Chapter Two

Sceptre and the Sickle

It is patent in our days that not alone is wealth accumulated, but immense power and despotic economic domination are concentrated in the hands of a few, and that those few are frequently not the owners, but only the trustees and directors of invested funds which they administer at their good pleasure.

Pope Pious X

Kamala Markandaya presents a typical Indian society during the pre and post-Independent period in her novels. In that society it is quite obvious that there is a demarcation between two hostile classes, the ruler and the ruled. The rulers move about with pomp and pride exercising their power on the ruled. The ruled are very often submissive and meekly accept their fate like sacrificial lambs, becoming victims of the exploitation syndrome.
There are various causes for the betters to exploit the less fortunate. In the novels of Kamala Markandaya "Sceptre" symbolises the British who rule the Indian mass with an iron hand and exploit them ruthlessly by hook or by crook. Industrialization introduced by the British is one of the ways in which they exploit the primitive villages in India. The villagers look up with awe and bewilderment at the technological set up. The change that accompanies industrialization is ushered within the twinkling of an eye. Carlyle and Ruskin have delineated the evil effects of industrialization. Goldsmith, has immortalised the metamorphosis due to industrialization in the poem "The Deserted village":

Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride
When once destroyed, can never be supplied. (51-56)

It is this evil aspect of industrialization that Kamala
Markandaya stresses in her novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and in *A Handful of Rice*.

Allied with industrialization, the encroachment of western technology in the Indian soil plays havoc on the traditional life of the tribals. They are too simple to accept the new influence. They are caught unawares in its strong jaws and they are crushed under its pressure. As a result they are forced to quit their familiar place of settlement. Technological invasion and modernization do leave scars on the tribal culture which has been existing from time immemorial in the hilly regions. Kamala Markandaya presents dexterously the corrosion of human values by the encroachment of western civilization in the two novels *The Coffer Dams* and *Pleasure City*.

The novelist explores the theme of exploitation in another angle in *The Golden Honeycomb*. Industrialization is tactfully introduced by the British in the lower strata of the Indian society. But the sceptre of the British crown falls also on the native rulers with a bang. The British empire had its sway over the Indian princes by the Subsidiary Alliance and the Doctrine of Lapse. By means of the Subsidiary Alliance,
the British ruled India with the help of Residents, Political agents, Commanders, I.C.S. Officers, Governor Generals and Viceroy later. Thus the British were denuding the powers of the native rulers and degrading them to the state of vassals. Kamala Markandaya with her perceptive eyes, views the British-ruled India in *The Golden Honeycomb* and lays bare the intrigues and techniques adopted by the British in exploiting the Indian princes, particularly in the princely state of Devapur. The sceptre deals a deadly blow on the sickle, that is, the poor peasants, the labourers, tribals and also the native rulers.

Kamala Markandaya has first hand knowledge about the microcosm of the poverty-stricken class in general. Her task in her novels is to interpret the real India of the villages to the West in the form that they could easily understand and estimate its economic condition. As a journalist, she has rubbed shoulders with many sections of Indian and European life in India. She has heard the villagers groaning under poverty because the village life has been sucked dry by the English bosses who exploit them. All these have left an indelible scar on her mind and hence she has written about
that sect of population who are continually being assaulted by exploitation.

A few decades ago in both the towns and villages in India, a revolutionary shake up of the entire pattern of Indian life was taking place. This affected every aspect of the society - political, economic, cultural and religious. Even today it can be seen at work, in the growing industrialization of the country and in the growth of large cities. Thanks to science, human life can be made very comfortable and far-reaching in all fields of human thought and endeavour, but there are also corresponding dangers and terrors flowing from a technological set up.

The impact of industrialization and the consequent urbanization can lead to the prosperity of rural families or to their disintegration. The tannery in Nectar in a Sieve is the root cause of exploitation and ruin of many families in South India. Its imperceptible and lasting consequences filter down to all the layers of the village, geographical, economic, social and moral.

The rich townspeople enlisted by the European bosses start the tannery which is the cause for exploiting the poor
peasants. Like marauders, the townsmen come with cartloads of bricks, stones, cement and various other materials needed for construction work. The supervisor directs the building operations with "much play of his authority, directing them with loud voice and many gestures but doing not a stroke of work himself" (NS 30). The red-faced white proprietor does not stay in the village along with the labourers but visits the construction site now and then. Thus the foundation of an industrial society is laid. It rests on the principles of exploitation of labour and absenteeism.

Moreover, the rustics have to shuffle and make arrangements for the white men to stay in the village. So far the villagers have been leading a simple life, characterised by contentment and mutual helpfulness. The white men "took over the huts that had lain empty" or dotted the "maidan even more thickly with the huts they built for themselves and their families" (NS 33). The children of the village are deprived of the pleasure of playing in the maidan. "In our maidan, in our village he [the overseer] stood, telling us to go" (NS 30).
Not only the children, but also the petty professionals find it very difficult to earn their bread. The village cobbler is left jobless and he strives hard to make both ends meet. So he has to pack up from his familiar habitat and leave for fresh woods and pastures new.

Moreover, Nathan, the tenant farmer is wedded to the land and he knows no other career except that behind the plough. His activities hover about the field. When the harvest is plentiful, the times are golden for his family. He expects that with a series of favourable seasons, he will be affluent enough to buy for himself the land he tills on lease. He derives his strength and sustenance from the soil. Often the monsoon plays ducks and drakes but Nathan is not upset by the vagaries of the weather. "While there was land there was hope" for Nathan (NS 136).

Even though the sons of the Nathans drift away from the village and the farm, Nathan continues to hold on firmly to the land. It is only when the landlord, tempted by a high price, sells away the land to the tannery, that Nathan finds himself completely at sea. The cup of his misery is full when he is asked to quit the leased land in which he has been
toiling and sweating for about three decades. He is not offered any tangible compensation for the potential inconveniences caused to him either by the tannery or by the landlord. Neither Rukmani nor Nathan protests against the great injustice caused to them. They passively endure their fate and swallow their sorrow. They are deprived even of a near dilapidated mud house in which they have been living for years together.

At Nathan’s decision to go to urban lands, Rukmani’s existence becomes “full of the husks of despair, dry, lifeless” (NS 136). The tannery is the cause of their exodus. The rustic couple with a heavy heart and low spirit move to the urban society foreseeing a bleak future. Rukmani ruminates:

Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men, staining the clear soft green that had once coloured our village and cleaving its cool silences with clamour. . . . It had changed the face of our village
beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways. (NS 135)

Uprooted from the village Nathan, the honest, hardworking farmer becomes an urban labourer, one in the vast multitude. “Better to starve where we were bred than live here” (NS 168) becomes the cry of the frustrated, tortured soul. Unable to withstand the hard task of stone breaking and exposed to an entirely new environment, Nathan dies. His tragic death in the alien, unfriendly city is a standing illustration against the curse of industrialization on the old village life. C. Sanyal Samares observes:

The author points out how disintegrating values of modern life ruin the pristine simplicity of human soul. The death of Nathan in utter poverty establishes the fact that it is better to have faith and suffer and die than to live on vacillating between different sets of values. (Indianness in the Major Indian-English Novels 91)

While commenting on the evils of industrialization, Kamala Markandaya strikes at absentee landlordism, which
had firm roots in India. As a tenant farmer, Nathan has to pay the land tax to his landlord for the lease of the land whether his bounty is full or nil. The Zamindar sends his agent Sivaji to collect the dues from Nathan. As repeated droughts reduce the family to starvation, Nathan has absolutely no pie in his pockets. Most of the vessels and good clothes have to be sold away to pay part of their dues. The old couple struggle for survival in a society riven by marked inequalities. The society in which they live crushes the poor and the helpless. The exploitation of the tenant farmer by the Zamindar is revealed when Nathan laments:

\[ \text{I \ the landlord can wring from us his moneys and care not for the misery he evokes, for indeed it would be difficult for any man to see another man starve and his wife and children as well; or to enjoy the profits born of such travail. (NS 77)} \]

Those who live at the mercy of the land always experience tragedy in their lives. N. K. Jain is of the view, "the fruit of the peasant's labour goes either to the landlord or is destroyed by the ravages of nature" ("Kamala Markandaya :
Nectar in a Sieve 79-80). If the farmer cannot pay the dues he is denied the powers of tilling the land. So the farmer has a constant fear of insecurity.

Another evil effect of industrialization is that the young men of the village are weaned away from the land and they march to the tannery to seek employment there. Correspondingly their labour is denied to the land. The factory pays better wages than the farm and the temptation to accept industrial labour is too strong to be resisted. In the village economy the boys in a family are very important for they can contribute substantially in the farm work. Though Nathan has five sons, none of them is available for assisting him in the farm. Arjun and Thambi, the first two sons of Nathan, join the tannery for better prospects.

The two boys are not passive like their father or mother. They do not want to accept the slavish treatment in the factory and they revolt against conditions of work there. They lead a strike and learn bitterly that co-operation among workers is not easy to obtain. Yet, they oppose the capitalistic exploitation and oppression of the common worker by industrial tycoons. There are touches of socialism
in Arjun which bring him in confrontation with the owners of the tannery who stand for soulless industry and capitalism. He is the representative of the thousands of rural young men who under the disturbing impact of modernity and industrialization only to be oppressed by the capitalists. Hunger and starvation drive them away from home only to be lost for ever. The intrusion of industrialization disintegrates Rukmani's family. Two of Nathan’s sons fall victims to the tannery's captivating manoeuvres and it claims another son, thereby revealing itself as a “monstrous pit of death” (Bhagwat S. Goyal, Culture and Commitment Aspect of Indian Literature in English 113).

After the advent of the tannery, life in the village undergoes both a qualitative and quantitative change. The villagers are after ready money and better wages from the tannery. There is a ready market for the produce of the villagers and they are able to get higher prices for what they sell. A spiral of inflation begins and the ancient settled families find themselves in tight corners. The village hawkers make a virtue of the tannery crowd and increase the prices of their commodities and exploit the situation. Rukmani cries out in despair:
[They] had made the bazaar prices too high

... but what could I buy with the money with
prices so high everywhere? No sugar or dhal
or ghee have we tasted since they came, and
should have had none so long as they
remained. (NS 32)

Inflation, a social evil brings havoc in the village economy
Kamala Markandaya points out how the simple village folks
become so engrossed with money that no one thinks of
another but schemes only for his own money. Samares
notices:

... industry and modern technology invade
the village in the shape of a tannery and
sinister consequences issue from this impact.
Rukmani, the peasant woman, looks with
horror how the age-old rustic life is shattered
by the intrusion of industrialization. (90)

The monopolistic buying up of the goods produced in
the village make the situation rather worse. Biswas, the
money lender is the rural Shylock and he is invariably an
agent of evil and economic exploitation. During the time of flood, Rukmani, tired and hungry goes from pillar to post in order to buy rice with the little money she has. She goes to Biswas and with great fuss he gives her only two ollocks of rice for two rupees. Rukmani pathetically says, "It is very little for two rupees" (NS 47). Biswas replies severely, "Take it or leave it. I can get double that sum from the tanners . . . ." (NS 47). He makes the best use of Rukmani's hard times and gives her very little money after getting her valuables. Biswas thrives on others' misfortunes. As Joan F. Adkins points out:

... the tannery becomes a symbol of evil – the evil of materialism. The self contained agriconomy is transformed to a competitive, monetary culture – from tilling to bargaining – with concomitant effects of selfishness, deception, and greed. Moreover, the family, traditionally the spiritual representation of unity and preservation of life, ultimately disintegrates as sons leave the toil of the land
for easy money to the factory. ("Kamala
Markandaya: Indo- Anglian Conflict as
Unity" 93)

A similar situation arises in Subbiah's rice shop. When
the war comes and brings in its wake food rationing, it does
not take Subbaiah long to master the art of making money
out of the needs of the hungry. The customer expects one
and a half seers of rice for half a rupee because he used to
get three seers for a rupee. But Subbiah demands another
eight annas to get a seer. (R.K.Narayan, "Half a Rupee
Worth" 141-150).

One of the saddest features of the poverty spread by
industrialization is the disregard for values. The libertines
like Kunthi have a field day with the tannery crowd to trade
their charms. The novelist describes her dubious way of life:

She spent a lot of her time making
unnecessary journeys into the town where,
with her good looks and provocative body, she
could be sure of admiration, and more, from
the young men. (NS 50)
The grinding poverty drives even such a good girl as Ira to earn a little money by the sale of her body and she feeds her family and especially her little brother Kuti to prevent him from dying of starvation. Ira is not only a victim of human monstrosity, but also a shocking picture of human degradation that hunger brings because of industrialization. With the painful heart of a mother, Rukmani utters in despair, "Ira had ruined herself at the hands of the throngs that the tannery attracted. None but these would have laid hands on her, even at her bidding" (NS 136).

The Indian peasant has been the victim of exploitation by the Zamindari system generation after generation. But even under those conditions there was happiness in the rural family because the forces to be contended with were known and accepted philosophically. With the advent of the machine and the factory, however, rural life undergoes a total revolution and all the old values become ineffective. The peasant is forced to forfeit his traditional role and its simple dignity. The sceptre slaps hardly and repeatedly on the sickle through an irrational and inhuman industrialization which destroys the time-honoured peasant norms without replacing them with adequate substitutes. The huge sprawling growth
of industrialization swallows up the peasants. Nathan and Rukmani are the representatives of the rural community with all its traditions, superstitions, rites and rituals. The stroke of the sceptre on the lives of the farmer couple has been constantly heard in India when the agrarian society is on the threshold of modernization. Nidhi Srivastava’s words sum up the real situation:

... *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), is the fictional epic on Indian life, which reveals the havoc of hunger, the evils of industrialization, the tension between tradition and modernity and Nature both in its pink petals and red claws, form the matrix of human existence in rural India. ("The Image of India in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 13-14)

In her maiden novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya deals with the landless peasantry class which suffer both by the advent of the industrialization and also the tyranny of the landlords. In her fifth novel *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi is exploited by the introduction of the modern textile industry. As a result, Ravi with his family suffers
hunger pangs. If Nectar in a Sieve is the story of a pathetic peasant family in a village, A Handful of Rice is the story of a tailor family in a town.

Nathan and Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve, though they are denied the right of tilling their land, accept their lot meekly. Rukmani questions, "What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change?" (NS 115) Dr. Kenny admonishes Rukmani for her silence in the face of injustice. He says, "You must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life?" (NS 115). But Ravi is not passive. He is an angry young man who voices his protest against injustice and exploitation. The young blood in him rebels against the atrocities of the sceptre. He cries aloud in protest:

The pattern must have gone on a long time, for generations, because nobody objected, nobody protested, they just kept going, on and on, and were thankful that they were able to. And yet, somewhere a leaven must have been at work ..." (HR 12)
Ravi, the young rebel protests against the pattern of life in the city, the financial condition of his family and the luxurious living of the memsahibs. The society he sees around exhibits inequality, man exploiting man, and the ugly underground activities of man. He and his father-in-law, Apu, undersell their labour and are subjected to unrestrained exploitation. There is constant struggle between the exploiter and the exploited. In circumstances of exploitation, Ravi as the representative of the affected group, fights an eternal battle to make both ends meet.

Economic conditions compel Ravi to turn his back on the peasant past and to seek his fortune in the city. The rude shock that makes him protest is his awareness that thousands of youth who are better qualified than himself are unemployed in the city. His bitter realization is that he has very few opportunities in the city which is “a man-made jungle, as full of snares and traps and unkept promises for them as for him and his like” (HR 209). In this jungle, as there is no human consideration for the deprived, the penniless Ravi starves for days together. In his dire need for food, he forces his entry into the house of Apu, a poor tailor.
He shouts, “I’m hungry, I want a meal. You let me in, do you hear?” (HR 6).

Being an apprentice under Apu, Ravi stitches clothes. Soon he realises the injustice of the paltry price of their back breaking labour because, “they live in a society (be it the village or city) which is geared to crushing the poor and the helpless” (Subash Chandra, “Crisis of Values in A Handful of Rice” 3: 88).

He gets a meagre income as he follows Apu’s code of conduct in business. Meanwhile his trade slackens and the customers leave him one by one. His dream of acquiring better prospects in life remains unfulfilled. He becomes angry and furious and rebels against that system of society which perpetuates his poverty-stricken state.

Ravi also resents the exploitation perpetrated on him by Eve, the readymade shop. He feels outraged at the merciless treatment meted out by the big businessmen to petty tailors like him. They keep a huge margin of profit, while people like Ravi get a pittance for their hard labour. Quality of work does not matter to the wealthy lot. Ravi is paid only eighty rupees per dozen as stitching charge for well
stitched jackets, but the shopkeeper gets a high rate of profit from his customers. In “Eve”, Ravi saw with astonishment:

... one of their coats. It did not look the same here: it had become vastly richer, more sumptuous, since leaving his hands – he had to look twice to make sure it was the same. But there was no doubt about it ... . Pleasure filled him ... until his eyes travelled down the straw hand-span waist where the price tab was Rs.125/- ... . Ravi was stunned ... . It shook him. (HR 68-69)

He feels outraged because of his underpayment. Ravi, an individual is crushed by an organisation, the readymade shop. As Kai Nicholson observes:

Ravi sees in the textile shop, “Eve,” the symbol of his destruction as an artisan ... . Ravi has been a victim of a capitalistic laissez-faire system of organisation which exists today in India. (A Presentation of Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo-Indian Novel 110)
The underpaid Ravi struggles hard to manage the joint family. Expenses mount high. Prices for commodities shoot skyward. His financial condition deteriorates. His aim of a better life is just a dream. He says sorrowfully:

It was the way life was: a jungle, as he and his kind knew all along the line from birth to burning ghat. In this jungle one had to fight, fiercely, with whatever weapons one had. Or go under. (HR 198)

The memsahib's attitude towards Ravi makes him rebel because they consider him as one who belongs to an inferior race. These memsahibs brought with them the English prejudice of the time. Ravi's main complaint against them is that they have always treated him like a piece of lifeless wood. Often he has seen their houses "with the flower-beds neat, with clipped lawns green, giving a general air of tidiness . . ." (HR 158). Their rooms are spacious and decorative exhibiting richness. "The European's sartorial tastes baffle him" (Susheela N. Rao, "Western Women in Eastern Novels: The Fiction of Kamala Markandaya" 53).
As a contrast Ravi has a joint-family living in a rat hole. The memsahib has “house coats, dresses, slacks, flowered shirts to wear over them . . . far more than she needed . . .” (HR 159) Ravi is red with rage when he thinks of his wife and son who have absolutely no clothes even for a change. The tragedy is that memsahib living in such luxury refuses to pay the stitching charge for a shirt to Ravi. Apu’s conversation with the memsahib makes Ravi hot with fury:

They sat on the upstairs veranda overlooking the garden, she in her cane chair, they on the floor, and argued item by item.

‘Seven rupees for a shirt? Preposterous!’

‘So much fine work, memsahib,’ Apu spoke softly, reproachfully. ‘Pin tucks . . . it took the lad many hours . . .’

‘Not a pie over four rupees’

‘Five rupees, memsahib . . . We have to live.’

‘Four-fifty.’ (HR 159)
He wants to lead a life imitating the English mode of life but his hard labour is undersold for a meagre sum to the memsahibs. The novel shows that, "most Westerners have little knowledge of Indians and less interest in their lives even when they live in that country, and the European woman in the story is no exception" (N. Rao, "Western Women" 54). With a bitter heart he raves against the rich. He questions his wife, "They're not made of different clay are they? There's nothing lays down they should always have the best and trample over us and do us down, and we should always come off worst?" (HR 75)

Ravi's fit of rage has its ill effect on his family. As his financial condition declines steadily, he throws out the cripple. He becomes churlish, short-tempered and moody. He lets out his rage by beating Nalini and his family life becomes strained and crumbles into pieces. His beloved son is scared of him. He is thrown into the thick of despair on account of unending poverty.

To make matters worse his first-born son falls ill. Ravi with his empty pocket cannot afford to pay for a doctor for his treatment at the timely hour. Inability to earn money
makes him an angry young man. He does not understand the ways of the world. He sheds tears of failure when Raju dies in his own hand. He points his finger at the society, "I don't blame myself for not getting a doctor. I blame them. Them. Society. Guilty of casual murder" (HR 231).

Embittered against society, Ravi joins a mob shouting "Rice today" (HR 233). The hungry crowd goes to plunder the rice godown. Along with the crowd, Ravi is about to reach the rice bags but fails to get even a handful of rice. The police rudely chases the looters. Ravi is angry when he sees rice scattered on the sheet. He says, "Rice lay everywhere, scattered like chicken-feed" (HR 236). No one could use it, except beggars who sifted the dust for the grain.

Again, Ravi in his poverty with his rebellious attitude joins another crowd indulging in destruction. In his fury he takes a brick to throw it at the shops at the Nabob's Row, the rich men's locality. The uprising of the poor and the hungry is crushed by the law. But their frenzy to rise in rebellion is a dire warning to the wealthy whose callousness may become self-destructive.
Juxtaposed with this sorrowful tale of Ravi’s need for food and other bare necessities of life, is the hateful urge of man’s callous greed for wealth. While the granaries of the selfish and greedy capitalists and black marketeers like Damodar abound in rice, innumerable human beings die for want of it. While the restaurants of the rich buzz with life and music and bulge with food, the destitutes in the nearby huts and pavements lie sick and helpless and die in hunger. It is against this picture of the mad world that Ravi rebels. He cannot tolerate wealth and self interest which are flauntingly successful.

Smuggling, black-marketing, bootlegging are other forms of exploitation, since those indulging in these activities play upon the innocence and credulity of the common man. They are unmindful of the misery they cause to the people, as long as they are sure about leading a rich and comfortable life. Such patent form of evil is often left to prosper unchecked. Unscrupulous individuals exploit the ignorance of the still backward people and feather their own nest at the expense of the poor. As P. S. Chauhan points out, “the city
becomes the symbol of . . . violence and inhumanity”
(“Kamala Markandaya: Sense and Sensibility” 145).

The symbol of this inferno is Damodar in *A Handful of Rice*, a big business man who fattens on the black market and shamelessly gloats over the sorry predicament of the poor. In his world humane considerations do not hold good. The mighty become mightier by inflicting hunger on the poor. Men like Damodar squeeze people’s throats to acquire their spacious bungalows and costly drinks. Damodar tells Ravi frankly that if he wants to become as rich as himself, “There’s no other way really, as things are, Grab or go under, you’ve been around long enough to know that” (HR 117). Ravi is not an expert tailor. When he fails to earn money in his tailoring job, he turns to the criminal Damodar. “He goes to Damodar for a job, a criminal job. He would not even mind an assignment, involving exploitation of poverty-stricken people like himself” (Chandra 92). In a drinking bout Ravi sees Damodar’s wallet fat with ten-rupee notes. “He must have had two or three hundred rupees on him” (HR 71). This ruthless exploitation of the poor by the rich rouses the rebellious spirit in Ravi. Kamala Markandaya emphasises the
fact that the anti-social elements prospered after Independence.

Frustrated and exasperated Ravi castigates the indifferent, cold and inhuman society. He is ultimately crushed by the socio-economic oppression. He rebukes the society for the failure of his dream. His aim of becoming rich and leading a luxurious life has become an illusion. The novelist passionately protests against unequal distribution of power, privileges, property and social resources. The inflation, bad monsoons and the government which could not control the rising prices are some of the causes for Ravi's tragedy. Srinivasa Iyengar draws one's attention to the fact that Ravi's predicament can be understood after a knowledge of the spiralling grain prices in India. "Bad monsoons have caused havoc in the lives of millions and bad governments have proved incapable of effectively holding the price line" (Indian Writing in English 446)

A dissenting note is always struck in Kamala Markandaya's novels by the younger generation. The older generation represented by Nathan and Apu accept tyranny and oppression of a few privileged with passive patience and
submission. But Arjun, Thambi and Selvam, the sons of Nathan and Ravi, the son-in-law of Apu belong to the younger generation of rebellious men who question the elders' acceptance of suffering as ordained by fate, and leave home in rage and impatience. They cannot accept the dictates of life as such and revolt against the paradoxes of life. They believe that a few positive steps can make life worth-living. There is an element of dissent and protest in disguise in Kamala Markandaya's novels. She expresses her disenchantment with different social institutions.

In The Coffer Dams, Kamala Markandaya repeats the theme of Western technology in the Indian soil and how this sceptre leaves scars on the tribal culture which has been existing from time immemorial in the hilly regions of Malnad. The sickle i.e. the tribals, are corroded of human values because of the modern machine civilization.

Like the traditional Indian village in Nectar in a Sieve, the little tribal hamlet in The Coffer Dams has been enjoying a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere for many generations. The tribesmen find pleasure in their simple profession of wood-cutting. Though they have been often subjected to the
indomitable forces of nature, they lead a quiet and contented life. Whether rain or shine their life is never disrupted.

For the first time, the tribals notice a change in their familiar surroundings. It is not nature as it used to be. It is something different; it is an external human agency, a consortium in the form of Clinton Mackendrick Co., that is exploiting the tribal settlement with thousands of tons of equipment to tame a turbulent river in an aboriginal territory. All on a sudden, the calm and complacent life of the inmates of the hamlet is ruthlessly disrupted by way of technological invasion. The construction of a dam in Malnad by the Western Engineering Firm robs the tribals of their huts. The tribals are baffled and bewildered. The "hill country people . . . had watched with awe the precipitate birth of a town in the jungle" (CD 10). The inhabitants lose their sense of belonging and they have a feeling of insecurity. The mechanical marvels of the industrially advanced Western world strike a note of horror in their minds.

Unaware of the magical performance invented by science, the simple village folk hear the wailing sirens and the hovering of helicopters with dubious spirits. The jungle
habitation is dotted with rows of bungalows and houses. The autochthonous culture of the tribals begins to receive set-
backs when the strangers with their alien culture start settling down there.

In *Nectar in a Sieve* the tannery is the cause of the dispossession of the villagers. In *The Coffer Dams*, the tribals become dispossessed due to the great dam building project. The simple rustics are forced to quit their familiar place because the construction engineers need the place for constructing their bungalows. The tribal colony seems to be an ideal place to build the English dwelling and the tribal people are evicted. Then they create a colony; barracks for the Indian labourers and quarters for the British. The houses for the officers are made to British specifications recapturing a bit of England. They create an illusion that a section of English housing estate had strayed on to the Indian soil. Searchlights brighten their houses all night, while kerosene lanterns twinkle now and then in the tribal settlement. Mackendrick describes, "Town houses in a woodland setting" (CD 16).
The tribals are not offered any compensation to quit the place. They foresee troubles and understand that they are exploited by the aliens. Like a flock of mute sheep, without a word of protest, the tribal people quit their ancient abodes as Clinton remarks indifferently, “Just got up and went, like animals” (CD 33). They hunt for new places and settle down there amidst a lot of inconveniences. Helen, the wife of Clinton, the chief engineer, shows the land to Bashiam and echoes the feelings of the tribals. “It was their land. They did not want to leave it, they were persuaded” (CD 57). By persuasion their land is snatched from them. But they have no advocate to represent their case. They are silent and passive sufferers who endure their terrible loss. The old tribal Chief considers the Great Dam as “the man eater” (CD 84).

The busy schedule of construction with the hulking cranes in the jungles, dynamite exploding right at the face of the tribesmen and the modern western technology make them raise their brows with awe and fear. They are too primitive to understand the need for modern machine civilization in their hilly region. The plan for the construction of the dam across the river gets finalised. “A year for the
diversion channel to take the altered course of the river. A concurrent year for the coffer dams to stem its flow. Two years for the main dam to rise between the coffers” (CD 20). Even after knowing the plan of the English, the tribals are too weak to utter a word of protest against the scheme. They passively accept their exploitation.

The British engineers, the Indian technicians and the tribals work together. “The economic vulnerability of the labouring class is very skilfully exploited by the ruling masters” (V.D. Katamble, “Kamala Markandaya’s The Coffer Dams : An Apology for Techno-Industrialization of Rural India” 61). Howard Clinton with a stern face and a steady mind is the master builder. He is a hardhearted English master who adopts the old English policy of “divide and rule,” creating dissensions between the lowlanders and the tribal labourers. He disdains the native Indians and never considers them as human beings.

Bashiam, the tribal crane operator is always looked down upon. He is constantly referred to as “jungly-wallah or even more disparagingly the civilized jungly-wallah” (CD 52). Not only Bashiam but all the local people appear to Clinton as “a
tribe whose outstanding characteristic . . . was the severe retardation of its civilization” (CD 42). The British even spurn the presence of Bashiam because of his primitive and uncouth behaviour. They have no sympathy for him and they make no effort to befriend him. Though he is not regarded with respect by his English bosses he accepts his position of the crane operator meekly and in spite of risks does his duty sincerely and honestly. He does not resent his ill-treatment by the British.

The tribals too accept their suffering without protest. They are docile and passive. Krishnan comments: “Look at them! Lined up like passive cows at a backstreet Christian butchery!” (CD 81) The slavish labourers are always at the beck and call of their masters. The battalions of the unemployed labourers are ever ready at the door of the British engineers. As the bosses have the clever knack of ensnaring and entralling the native workers, the labourers fall prostrate at the feet of their employers.

Though the tribal community is servile, the young Indian technicians like Subramaniam, Krishnan and Gopal Rao voice their protest against the exploitation of the British.
When Mackendrick questions the stability of the bungalows, Subramaniam, the efficient and conscientious contractor who has built them, tears off the fresh British contracts. He has a firm determination not to have any dealings with them thereafter. Krishnan says in rage that they are kept at a distance by the West. The British engineers slight the Indians. He has tried twice to stimulate the thick-skinned labourers to strike work. But each of his attempts is aborted. Every time he tries to galvanize the labour power, his effort is frustrated before it is completed and they get fragmented before his eyes. The novelist's comment is illustrative of the affairs. "That strike-breaking machinery existed, in the shape of an under-employed army that would swarm up the hill at first beckoning by Clinton Mackendrick . . ." (CD 81).

Gopal Rao, a man of twenty one with delicate features and brilliant eyes is nicknamed "gecko or lizard" because of "his neat, quick and efficient gecko-like movements" (CD 73). Gopal resented the use of such a nickname. Gundappa, the servant is often called gorilla. Indians are just like animals to them. When Krishnan disagrees with Clinton in the initial
programme of the dam, he slights him. The racially induced superiority-complex of the British is resented by the younger generation of Indians. These biases hamper all healthy relationships between the races and cultures.

In an industrialised society labour problem is a routine affair and it leads to friction and tension between the masters and the labourers. Clinton, the master builder is the best example of the hard task master. Whenever he hears about the labour problem at the site of construction, his blood boils and he reacts angrily towards the labourers, typifying the overlordship of the English engineer. "We could sack the entire coolie labour force overnight" (CD 63). Again when his partner Mackendrick informs Clinton about labour organisation, he shouts in rage, "Dock their pay and you'll have them wrapping themselves round your feet . . . . You know what these people are, live from hand to mouth" (CD 63). Thus the economic susceptibility of the poor workers is taken advantage of by the employers. The common labourers are "rattled around like peas in a tin" (CD 120) and they are paid low remuneration and unpromising jobs. Even then the workers bear the yoke patiently.
The English engineers and the technicians exhibit their brutal nature and cold heartedness towards the labourers even at crucial points. Accidents occur at the dam site. Both the Indians and the English die. But the tragedy is measured with two different scales, one for the English and the other for the Indians. Forty-two tribal labourers lose their lives in a dangerous dynamite blast. Clinton is informed about the tragic incident. Instead of uttering a word of sympathy, he urges the technicians and other workers to continue the work without any kind of disruption. Moreover the corpses get jammed by a boulder. Without making an attempt to retrieve the bodies, Clinton contemptuously feels, that instead of delaying the work, “their bodies can be incorporated. Into the structure” (CD 188) revealing the cruelty of his heart. To him the death of the black apes is a trivial matter. Through Iyengar’s comment that “the technician in Clinton incarnates the township’s idea of ruthless efficiency” (447) the iron hand of the sceptre is visible. Clinton’s excessive love for construction work blinds his human sensibilities. In his scale of human values, the tribals are at the lowest point.
As an example of the western pragmatist Clinton has no human concern in professional work or private life. He is a workaholic. Neither the tragic death of the tribesmen nor the fury of nature could change his heart of stone. Bashiam, the crane operator offers his services to lift the boulder in order to remove the corpses. Clinton knows fully well about the defect in the lugs of the crane. Despite his excruciating agony, when his back is broken, Clinton remains unshaken devoid of any human emotions. Describing the character of Clinton, K. Madhavi Menon and A. V. Krishna Rao observe: “Markandaya presents Clinton as an example of the engineer manager . . . the latest species of superior homo sapiens” ("The Coffer Dams : A Critical Study" 171). The ruthless pursuit of his will is an obsession with him. Human beings whether they be his own wife Helen, his business partner Mackendrick, his British co-workers or the tribal labourers, do not count to him.

Clinton’s obsession with his work prevents him from leading a normal human life. His family life suffers breaches and strains. He has no time to spare for his beautiful wife who is away from her homeland. In the age of mechanization he has become one among the machines. Helen finds life
intolerable with the austere and dedicated dam builder. Her interests lie elsewhere; she finds a common bond between herself and the humane tribals, and Bashiam in particular. Hence there is a rift in the family. Hari Mohan Prasad points out:

Clinton's blind worship of machine, oblivious of humanistic consideration is synoptic of modernity and Westernization while Indian primeval life is passionately emotional where human feelings are ever present like the 'heart beat: insistent, unceasing, soft when you took no notice, loud when you listened.' ("Culture: Heritage and Heresy" 34)

Industrialization and modernization do not spare even a tribal culture which has an ancient origin. Under the stringent pressure of modernization the human values are degraded and deteriorated. In the post - independent India social changes have cropped in. Markandaya describes, "The country was full of foreigners – . . . all of them eager, in a greater or less degree, to gain a foothold in an expanding subcontinent of vast commercial potential" (CD 12). After
this new contact, the tribals have keen interest in new values like commercialism and material prospects.

Originally the tribals have no natural instinct for money or commerce. With the rise of the coffer dam and the association with an alien race, they become as money-minded as the foreigners. Like the tannery in *Nectar in a Sieve* which attracted the simple villagers towards itself for material gains, the tribals are lured towards the construction project for easy money. During one of her casual visits to the tribal colony, the old unnamed tribal Chief tells Helen, "Money, money. They are becoming as money-mad as you foreigners are" (CD 84). The tribal chief typifies the old generation of yester-years which does not accept change in the traditional value system.

Through this novel *The Coffer Dams*, the novelist treats a new aspect of exploitation in the cross-cultural interaction. On the human level the conflict is seen in the form of hostility between the sophisticated British technicians and the hill tribesmen of India. When British technologists and Indian technicians work together, both sides carry memories of the colonial past. Clinton belongs to the generation of
Englishmen who stand as a symbol of the typical colonist. He thus upholds the myth of racial superiority. Krishnan and Shunmugam are representatives of prejudiced Indians who look upon the British as colonizers and exploiters. Though the dam really brings the alien races together, the collaboration of the East and the West, the industrialization and the modernization do not help in bridging the cultural dichotomy. In spite of the joint venture, the East and the West remain "like an ill-sorted bundle of sticks that stood or fell together" (CD 175). The West may spread its impact, its industrialization which leads to modernization, over the East, but the sensibilities and values of the East remain firm and unshaken.

Kamala Markandaya explores the role of the sceptre in another angle in her ninth novel The Golden Honeycomb. The native rulers who are brought up and educated in the English style are completely in oblivion of their Indian identity. They belong to the class of brown Englishmen. Kamala Markandaya very poignantly portrays the sorry plight of the native rulers who are tied to the apron strings of the British crown. They are Maharajas for namesake and in actuality they are reduced to the state of vassals. They are
under the powerful hold of the sceptre and its weight is too heavy to be shaken off by the so called rulers of the native states.

In The Golden Honeycomb, Bawajiraj III is a symbol of an Indian ruler who is exploited by the British, particularly in the state of Devapur. He along with the British rulers moves about with an air of pomp and pride and keeps a distance from the Devapuris, his own subjects. Hence there is a wide gulf between the rulers and the ruled. The British empire exercises its sway over the Indian princes politically and economically.

After 1958, all the States in India were subordinated to the British Crown on a Paramountcy. While the British Crown recognised their individual entity, the native Princely States accepted the overlordship of the British Crown. Hence the power of the native princes was very much reduced. The British Government having agreed to protect the Indian States, interfered in the internal affairs of the Indian States. Disputes of succession were resolved by the Crown, which also had the right to sanction each succession. Whenever any ruler misruled, the Crown deposed him and nominated a
successor. Kamala Markandaya gives ample proof of this kind of rule of the sceptre in the native state of Devapur. As a result the Indian States lost their independent status.

In order to keep Bawajiraj III slavishly under their feet, the British government kept garrisons in the capital of each state, "permanently stationed in the cantonment" (GH 37). These troops were under the British army officials and under the pretext of maintaining law and order, the British controlled India and checked the powers of the native rulers. All these reveal, "The scheming and machinations of the British in the days of the maharajas for the sole purpose of gaining political power and keeping the potentates under their thumb" (N. Rao, "Western Women" 58). The slavish princes were asked to rule the state as per the dictates of the British Raj. They complied with the demands of the British policy.

Bawajiraj I, as the ruler of Devapur is deposed because of his temerity to defy the English. He has an independent line of thought which the British do not relish. Hence his power to rule is clipped and the British Political Agent and the Dewan select a young man belonging to the Kshatriya
caste to succeed to the throne of Devapur State as Bawajiraj II. He is in reality a commoner, a land owner's son. With the prime motive of executing the British bid and to make a victualling bania, he is raised to the state of Maharaja of Devapur. The alien rulers have found him a fit vessel to carry out their political plans. After him his young son ascends the throne as Bawajiraj III commonly known as Waji. He is raised to the highest position of the State because the British have found a proper puppet to effectively execute their dictates and designs.

Like the poor peasants who are denied the powers of tilling their land because of industrialization, these British selected and approved Indian rulers are denied most of their ruling powers. The sceptre is in the hands of the British and the native rulers are holding a wand which is powerless. In order to make them vassals, the British introduce English education to them. To strengthen their political authority and domination over India, English education is of immense use to them. They hoped that this kind of English education would help the Indian rulers and the Indians to reconcile themselves to the imperialist domination of the British. To quote from the famous minute of Lord Macaulay, the
provision of modern western education in English should create in India "a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect" (qtd. Broughton et al. 2). Waji is an example of such an Indian Englishman with European education and military training.

The education of Young Bawajiraj III is planned not by his mother but by the British in such a clever way as to make him a loyal subject of the British Crown. The Chronicles of his country, his ancestral history, his deposed kinsmen are matters of triviality. The boy's attention is drawn towards the story of the Great Queen, her accession in girlhood and the wisdom of her rule so that he may feel proud to be her subject. The novelist comments:

The boy who will one day be Bawajiraj III learns about England, its geography and history, its constitution, its manners, laws and customs and about its explorers, generals, and statesmen who, from the highest motives, have annexed a third of the world. (GH 17)
He absolutely loses his Indian identity and becomes an Englishman in action and attitude. "Homecoming after a sojourn abroad and consequent readjustment and revaluation of the terms to face life constitute the major issue" in the life of Bawajiraj (Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction 71). Hence he carries out the political and economic schemes of the British effectively and efficiently.

Bawajiraj III is a Maharaja in the state of Devapur just for namesake. All the ruling power is in the hands of the British and he is reduced to the state of a vassal which he does not realise. The novelist ironically comments, "Bawajiraj III is a Ruler; but most of the ruling that matters has been taken from him" (GH 39). The areas in which the ruler can exert his rule is precisely delineated by the British. The Resident keeps close watch over the Maharaja to ensure that there is no breach between the East and the West. Only with the approval of the Resident, the Chief Minister of the State is appointed. Moreover the Dewan is, in the whole process of running the state, a vital link between the king and the people. He appoints his ministers very cleverly and tactfully. The native rulers' wings are clipped. They are like flightless
birds hovering and hopping around the British. The real state of Bawajiraj III is described as:

Bawajiraj III cannot raise levies.

He is forbidden to make treaties.

The first priority upon State revenues is not the State, or even the Maharajah, but the upkeep and maintenance of the Garrison Force.

He cannot travel abroad without the Viceroy's tacit approval. (GH 37)

The Delhi Durbar is a proof of the slavish role that Bawajiraj III plays in the presence of the British. He bows low deep bows to the Representative of the King. He speaks softly, “pause and speak and bow, three low bows” (GH 161). The supposed Maharaja walks backwards reverently from the dais of the durbar hall “backing away like a lackey, like one of his own subjects at one of his own durbars” (GH 161). This obvious picture of the slavish stoop of Waji illustrates the state of affairs. Rabi sadly realises that his father is mighty no longer. The sovereign is the Viceroy and his father.
has to pay homage to him. Actually he is “a vassal, that is
the reality of it, who has to bow and scrape and back away
from the Presence” (GH 161).

He is so loyal to the British that he sends his own
people to battlefields to fight for the British unaware of the
wrong he is doing to his own countrymen and to his
motherland. As he is moulded into a perfect British stooge,
the First World War drew from him a very enthusiastic
response in terms of men and money. He does not realise the
danger that he is courting. He is a prototype of the native
prince who continues to follow the old tradition of being a
vassal in the hands of the British “For Bawaijiraj is a British
creation” (GH 106).

In the lower strata of the society absolutely no
compensation is given to the exploited lot. They are mute and
silent sufferers because most of them are illiterate and bear
the burden. They are unable to question because they are
unaware of the ways of the world. The Indian rulers are also
in a sorry state of life but the British do let them enjoy a
luxurious life as a sort of compensation for leading a slavish
life as per the codes and systems of the British.
Bawajiraj III enjoys his luxurious living without understanding that it is his compensation from the British for his submissive and passive rule under them. As the British are past masters in puppetry, they allow him to lead a luxurious life. He lives in a spacious, well-decorated palace with soldiers and maids to fulfil every need. He "has the palace, the Palace estates, the three Guest Houses, the Summer Palace, the Jewel Chamber, a score of hunting and shooting lodges, his cavalry, his elephants, and in time the fleet of Daimlers and Rolls-Royces..." (GH 38). The bania has golden expanses of land. But he is a reigned horse; his ruling is stealthily taken off from his hand.

His wardrobe is full of rich clothing. At times of public audience, Bawajiraj III wears apricot silk and brocade coat. The coat looks golden and radiates. His turban is of apricot muslin with gold lace bands. At the centre it is decorated with diamonds that sparkle in the light. His gilded sword has a jewelled scabbard and hilt. He sits majestically on the glittering throne. All these facts reflect the pomp and pageantry of the ruler. In Delhi Durbar, Rabi is enlightened to see his father as "a shining warrior-king wrapped in a
shining mantle” (GH 149). The rings on his fingers gleam when he raises his hand; “he has a sort of total golden look, like a nugget” (GH 149). A golden aura seems to surround the Maharaja and the Englishmen.

(Not only do the British exploit politically and remove the power of ruling from the hands of the native rulers but also exploit India economically. The expenses for maintaining the British army, British officials, Political Agent and the Resident are met from the coffers of Devapur. Margaret P. Joseph notices, “how irrelevant the princes and Englishmen are, in the context of a poor and struggling country” (Kamala Markandaya 149).

As a contrast to the poor dwellings of the Devapuris, the Residency is magnificent. It stands in sixty acres of the choicest land. The novelist minutely describes how the Maharajas of India are robbed of their property by the British:

The major slice of the lush acreage has been seized from the deposed Bawajiraj I. Of the remainder, part has been surrendered by the succeeding Maharajah in compliance with an
Order-in-Council; and part . . . is a gift freely
given by the overwhelmed Bawajiraj III in
return for the Star bestowed on him in
acknowledgment of his munificent
contribution to certain causes close to the
Resident's heart. (GH 65-66)

The Residency exhibits its splendour and magnificence
with its Grand Portico and is fifty feet long and forty feet
high. Annexed to it are the Durbar Hall, the reception rooms,
the drawing rooms, the galleries, the glittering Ball rooms,
the Banqueting rooms, the guest suites and private
apartments. The ceilings, the doors and the floor are
splendidly kept and polished daily. Often enrapturing dances
are held to restore English atmosphere in India. This kind of
luxurious living in palaces is carried on with the knowledge
of the native rulers. "The costs of the Residency have been
and are borne by Devapur State" (GH 66) and "the entire
expenses of the Residency continue to be billed to the State
Exchequer" (GH 66). All these unnecessary expenditures of
the British crippled India's economy. N. Rao comments on
the British activities in India:
The novel shows in vivid colours, the British activities in India in both political and economic spheres. The picture of England spreading its net over Indian princes and people and engaged in a complex web of intrigues and counter intrigues. The country generally regarded as the Mother of Parliament did not have the interests of the common people at heart but only its own interest; British government garnering wealth in all possible ways. ("England in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 7-8)

Heavy taxation is another means adopted by the British government to exploit the people of India. Devapuris are often sucked dry by various taxes. It is burdensome for them to pay new taxes frequently. The native rulers never cared for the people and their welfare. In order to please the British, they remained silent. By collecting huge sums of money as taxes from the Devapur state, the British became rich and their treasury full but India was robbed of her wealth. The two paragraphs following clearly show the contrast between the British and the Indians:
The viceroy, symbol and embodiment of this [Imperial] Presence, sets these standards. His salary and expenses total several lakhs of rupees. Even these lakhs, however, cannot support an entourage of nine hundred, summer and winter capitals, State balls and dinners... His Excellency, it is made known, has to dip into his private pocket.

Janaki, the servant girl, has no private pocket to dip into. Nor has she any status to speak of to maintain. Her main preoccupation is to sustain her present state, which, since it includes one fair meal a day and one new piece of cloth each year at Deepavali time, on the whole she regards as satisfactory. She is paid one rupee per week. The Paymaster's assistant drops the coin into her cupped palm and tells her... not to spend it all at once.

(GH 65)

Rabi is determined that "insupportable levies and treaties must be rescinded, whatever the consequences" (GH 416).
In the British rule, Indian sepoys belonged to the exploited lot. They were considered inferior to the English soldiers. The higher posts in the army were reserved for the Britishers. No Indian could rise higher than a Subedar. The Indian sepoys were paid less than the English soldiers for the same kind of work. The Hindu soldiers were sent abroad across the sea to fight wars much against their religious sentiments and practices. Even then the Indian soldiers were very loyal to their British masters.

Presentations of gifts and mementoes by the Indian rulers is a routine affair. Generous gifts were offered to the British by the Indian Rajas in order to please the British. The cost of the gifts displayed the dignity and status of both the parties, the receiver and the giver. Special occasions such as Durbars, the birthdays and farewell of the Emperor and Empress demanded very expensive gifts. Bawajiraj III is very cautious in selecting and giving presents to the British. At such times he exhibits his complete allegiance and surrender to the British. But the British were very careful in giving reciprocal gifts and they were frugal. Only gifts of high symbolic order were returned. They were often not valuable or costly.
Whatever may be the kind of exploitation, the lazy drones are contented and satisfied with the life of splendour and luxury. They are selfish. As they live in rich palaces, they are least bothered about the well-being of their subjects or their fellowmen. They are thickskinned and refused to admit that they are leading a slavish life. Though a ruler, he is in reality a slave of the British.

On the other hand, there is exception to any rule. The older generation of the rulers lean on the sceptre and are easily captivated by a life of ease. The pleasures of the palace are too tempting for them to resist. The members of the younger generation of royal blood rebel against the accepted codes. They fight for their rights as rulers because they have learnt something about the world that exists outside the palace. They realise the lopsidedness of the privileges enjoyed by the Palace and Residency on the one hand, and the common people suffering under the hardships of natural calamities and heavy taxation on the other.

Rabi, the illegitimate son of Bawajiraj III realises the whole concept of the native states and the plight of the British approved rulers. This awareness dawns on him in the
Durbar of Delhi, when he sees his adored father, a powerful sun in his eyes, slavishly bows to the Viceroy. “Rabi realises that social responsibility is more important than personal indulgence . . .” (Joseph 150). Hence the approval of the Viceroy to appoint Rabi as heir to the throne of Devapur is not overwhelming to him. He calmly sets aside his princely role as against the expectation of his father. The path of the father and the son are diverse. Rabi's Indian upbringing and worldly education give him an aversion to becoming a British-approved dummy ruler.

Distrust in parental attitudes leads Rabi to revolt. Breakaways are the order of the day. Contacts of Rabi with Janaki, Das and Jaya along with his mother's and grandmother's instilling of nationalism in him crystallise his determination to work for the poor. The huge amount of money that is swallowed by the Empire could be utilised for the people's good. He comes to the conclusion that in rejecting the British who have exploited the credulous Indian masses, he could help them towards rehabilitation. The poor are miserable because their exploitation is twofold, by the British and the Indians alike.
Rabi, as a young man sees the conditions of the poor and the oppressed in the State of Devapur where his father rules. The wide chasm between the life styles of the rich and the poor cause concern for the poor. He begins to question the social disparities. In Simla, he contrasts a servant-in-waiting with the princes who carouse in enjoyment. The man waits patiently for hours together, “ready to drop but gritting it out in the fervour of retaining this plum job secured over the head of fifty contestants” (GH 239). In the luxurious hotel in Bombay, as Rabi is about to eat the exotic fruit offered to him, he is suddenly aware of the servant and guesses his thoughts. He too would be coveting the fruits of the earth. There would be hundreds, thousands like him in the territories. “. . . Where his father’s writ did not run . . .” (GH 245) The luxurious hotel with its pearly floors, he felt, “would never reflect . . . the cruder compositions of substance, the bowels, bones and grimaces stitched up inside a reality . . .” of the country. (GH 245)

Rabi wants to champion the cause of the crowds which protest against the conditions imposed on them by the British. He wants to advocate social reform. The condition of
the mill workers is too poor to describe. People want to shout at the top of their lungs:

Look at those miserable shoulders, these collapsed bellies, this faded rag that has to be washed and worn on the body because there is no other, although we are the ones who daily manufacture a thousand. Look at us! Our flesh and our children's flesh melt on the bone to provide you with trifles, look at us if you dare! (GH 269-270)

Rabi wants to be on the side of the empty-belly race shirking his princely hood.

Different standards of equality and justice are maintained by the British for their own men and Indians. This code of conduct makes Rabi's blood boil in rebellion. Heavy taxation, underpayment, overwork and poor conditions of life are the causes for which the mill workers strike work. But the police will not allow them to speak. Their basic rights are denied. Rabi wants to fight against this sort of social injustice. The dispensing of justice is hit hard by Kamala Markandaya:
Mansions arose, palaces and guildhalls and custom houses sprang up like crops of mushrooms or poppies in Liverpool and London, in Calcutta and Bombay, in Capetown and Durban and Lisbon and Atlanta and Amsterdam, on the fertile bone-meal provided by humble labourers.

Labour was cheap.

It was cheap because scores of thousands of people had been disinherited, some of them of their land, most of them of their spirit.

(GH 251)

Awareness of the realities of life makes Rabi take a decisive course for the unprivileged represented by the sickle. The blow that they receive from the British is too hard to bear. His father, the Bania, has selected his proper position as supplier to the British and traitor to his people. His individuality of being an Indian, the spirit of identification with the country makes him rebel against the alien rule. He has to fight for the progress of his people so that they can prosper. "He finds the courage to fling aside
the suffocating cloak of pomp and tradition in the society into which he is born, and assert his individuality" (Joseph 155).

Rabi’s sojourn amidst the downtrodden in the shacks of Bombay, his tour around Devapur and its impact on his mind, the pitiable state of his father’s servitude, the poverty and the penury of the Devapuris under the British, induce his assumption of the leadership of popular protest. He is hailed as a young leader of the masses. Rabi leads a band of Satyagrahis demanding tax concessions. He is the champion prince of the non-violent mass against unfair taxes and levies. In his crusade against the British Raj, he is fully supported by Usha, the youngest daughter of the Dewan. He has to fight against the foreigners. He has to work laboriously for the betterment of his people.

Obviously strikes and agitations become part and parcel of the national awakening in India and they invade the State of Devapur. Their cry for freedom is intense and the people refuse to co-operate with the British government which exploits them. People of Devapur are bold enough to rise against Bawajiraj, their Maharaja, who has neither taken
any steps for the upliftment of his people nor resisted the undue taxation. The restless masses with their throbbing spirit for the freedom of their motherland cannot be suppressed.

**Pleasure City**, the tenth novel of Kamala Markandaya is linked with *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Coffer Dams* thematically. A common thread of modernization runs through the trio. The novelist deals with the theme of forcible encroachment of western technology on a remote coastal village in one of the Southern States of India. The construction of Shalimar, a holiday resort for rich tourists obstructs forever the traditional life of the fishing community. In the introductory paragraph the novelist describes the busy fishermen engrossed in their work:

> The boats went out before it was light, the nets were down before the sun came up. They caught sardine, mackerel and prawn . . . . There were always jobs a-plenty waiting to be done in a village that lived by fishing. (PC 5)
The construction project is undertaken by a multinational corporation, The Atlas International Development Corporation, AIDCORP in short, which is similar to the Clinton Mackendrick Co., in The Coffer Dams. Directed by Copeland Tully, with Herbert Boyle as the chairman, the firm brings in a new culture to the old fishing village. Boyle has a feeling of racial superiority and he is snobbish and arrogant towards the natives. Rikki could find that “there is an ocean between us” (PC 147).

Like the villages in Nectar in a Sieve and The Coffer Dams, the coastal village too observes with calm reserve the coming of alien men “important-looking in shoes and spectacles, carrying cases and supple canes with silver mountings” (PC 25). Soon tents seem to bloom in the coconut groves. The novelist raises her voice, “It was nothing but the old carve-up; the same old imperialists at it again, only this time disguised as technocrats” (PC 21-22).

Social change affects the remote fishing village. The traditional village with its ancient profession of fishing has a setback. Unlike Nathan the rural peasant in Nectar in a Sieve, and Apu the tailor in A Handful of Rice, who belong to the
older generation endure their suffering passively, the youth do not like to lead a slavish life and they rebel against the forces that curtail their freedom. In *Pleasure City* it is the other way round. The old generation represented by Apu, the headman of the fishermen raises its voice in opposition against the British technocrats who exploit the fishing community. He resents any change. He hankers after the traditional mode of living like the tribal Chief in *The Coffer Dams*. He hates any modernization with the construction of Shalimar because he has "a different set of values, pertinent to a different kind of living" (PC 26). Any new thing is unacceptable in his sight. He cannot digest the thought of his race becoming coolies under AIDCORP. His voice is loud when he cries, "This is our territory. The waters are ours to a five-fathom depth" (PC 26). He cannot reconcile himself to the new outlook and socio-economic change that has been taking place in his village. In the words of Elizabeth Claridge, "The pleasure city seduces, corrupts, sews envy, undermines old fidelities" ("Aftermath" 108).

On the other hand Apu's wife along with the young fishermen stands for the new ideals. She is ready to accept
change and she appreciates Shalimar and its beauty. "It was the lights, the brilliance had quite captured her" (PC 115). She is pleased that she need not use the lanterns any more. She is grateful for the leftovers which Rikki brings home from Shalimar. Being a woman, she is flexible like the youth and changes easily unlike her stubborn husband who sticks to ancient values. As Rikki’s adoptive mother, she is ready to accept the change in her son and in the surrounding.

"... India has achieved its freedom and the two nations are brought on equal footing" (Ramesh Chadha, “Cross-cultural Interaction in Kamala Markandaya’s Pleasure City” 63). Hence in Pleasure City there is none of the antipathy and bitterness that typifies Markandaya’s treatment of the East and West as in her earlier novels. There are only occasional clashes between the Indians and the Britishers. The spirit of tolerance and understanding make the two races follow the new policy of “give and take.”

The youth willingly offer to work for the British and pledge their services to them. “They are lined up to turn into coolies, at such time as AIDCORP might beckon” (PC 26). When the catch is bad, the fishing families starve. When it is
good, they feast and forget the bad times. What Shalimar seems to destroy is the communal suffering. Hence the fishermen are after easy money ashore serving in the holiday complex, rather than risking their precious lives in the unfathomable deep.

Like Arjun, Thambi and Raja in *Nectar in a Sieve*, who are attracted towards the tannery, Rikki, an orphan fisherboy in *Pleasure City* accepts the job of a tea-boy in Shalimar. His reluctance to turn back to his ancestral profession is evidence of the fact that he has a strong tendency to accept the change. Tully sees the incongruity of Rikki making meringues and learning how to serve drinks. Rikki has no desire to relinquish his perks as a waiter and life-saver at Shalimar. He has found a bosom friend in Tully, an Englishman, though this friendship is not cherished and liked by other Englishmen and women, particularly by Corinna, the wife of Tully. The youth are thus lured after easy money and they accept the rapid encroachment of the alien culture, unlike their fathers and the older generation. Commenting on the friendliness of Tully and Rikki, Chadha notices:
Rikki, the child of nature or the aboriginal world, knows the secrets of nature, its unpredictability, its turbulence, its savagery and also knows how to tame it and bring succour to the people unfamiliar with the unpredictable elements of nature. Tully, the representative of the sophisticated and scientific world, knows the secrets of modern technology. They are thus complementary to each other, rather than foils. (Cross-cultural 60)

It can be deduced that the effect of industrialization is felt heavily in the agrarian Indian society. It leads to disintegration of the rural community. The ordered and systematic rural society tends to become chaotic and disorderly. Rukmani and Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the tribal Chief in *The Coffin Dams*, the village headman Apu in *Pleasure City* are representatives of the old way of life. They are deeply attached to the traditional, social and cultural modes of life and they are caught in the whirlwind of modernization and its vicious consequences.
Of the two groups of characters, the poor are affected by industrialization, and the other, the Indian princes, are touched and toned by the British rulers. Characters belonging to the two groups whether they are peasants or princes, are exploited by the sceptre. At the verge of exploitation both have similar weaknesses in their inability to raise protest. Their suffering is silent. Both are meek and mild. Whatever may be their difficulties they suffer intensely but bear their suffering patiently. Finally both sell their identity for a loaf of bread.

The reason for the confrontation between the ruler and the ruled arises from the incompatibility of temperament between the English ruling class and the ruled. In behaviour patterns, customs and conventions, the West considers itself superior to the East and hence the East is exploited. Not only Kamala Markandaya but E. M. Forster and Kipling also reflect “this consciousness of the gap between the dark and the light” (Louis L. Cornell, *Kipling in India* 144).

Like Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya shows a marked preoccupation with social problems. Both her novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and
A Handful of Rice portray accurately the harsh realities of work-a-day life in rural as well as urban India. The novelist has a soft corner for the weak and the oppressed Indian lower classes because they are the exploited lot. The sickle is too fragile to withstand the life blow of the sceptre. Hence the sympathies of the novelist are with the sickle and indirectly she becomes the mouthpiece of the downtrodden.

Her portrayal of life in the little villages and big cities of India rips open the sordid, the pathetic and the tragic side of life, its perpetual fight against hunger and poverty, starvation and degradation in the pre and post Independent India. Her novels thus become faithful records of the means and ways of exploitation in various forms. “In the depiction of Mahanagar and the paddy fields Mrs. Markandaya is by far the best exponent” (Nicholson 120). She has portrayed life in its most gruesome and degrading form. Her realism is purposeful and her intention is to arouse polite society to an awareness of the real problems of the people.

Kamala Markandaya is not averse to industrialization but she shows her hostility towards its rapid colossal destruction in rural India. Because of its evil impact the
peasants are deprived of their land and the common worker is oppressed endlessly. Moreover the peasants are uprooted and they shift to alien lands. Vulgarisation of life and culture and resurgence of antisocial elements are the added evils. She is on the side of the oppressed and suppressed, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence. Racialism, the lust to possess, divide and rule are severely lashed by the novelist. Her novels are faithful records of Indian society.

For the past three decades change has been taking place towards modernization in the Indian subcontinent and hence there is a gradual shift in values. The two great forces that toss India to and fro are its precious traditional values inherent in it and an intense urge towards modernization due to industrialization. In an advanced age of science and technology, the novelist struggles hard to retain her traditional and cultural values.

"This process of modernization has unfortunately led to "the dehumanization of social environment and depersonalization of human beings" (Sulochana Rangeya Raghava, Sociology of Indian Literature 158). Hence the rural
values tend to disappear slowly and urban monstrocities creep in gradually. Kamala Markandaya's novels present this thrust towards modernity through various characters and situations. People who have adhered to deep rooted cultural modes are caught unwittingly by the sudden intrusion of modernization which is the effect of industrialization.

It is customary to see Kamala Markandaya's novels as both reflections and commentaries on twentieth century Indian society. On the whole, her novels mirror the drastic and inevitable change that is taking place in the Indian villages and cities. It can be seen at work in the growing industrialization of the country, in its efforts to change the traditional order, the growth of large cities, in the removal of superstitions and in the quest for modernity. Men and women whose grandparents were taught to accept oppression, poverty and disease as the will of gods are now convinced that these are to a great extent man-made evils which can be conquered by concerted human effort. New ideals of justice and equality are challenging the old patterns of political authority and economic privilege. In this process of change women too have shed their orthodox home and
hood and emerged with liberal thinking to exert their own identity.

An interesting aspect of modernity is the creative release of feminine sensibility. Women in modern India have not only played exciting and dangerous roles in the struggle for Independence but are also touched and toned by the consciousness of cultural change. Kamala Markandaya's novels seem to be fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society. Hence feminine response is the concern of the next chapter.