

Due to urbanization of the rural scene, there is mass exodus from rural settlement to urban lands. These strange lands provide no sustenance as expected. The migrated rural people face countless problems in the urban civilized societies. As they are exploited to the core, they feel frustrated and fed up after their belated awareness of the ruthless nature of city life. Exile from the familiar habitat ruins their mind and spirit. Moreover no compensation is given to them by the English bosses who encroach into their lands under the pretext of industrialization. Rukmani and
Nathan in Nectar in a Sieve, the tribal community in The Coffer Dams and the fishing folk in Pleasure City are deprived of their possessions without any compensation.

The encroachment of western technology in The Coffer Dams is the cause of dislocation of the tribals from the site of the dam where they worshipped the river as a veritable god. Though the dam really brings the unfamiliar people, the Indian and the British together, it does not help in bridging the gulf created by the cultural dichotomy. The same theme of construction of a holiday resort in Pleasure City upsets the sea life of the fishermen community. The complex Shalimar shatters the traditional mode of their living and it entices away several lads. Under the pretext of uplifting the country where they have landed, the British better their lot and grab the material benefits by introducing schemes that exploit the natives. Kamala Markandaya lashes at the colonial attitude of the Britishers and their pursuit of materialistic gains through exploitation. Every activity of theirs is calculated and subordinated to the motive of bigger profits.

Like the peasants and the tribals, the native rulers too are oppressed by the sceptre and they belong to the category
of the exploited. The British crown curtails the power of the native kings and they are never rulers in the real sense of the term but mere vassals. They are trained in such a way as to aid the British rulers rather than to perform their duties as kings and look after their subjects. The British Nobles have many special privileges. The poor subjects are forced to pay exorbitant levies and undue taxes. The native ruler Bawajiraj III in *The Golden Honeycomb* turns a deaf ear to the hue and cry of his subjects because he is firmly under the strong hold of the British rulers. The mill workers' little attempts of protest marches and strikes do not gather momentum and they shout in vain.

Unlike the labouring class, who are left without any compensation, the native rulers are allowed to live in luxury for their submissiveness to the British. Bawajiraj III is the best example of the native ruler who lives in great splendour. He is fully satisfied with the material benefits given to him by the British lords and so he never resents the alien rulers. He becomes so thick-skinned that he does not sense or feel the power of exploitation on him or on his subjects. The British very subtly camouflage their rule by giving the native rulers
pomp and pageantry and making them loyal to the British rule.

The characters in Kamala Markandaya's fictional corpus respond differently when they are faced with the exploitation syndrome. The novelist has a keen interest in analysing woman characters and most of her female creations are victims. It has been the practice for a long time to brand the women as the weaker sex. Having given that label, they are subjected to the tyranny of the male and allotted a subordinate position in society. They are placed in such critical situations that exploitation is inescapable. The exploited women characters in Markandaya's novels belong to two distinct groups. The first group consists of traditional women who stand for the Indian ideals of womanhood. Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve, Sarojini in A Silence of Desire, and Vasatha in The Nowhere Man retain the traditional virtues of modesty, fortitude and sacrifice. They cannot be destroyed from their Indian roots because they have a native simplicity protecting them. These simple women's roots are so firm that all the tremors of their neighbourhood cannot
disturb their equilibrium. Though they are exploited they are yet the symbols of the triumph of Indian values.

The women with progressive attitude are victims of the society's unjust persecutions. Mira and Roshan in Some Inner Fury and Anasuya in Possession acquire invincible strength to carry the banner of high ideals of the new India. Though Indian by birth, these women are westernised because of their education and travels. They resent exploitation in its varied forms. They shed their ancient role of being passive sufferers and strive hard to achieve their goals. There are moments when these helpless and famished destitutes rise above the oppression of exploitation and emerge as new liberated women.

Kamala Makandaya also portrays the traumatic experiences of men characters when exploitation syndrome affects them. The mental landscape of the sensitive suffering individuals is laid bare. Most of her men are tortured individuals through whose mind the novelist projects the contours of social conditions. These men are not only emotionally wronged but are also shaken at the existential level. The men who are incapable of communication like
Dandekar or unable to relate themselves meaningfully to the surroundings like Ravi are caught up in the dilemma of existence.

The cause of trauma in men are industrialization, domestic breach, clash of reason and faith, cultural dichotomy, irreparable physical sickness and death. Moreover they are faced with unemployment, violence and instability in the society around them. All these have shaken them to their bones. They are no longer confident. The Renaissance man was ambitious enough to reach the topless towers of Ilium. The romantic rebels had an intrinsic faith. But the modern men in Kamala Markandaya's fiction are restless wanderers. Since man has lost the confidence in his powers which he had earlier, he experiences trauma.

Deeply hurt and emotionally embittered, the men belonging to the older generation are passive sufferers. They come under terrible exploiting situations but they do not protest against inhumanity. They bear the painful yoke patiently. They are dashed against the rock of poverty and tossed into the waves of hunger. Nathan and Apu belong to
this group. Deeply affected by the exploitation syndrome Nathan and Apu suffer physical ailments and finally perish.

Srinivas in *The Nowhere Man* and Bawajiraj III in *The Golden Honeycomb* are victimised Indians who are traumatised by the East-West encounters. As they become the victims of the cultural clash of the two modes of life, they are in a traumatic condition. The White man’s racial prejudice and colour consciousness, turn Srinivas into a blundering, bewildering and hurt spectator. His experiences sea-saw between the two opposing poles the East and the West. He grows lonely and insulates himself against the world. He finds a safety-valve in his imagination which gives him a dream world with all its dimensions blurred and edges softened. The colour of one’s skin is the yardstick that the British have, to measure the worth of an Indian. In trying situations Srinivas remains passive.

Kamala Markandaya voices her strong plea against violence of all sort. Her aim is to reveal the pathetic condition of the coloured people who have made England their own country. In the bitter portrayal of the anticoloured migrants, she does not attempt to analyse the cause of racial
conflict but cries aloud out of rage and she protests against inhumanity that man practise against his herd.

Bawajiraj III is a puppet ruler through whom the British enforce their exploitation by means of schemes and counter schemes. The state of Waji excellently presents the woeful tribulations of our country under an alien British Government. He is touched and toned by the British to achieve their ends and to fill their coffers. He acts as a medium to carry on the interests of the British Raj even at the cost of his own people, the Devapuris, and their resources. Through a representative of a princely state and its ruler, the novelist depicts the pitiable plight of India under the alien rule.

The younger generation of men react strongly against the vexations of life and become rebels. Exploitation does not make them passive but rebellious. According to psychologists rebellions become a medium for revealing the abysses and recesses of the human mind. The young men Ravi, Shanmugam, Krishnan and Rabi rebel against the existing order of society.
Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* rebels against economic forces that divide men, against the unjust, inhuman restrictions of a society that abounds with evil. Ravi is furious at the intolerable general conditions in the society. One principal reason for his anger is the disparity between his own working class origin and the aristocrats. In other words, he is conscious of the class distinction which he strongly disapproves. He is bitter because his life is full of disappointments. The rancorous Ravi symbolises the fury of the younger generation that felt betrayed and ruined by the society.

Another example of a rebel is Rabi in *The Golden Honeycomb*. Though a British approved heir to the throne of Devapur, he refuses to be a vassal like his father and champions the cause of the Devapuris. When the truth that his admired father has no power but only pomp, dawns on him, he is really hurt. The general condition of his native state and his victimised subjects motivate him to get involved in direct action. He has broken the prolonged waiting by means of a demonstration or a shout. Rabi has great faith in the unhemmed horizon of man's ability to change the world
and reminds the readers of the inexhaustible fund of surging creative energy latent in ordinary folk like the Devapuris. The mass protest against the alien rule under the leadership of Rabi and Usha is a leap towards setting India free from the bondage of the British. They protest against the blinkered codes and insurmountable barriers imposed on them by the British rulers and implemented by their Indian counterparts.

The next group of Westernised Indians such as Kitsamy in Some Inner Fury, Dandekar in A Silence of Desire and Laxman in The Nowhere Man exploit their own lot like their parents or wives. In the contemporary civilization of India, the indigenous Indian tradition and the imported western ideals collide and many Indians happen to be the product of these two cultures. Problems in their homes arise because of their Indian family members' inability to adjust themselves to the alien culture. Hence these westernised Indians become victims of their own prejudice against the Indian mode of life. They foolishly consider that they are superior to the Indians. Their trauma is caused because they try to ape an alien way of living.
Kit in Some Inner Fury exploits his wife Premala with his western notion and she becomes a poor victim of his Anglo-mania. He hurts her always for her Indian sensibility and finally he becomes the cause of her death. He is unable to understand and appreciate the aspiration of his own wife who has been bred on oriental values of humanism.

Dandekar in A Silence of Desire has ideological difference with his wife. In his home there is an incessant conflict between Eastern tradition and Western progress. The antithetical natures of the husband and wife cause the trauma in him. His spirits droop in melancholy. His torment of mind makes him a meditative and suffering being after long years of thought-free life. As the gathering storm gains momentum, Dandekar's marital bliss and domestic serenity are crushed. His tension, strain and depression are the bitter fruits of an ideological ambivalence.

Laxman in The Nowhere Man does not inherit any Indian character. His roots are completely cut off and hence the familiar sentiments of his Indian parents irk him. His callousness pushes Srinivas, his father into isolation. He is traumatised because his father has not shed his Indianness
even after his long associations with the West. He leaves his parents because they adhere to the Indian culture. He alienates from his father and there is no bond of affection between the father and the son because Laxman is completely anglicized.

The westernised Indians are the victims of cultural dichotomy. There are glaring differences between the Orient and the Occident because they belong to two different regions of the world. There can be no compromise between cultures so widely apart as the East and the West. This cultural dichotomy is part and parcel of the exploitation syndrome and this leads to the trauma in the westernised Indians.

Valmiki in *Possession* stands midway between the East and the West. He is an adolescent like Sarojini in *Two Virgins*. Though exploited by the powers of the West, he remains true to his culture. His roots are firmly laid as in the case of Rukmani and both these characters return to their native land, though they are separated for a while from their familiar habitat. The pitiable plight of the artist in the westernised society is that it tries to smother and exploit him
through all possible means. The West gradually wants to sap the soul of the illiterate Val and he feels the unnerving effect of the corrupting influences. The dilemma of Valmiki symbolises the dilemma of independent India and the decision he takes to seek nourishment for the growth of his art from his spiritual roots is the ideal that Markandaya wishes India to follow.

The men characters, whatever group they may belong to, are traumatised when they encounter the exploitation syndrome. Often the men and women in Kamala Markandaya’s novels are tortured individuals through whose minds, the novelist reveals the changing social, national or human condition. The torments of individuals articulate the zeitgeist of contemporary Indian life. The changes in social conditions and human values are configurated in fiction in terms of human relationship, and the exploitation tortures and shatters people mentally and physically.

The novelist’s portrait gallery is rich with characters who are uniquely individual and yet symbolic of the suffering humanity. Hence in her novels there is a cry of outrage, a protest against exploitation syndrome which is the result of
man’s inhumanity to man. The characters who are victims of exploitation are not restricted to a particular place, severed from the rest of the world. They are the genuine progeny of common humanity.

Kamala Markandaya possesses a unique power as a novelist to transmute the contemporaneous to the enduring, and the unique to the universal. She deliberately avoids naming the location of the novels. Her first novel **Nectar in A Sieve** is set in an anonymous village in South India because it becomes the representative of millions of similar villages in India which are affected by industrialization and its vicious aftermath. By avoiding concrete particulars, she makes exploitation a universal phenomenon.

Effective use of images emphasises the theme of exploitation. The image of the hunter and the hunted in **A Handful of Rice**, the dove and the eagle in **Two Virgins** and the bird catcher in **The Coffer Dams**, are all self explanatory. They symbolise exploitation in its varied forms.

The young men belonging to the lower rung of the society question the privilege of the aristocracy. They
painfully realise the corrupt ways in which money has accrued, the class distinction which has taken firm roots and the disparities between the rich and the poor. It is true that India is a land of glaring contrasts with prosperity and penury existing side by side. On the one hand the poor have their pots without rice and the lamps without oil. On the other hand, the rich in luxurious clubs fritter away their time and waste money without forethought. All these conditions provoke the rebellious spirit in the younger generation.

Victims and rebels, they are more vibrant with life and surge up at moments with jet like energy resisting the forces that corrode them. This is true of the majority of the characters in the novels. Very few are passive. These downtrodden who have suffered so much are the cream and the resilient core of Indian civilization. In truth, the totality of Kamala Markandaya’s fiction is a chorus, a song composed in tunes of both pangs and protest, humiliation and honour, above all despair and courage.

Exploitation is widespread everywhere. Though man is fast moving to the twenty first century with technological
advancements, jet travels, computers and robots, exploitation finds its free play in all walks of life. Rukmani, Nathan, Srinivas and Bawajiraj III are all in the inferno of misery because they are exploited. Kamala Markandaya articulates her compassion and concern for the victims of so many wrongs and so much misunderstanding. She wants to seek salvation for the lonely and the humble creatures of the soil.

The malaise affecting the society and deforming it cannot be eradicated just as syndromes or hereditary diseases are not easily curable. All that medical science can offer at this time is treatment of the symptoms of those genetic diseases that can be managed by administering drugs. Syndromes can be prevented to a particular extent by means of genetic counselling, avoidance of consanguinous marriage, prenatal diagnosis and gene therapy. To cure a hereditary disease, the abnormal genes would have to be replaced by normal ones in all of the patients’ cells if the disease is not to be passed on to the offspring. It is impossible to do this by any existing medical techniques. However it may be soon possible to correct the symptoms of
a few, selected hereditary diseases by Somatic gene-therapy. Though the disease cannot be cured completely, the symptoms of the disease are reduced or eliminated by introducing normal genes into somatic cells of an individual.

Like the doctor who treats the symptoms, the rebels probe into the social malaise and rip open its ugly sores. They may condemn the cut throat competition that is rampant in the modern world. They are furious to find the unscrupulous pursuit of money and material success. They rebel against the anomalies and contradictions that exist in the different classes of society. They lash out at the economic disparity that widen the gulf among classes of people. They fume at the silent suffering of the landless peasantry who are victimised by the tyranny of the landlords and also the advent of industrialization. The cultural contrast, the racial tensions which result in identity crisis and alienation provoke the rebellious youth to question racial discrimination.

The younger generation of underprivileged men to whatever social rank they may belong, question the social
evils. These men claim equal rights for all. They expect a resurgence of a new order by upsetting the hoary tradition of India. The rebels in Kamala Markandaya's novels shout to disturb and destroy the existing world order because they wish to construct and to create a superior world of just social values. The idea of reshaping the world is emphasised in Omar Khayyām:

To grasp the scheme of things entire
Would we not shatter it to bits
And remould it to our hearts desire. (146)

The distinct voice of protest may be a cry in the wilderness or a wasted talent presently but would definitely come to prevail sooner or later. A few positive steps taken steadily and boldly can make life worth-living. The prevailing value system of India should come in for a radical revision and the social institutions should be thoroughly reformed so that life becomes more agreeable for all. The cudgel is taken up by the youth to reform the society.

Unlike the older generation of passive rulers of India who voluntarily allowed themselves to be exploited by the West, Rabi in The Golden Honeycomb rebels against the
western political overlordship. The stag at bay becomes a lion and leads his people to a new awakening. The uprising of the Indian populace under his leadership is the first leap of the Devapuris towards freedom. He is optimistic that his people will live together in a free India in a spirit of reconciliation without the interference of the alien rulers.

The tannery, the western technology and the British rulers are the agents severing the bonds of kinship and citizenship. The youth are hopeful that the period of disruption and dissonance will vanish and a new realm of quiet and peace will be restored to the succeeding generations. In the new social stratum which will emerge, the oppressed and the suppressed will be the members living a life with their rights as men. In such a resurgence of a new order, one can expect to claim the right of equality.

The final note is the glint of hope. The voice raised in protest need not be a weakling's voice in the wilderness. It is often raised in authority and with strength to support the oppressed and the victimised lot. Nevertheless the younger generation of men feel the urgent need to denounce the old institution and customs which cause exploitation.
The rebellious youth may not enjoy the fruits of the laborious task of building a new social order, which will be free from the exploitation syndrome. They foresee a beacon light ahead. The seed for a change that is sown in the minds of the multitude of their countrymen will take roots and grow firmly. Amidst dark clouds of exploitation they visualise the silver lining. At least posterity will enjoy life in an India where all the distinctions of class and colour are reconciled. Perhaps Kamala Markandaya visualises an India which will be altogether a different land in which all the polarities of the society will be compromised, if not destroyed and man will be tolerant towards his fellowbeing.

In the medical world, the pain caused by the syndrome can be alleviated with the help of drugs. In the human society it is hoped that the youth will emerge successful in a few generations. Without this hope, none will lift a finger to destroy the exploitation syndrome. Pope said long back “hope springs eternal in human breast.” A new pattern of life so contrary to the present is expected to be born. Exploitation syndrome has brought about suffering both physical and mental.
A sea change for a better mode of life is visualised. Kamala Markandaya hopes to move the hearts of the exploiters by portraying the havoc caused amidst multitudes, by their thoughtless, selfish exploitation. Indirectly, she implies the reforms that ought to be introduced, an economy which ensures a fair distribution of necessaries, and a social order which will give equality to man. In this sense she may be called the crusader against exploitation of any kind. She affirms that the spirit can triumph in spite of the exploitation syndrome if it takes a firm hand to resist evil with courage and confidence as the slogan of the US Army goes:

The difficult we do immediately;

The impossible lay a little longer.