CHAPTER VII

TWO VIRGINS
The novel *Two Virgins* by Kamala Markandaya has drawn varied responses from the critics. Some of the critics contented that the novel presents a kind of conflict between tradition and the modern culture. The traditional culture is represented by the Indian life and the modern culture is reflected through the Western society. A host of other critics find the novel is very disappointing so far as the story and the plot of the novel is concerned. A noted writer Margaret P. Joseph labels the novel as an artistic failure because of two reasons. One is the plot is not so well-knit and secondly that the story is narrated to the mouth of Saroja, which does not impart appropriateness to the observations of the novelist. Margaret P. Joseph writes:

"while *Possession* is considered by many to be Kamala Markandaya’s first failure, *Two Virgins* is undoubtedly her second. The reason for this fall in achievement may be traced to a disastrous failure of technique. The plot is flimsy and the hobby-house theme is threadbare. The main cause of this decline, however lies in a breakdown in the novelist’s skill the wrong point of view and the lack of convincing characterisation." 

Another critic, however, complains that the novel lacks in the proper delineation of social life, with which it shows its culture. Uma Parmeshwaran, particularly is the critic who find this short coming in the
"Two virgins irked me in many ways. What is the social milieu we are given? The names, Alamelu, especially, imply a higher-caste setting and Chingleput the sweetmeat maker and the wife of Manikkam-the milkman seem oddly not of place in their role of confidantes. I can’t visualize the everyday routine of this village, where are the people? In Nectar, there is a distinct presence of people but here there are just these two houses, a sweetmeat shop and several buffaloes, where are the real farmers? What does Appa do for his living? Why this endless repetition of characters who contributed their little to the independence struggle? Who else is in the school other than Jaya and Saroja? Why has Markandaya so handily exiled the brothers from the village, instead of making them part of the girls growing up?" 2

Further Margaret P. Josep considers it as the weakest of her novels and nothing more than a documentary about the village life. She says:

"There is little attempt at plot construction and story is merely tedious description of village life, with stereo typed constraints between pre and post-independent India, village and city, traditional Eastern and modern Western ways the whole amounting to
nothing more than a documentary rural living such as the film director in the novel actually makes." 3

Mr. K. S. Rammurti goes to the extent of saying that Two Virgins is:

"Source of embarrassment for all her admirers and critics, for it is not a novel which lives up to standards set by the hopes raised in all the earlier novels. It has been considered generally as the poorest of all her works and positively sub-standards too." 4

There is an other side of the coin also. Two Virgins has received appreciatory remarks also from the critics. Critic like Uma Parmeshwaran considers it as a successful novel as it:

"taps the treasure have of basic human experiences especially every-popular one of adolescence in a series of well worded, well organised vignettes." 5

S. Krashna Swamy finds it remarkable as it:

"gives us an in-depth study of problem of growing up into an average woman of an average family in contemporary India." 6

Another critic like R. N. Rai has rightly commented

"it is true that the novel suffers from the lack of structural compactness, it has merit of its own. It shows the subtle transformation of Indian woman
through adolescence into adulthood. It gives us an insight into the concept of ‘cultural continuity’ in the midst of political, economical and social upheavals.”

Whatever are the merits and demerits of this novel the novel is certainly an invaluable document on man-woman relationship from a new angle, particularly from the angle of cultural clash between two modes of life-Eastern and Western. In addition to this Markandaya has presented the man-woman relationship in this novel, from the view of an awakened feminism sensibility in a constantly changing traditional Indian society. She is also aware of the:

“double pulls that the Indian woman is subjected to between tradition and modernity, between Indian and Western ways of living and values, between her dignity as a human being and her duty as a daughter, wife and mother, between marrying for love and marrying for the mother between her desires for autonomy and her need for nature.”

Appa and Amma form the first example of the harmonical man-woman relationship. Appa is commanding. His “body was hard.”

The hardness is symbolic here, it implies the primary position, men is given to in the society. Appa was younger to his sister aunt Alamelu but in discussion with her Appa held the sway.
“Appa was also younger than aunt Alamelu, but although she was older, aunt Alamelu tried hard not to cross him.” 10

Appa was presented as model in outlook, he thinks that his daughter should get education on modern lines. Amma is traditional and devoted wife. There are two daughters to this couple- Saroja and Lalitha. Saroja is the elder and Lalitha is the younger. Appa developed a particular liking for Lalitha.

“A prettier new born babe, I never set eyes upon before or since.” 11

Amma did not discriminate between her two daughters. She says:

“all our babies were beautiful not a flaw or blemish on any of them why do, you have to make a difference between them?” 12

Lalitha by virtue of being a beautiful, her father is favorite:

“Lalitha was his favorite because she was pretty.” 13

Lalitha was also conscious of her beauty.

“Lalitha lashes were quite phenomenal.” 14

Even Saroja admits the superiority of her sister’s beauty

“which out class that of all these city ladies.” 15

Lalitha is very different from her sister Saroja.
Saroja:

“had become used to being plain.” 16

But Lalitha is proud of her physical beauty. She is aware of her: “long lustrous eyelashes” and knows when to use them in order to a host of admirers Saroja has correctly observed:

“Lalitha had status she had no husband yet but everyone could she when she did she would have more than her fair proportion. There was no lack of emissaries. The young men’s mothers sent them and the women come and spoke to Amma and piched Lalitha’s cheek and Lalitha was demure, pressed her delicate feet together and cast down her eyes to show off her lashes, which were long and lustrous. Saroja knew it was for show because Lalitha told her.” 17

Lalitha does not seem to be afraid of teasing and wooing. Other female characters are afraid of this, Lalitha seems to enjoy eve-teasing. The characters like Saroja and even Jaya seems to be afraid of Lachu.

Lachu:

“did nothing all day long but seat by the roadside stretching out his hands to the girls on the way to school.” 18

The girls are afraid of Lachu but Lalitha was quite indifferent to the comment of the girls about the nasty behavior of Lachu. But Lalitha has her own view about Lachu. She says:

A Ph. D. Thesis. S. R. T. M. U., Nanded
“What if .... he is a simple man he would not harm a fly, he just dallies with girls, did not Krishna dally with girls.” 19

The girls and even Amma had seen Lalitha

“flicking her lashes at Lachu.” 20

Lalitha did not seem to be conforming to the codes of morality—particularly that of the females. She does not want to follow in habitations and taboos in any matter and particularly in matters of man-woman relationship. She prefers to be a libertine than to be puritan. The girls like Saroja and Jaya were afraid of Lachu even Amma was one of them who was terrified by Lachu. They wanted to report the matter to police but;

“they did not want it should in the courts what had been done to their daughters.” 21

Lachu had told them.

“He was a mad man and mad men were the children of God. Further he had said if you fell on me God will make you goat in your next generation you will be chopped-up to make goat carry by Muslim butchers.” 22

It is because of this reason the girls did not dare to contemplate any offensive measures against Lachu. For Lalitha none of these things mattered. What mattered to her much was that man should praise her beauty
and should make love with her. Making love with men is a symbol of being modern. For Lalitha, that is why when Saroja asked Lalitha if Amma had dallied with Lachu Lalitha had replied scornfully

"Amma was too unancient to dally with anyone." 23

And when Saroja asked if Lalitha had dallied with Lachu, Lalitha had replied

"mind you business and turned back on charpoy." 24

The most interesting relationship portrayed in this novel is that between Appa and Amma.

"In the night Appa and Amma quarrel each saying falls and terrible things about others scrounges." 25

Saroja was very much afraid when Appa and Amma quarreled and hissed at each other. "But Lalitha was not afraid of this quarrel, because Lalitha thought that Appa and Amma:

"were only working themselves up and it would all end in the same old way." 26

Always in the night the girl heard, "the charpoy creaking away." When her parents were making love. The way Appa and Amma made love in the night is described in the following manner.

"They made love quietly to start with but then it got frenried the cot strings twanged although they were only mads of rope and wooden frame groanded. One of the charpoy's leg was loose, it grounded most
fearfully. Sometimes Amma would hiss that she could bear it no longer and they would bounce off on to the floor. Saroja knew she ought to be pleased her parents, quarrel ended in love-making and in a way she was.” 27

Kamala Markandaya has described the sensuality and sexual feelings in such a candid and frank manner that in no other of her works, it may be found. She resembles Shobha De in her following description of sensuality:

“In another way, though it disturbed her made her thighs flutter and her inner moist, she longed to know what it was like for Amma, who was constructed like her some openings only larger Manikkam’s wife told her, because of the babies pushing out not to mention what was pushed in. Why don’t you find out? Said Lalitha. She had pebbles collected from Ranga’s River, shaped like lingams, smooth as anything. The showed Saroja how, got to moaning working herself on the stone and quite shameless, showing her thighs and crotch and even her little wick. But Saroja ran off, she did not want to try, she was frightened to in case the pebbles got lodged got in the way of babies which were more important than anything else a woman must have.” 28

But it is clear that Markandaya gives reference to sensuality only
to create artistic effect and not to create excitement. What is more surprising in the novel is that the two brothers of the family are not described in relation to their sisters. They do not play any active role in the development of the story of the novel. Therefore the relationship between brothers and sisters cannot be studied. It appears probable that had brothers been there present before the sisters, their presence could have restrained the uncalled for freedom of the sisters—particularly that of Lalitha. The aforesaid conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the imbalanced relationship between Appa and aunt Alamelu. Aunt Alamelu could not speak freely and liberally in the presence of her brother. She was afraid of her brother Appa. Her existence in the family of Appa was negligible.

“She had nothing, no husband or children and she lived with them for nothing.” 29

How helpless is the women in her association with men is clear from the fact that Appa unreasonably reprimands aunt Alamelu.

Aunt Alamelu becomes so scared that she leaves the house for place she does not know. The description of this incident tends to bring tears to our eyes.

“I know, Brother I know, she said, just tell me to go and I will, I know I have outlived my usefulness.

Where will you go, no one will touch you with a bargepole, said Appa.

Ah, yes, that too I know, croakeel Aunt Alamelu, but
what matter, I am only a widow less than the dust. So do not torment yourself about my fate, brother and she pulled her sari over her head like the poor widow that she was. Go then, I’m not stopping you, you meddling old bag, cried Appa. He was shouting and his hair had become electric wiry and flying away from his head. Aunt Alamelu got up her mat and made a small bundle of her belongings and touched Saroja’s eyes with her knuckles and kissed her knuckles and said sweet child, don’t wear out your eyes, crying for your old aunt, God will take care of her." 30

The man-woman relationship in this context appears to be imbalanced and out of harmony, and one could comfortably agree with Raman Selden who says:

"women is riveted into a lopsided relationship with man." 31

Commenting on the subordinate position of women and the conflict in the female psyche regarding her role and status in the contemporary society, a great feminist author Simone-de-Behavior writes:

"The women of today are in a fair way to de throne the myth femininity, they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways but they do not easily succeeded in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means
practically subordination to man, for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social functions.”

Commenting on the nature of the story Margaret P. Joseph writes that:

“The story is about an adolescent growing into a woman and a child into an adolescent. So the title ought to prepare as a point. It is a hint of the liberal lacing of sex with which this particular potion is flavored and it denotes nothing more than the physiological.”

Margaret is right in her remark but what may be added to the remark is that the story is about a girl growing into woman and coming into contact with man and it is her relationship with man which determines her entire course of action and future living. Lalitha’s contact with Mr. Gupta and the impact of Mr. Gupta changes the entire life of Lalitha.

Similarly, Saroja’s relationship with her confident Chingelput changes Lalitha profoundly.

Right from the beginning, Lalitha is more inclined towards men. Whereas Saroja is content enough to maintain a reasonable distance from them. Lalitha does not agree with Aunt Alamelu when the latter says that women are associated with creation.

But Saroja agrees with her.

“Men are like that, Aunt Alamelu said, that is why creation has been entrusted to women. Saroja liked
the thought, it made her feel good but Lalitha sniffed
and said creation was given to men too, which stopped
Aunt Alamelu dead in her tracks, stopped her from
going on cocily about nestlings and nests, which she
had been about to do. Saroja know because she often
listened to Aunt to oblique her. Lalitha wouldnot,
unless it was something she was interested in, she was
too impatient life is too short, she told Saroja but
Saroja couldnot think of life like that it seemed to
her more like a shining ribbon yards and yards of it
coming abundantly off a heavenly blue spool.” 34

Lalitha is a liberated girl who feels suffocated in her village
surroundings. She aspires for modernity and goes to the extent of violating
all norms of traditional Indian society. She finds the village, “stifling”
and “a sparkles” her soul belongs to the city. She flaunts the norms of
sexuality that are deeply rooted in the traditional village life. She is
determined to reject tradition and follow her own way. She is most willing
to be seduced. She invites seduction and the opportunity of being seduced,
she finds in, “A chance to be in a film.” Her mother is not at all prepared
for sending her daughter to such a carrier. However Appa, is of the opinion
that the kind of education Lalitha has received would enable her to match
all the requirements

“Lalitha told Appa and Amma. She had to, to get their cooperation without it she could not have seized her
opportunity. No one was clear what that was not even Lalitha. A film star, she said, a film actress a chance
Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya.

to be in a film. She whittled it down to fit the reality which would eventually have to be conceded. Appa said we must see. He said one must have the fall facts of the matter to enable one to come to the right decision. Not in this world, said Amma, in this world it is not possible to have the full truths, on any subject. It was clear they were talking for the sake of it to save face in front of their children by refusing to admit the subject was wholly outside their scope and experience. Appa said the Indian film industry was the second biggest in the world. He said it gave employment to two million people. His brow was furrowed he paced the countrywide with his hands looked behind his back and it was as plain as anything could be that these were not the facts that were needed what they wanted was another kind of information and not all his books could help to provide it” 35

The gesture of Appa is construed as silent approval by Lalitha. Lalitha becomes a victim of money minded “a western punk” and a film maker Mr. Gupta. Who exploits her weakness by assuring to give the role of heroin in his film. Mr. Gupta told the family that his intention was, “to make a documentary.” Lalitha seemed to be interested in joining him for the film.

“Good said Mr. Gupta. He seemed to take more notice of her than the had doing. In that case he said that he could use her defiantly.” 36
Mr. Gupta visited the house of Lalitha along with Devraj who was an assistant to Mr. Gupta along with them also came Miss Mendoza- the principal of the school where Lalitha and Saroja were obtaining education. During the visit, Gupta used to bring presents and particularly sweets to create impression on and rapport with the family. During his visit Mr. Gupta kept an eye on Lalitha. Saroja was also given presents by Gupta.

"Mr. Gupta hardly ever came without bearing presents for Appa and Amma and Aunt, for Lalitha and Saroja. Saroja suspected his largesse to her was to do with her accompanying Lalitha, who wasn't permitted to go off alone. It pleased her all the same, it wants easy having Lalitha singled out for the favors all the time. Sweetness, said Lalitha, sugar-doll, sugar-sweet, sugar-candy. Whom do you mean? Asked Aunt Alamelu. She knew who was meant, she often accepted gifts herself she was incorruptible. Why, said Lalitha, I meant these dainties and delicacies, what else should I mean did you have some-person in mind?" 37

Saroja was aware that Mr. Gupta is after Lalitha. She discloses the matter to Chingelput—who is her confidant. She gives the sweet presented to her by Gupta to Chingelput. Chingelput says, "very nice", perhaps the sweet was better than the one prepared and sold by him. In order to hide the second rate quality of the sweets, he says that the sweet brought by Gupta is "excellent although done by machine." Chingelput wanted to imply that hand made sweets could in no way compete with machine made sweets.
What Chingelput had got in his mind was a fancy for Saroja which he was afraid to express openly. Chingelput was no better than Mr. Gupta. Even Appa called Chingelput, "a shrewd man."

Appa had always helped Chingelput. Chingelput was close to the family and perhaps because of this closeness to the family, he could not dare to deflower the virginity of Saroja. Mr. Gupta, on the other hand, lived in the city. He was not close to the family and hence there was no reason for him to retain his animal desires. Aunt Alamelu could foresee the satanic intention of Mr. Gupta.

"Your daughter, said Aunt, she did not have to make it plain which one she meant, she's after your daughter. She spoke right out you could see her feelings had carried her away beyond the bound of respect she owed Appa." 38

Lalitha's actions prepare for the future tragedy that she meets. She is not respectful of the village traditions. What matters much to her is the glamour, and show of the city life. The city life is characterised by the motive of bigger profits. Everything is subordinated to higher gains.

"Animals are fattened for slaughter, they have no right."

For, Lalitha virginity, traditional values and honor do not count much. She desires to shoot into fame and hence she replies in a very contemptuous manner, to her Aunt Alamelu.

"She pulled herself together and said, loftily, I'm an artist, you have no conception of artistic affinity,"
which is what lies between us, you can see only evil in the most beautiful things.” 39

Lalitha makes dove at the doorsteps to welcome the film producer Mr. Gupta. When Mr. Gupta enters the dove gets blurred.

“When Mr. Gupta shuffled his feet the dove got blurred, but no one seemed to notice except Saroja. She watched the socks getting powdered and the dove disappearing, but you could not very well correct a guest even if he was a departing one.” 40

Lalitha feels disappointed and then after Gupta leaves she makes an Eagle.

“Tears fell from Lalitha’s eyes, she said it was to see her lovely dove destroyed. She knelt and brushed away the scuffed powder and drew again. This time it was an Eagle a golden Eagle soaring over the plaints.” 41

Dove and Eagle are symbolic here. The dove symbolises peace and love but after the interference of Gupta in the family and the life of Lalitha, the peace and love is destroyed as symbolically dove is “blurred”. Eagle is a symbol of destruction and danger-which Lalitha’s union with Mr. Gupta has brought.

The offer of role of heroine tempts Lalitha to leave her house. She goes to the city in order to lead a free and independent life. There she, lured by the attraction of the city life, is seduced by Mr. Gupta. Theme of seduction is very common before the fall of man. In Ramayana, Rama was
Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya

seduced by the "miriga-maricha", and result was downfall. Satan seduces Adam and Eve and tempts them to taste the forbidden fruit and result is the downfall. In *Tess of Durbervilles* by Hardy. Tess is seduced by Alec and thereafter the tragedy befalls Tess. Here in the novel Mr. Gupta seduces Lalitha and impregnates her without marriage. On the other hand the going of Lalitha from village is deeply regretted by the family members. It is the Diwali festival and Appa misses his daughter. The disappointment and despondency of Mr. Gupta is depicted by the novelist in the following term:

“He looked lost. He watched Saroja, who was filling little mad saucers with oil. He was nice to her admired the wicks she had made and laid, out ready in a row. Wicks are easy said Saroja she soaked one in oil and twisted it into place. She knew she could not, could not take the place of her missing sister, no human being could fill the place of another, the shape of the space was different” 42

Going of Lalitha to the city for a new role in a film and for acquiring a new identity is like going away of Karuna in Socialite Evenings, of Shobha De Karuna goes to join a carrier in modelling. Lalitha goes to start a carrier in a film. Both kinds of carriers the Indian Society do not permit to women. Aunt Alamelu asks her brother,

“You have given your children their rights, brother and what is the result.”

Here it is worthwhile to mention that Aunt Alamelu represents the A Ph D. Thesis. S. R. T. M. U., Nanded
traditionalism. Appa is extremely enraged with Aunt. He reprimands her for her old views on liberty of women and the joint family system.

"Appa was incensed. He danced in his rage, was quite dramatic. Ancient scriptures, be cried, what ancient scriptures, you meddling old bag? Can you say which of them lays down that young men should rot upholding the joint families system?

Is that what you had in your minuscule mind for my boys, that they should stagnate in this village where there is no outlet what so ever for their energies and Talents? Joint family? He said. He was breathing he was bothered, you could feel his deep repulsion for curbs and compulsions, after all he had fought for freedom all his life." 43

Indian women has no status without husband. Aunt Alamelu has no status as she is without a husband. Lalitha is impregnated without marriage. Nothing can be a greater curse than the pre-marital pregnancy for an Indian women. Indian society doesnot permit an illegitimate child. Lalitha comes back home. Appa becomes very much worried with condition of Lalitha Miss Mendoza advises them to take decision very coolly. She says.

"We must not jump to hasty conclusions." 44

They take Lalitha to the city and they try to negotiate with Mr. Gupta. Mr. Gupta refused to own the responsibility of the child. But he agreed to pay for the abortion of the child Mr. Gupta was not willing to accept Lalitha
as his wife. As a result the parents were left with no alternative than to abort the child. Saroja was against the abortion. Appa realises his mistake now.

“I educated the milkman, he said but I couldnot do as much for my own child. She was innocent and we let her go out as she was.” 45

Appa talks to Mr. Gupta, regarding the follies he has committed and thereby brought a disgrace to his family. During the conversation, Gupta listened to Appa very carefully and said,

“It was a great pity.” The conversation between Gupta and Appa is very truthfully depicted by the novelist.

“Appa opened the proceeding, said what a terrible shock it had been to them. It had cast a shadow over their entire lives Mr. Gupta said, he understood, he understood perfectly. He sounded nervous, as if on guard against admitting anything His daughters” life was in ruins, Appa continued, His voice quavered then it picked up rose accusingly. Her whole future had lain before his fair and lovely daughter, he said with her talent and looks it had been a great future to which they had all looked forward, now all was reduced to ashes. Mr. Gupta said it was a great pity, a great pity.” 46

What is significant in the discussion is that Amma doesnot grill Mr. Gupta. The only question she asks is “If that was all he had to say.”
fact she requested Mr. Gupta to wed Lalitha. But Gupta declined. On the contrary he inhasitatingly put the blame on Lalitha. He contended that:

"Lalitha had flung herself at him, he had never been so pestered in his life." 

The remark of Mr. Gupta about Lalitha hurts Appa but Mr. Gupta went on blaming Lalitha:

"What she was doing in his studio then, flapping her lashes and is issuing invitation to all and sundry."

Women in Indian society is weak and subordinate to men. Man is not blamed for any kind of incestuous behavior. The blame is put directly on women. Mr. Gupta further tells about Lalitha.

"Lalitha is a women with the natural desires of a woman."

The only responsibility he takes is that he could not resist the temptation.

"I am not made of a stone."

The only assurance Gupta gives to the parents is that,

"everything will be taken care of I will arrange everything."

The parents have to compromise considering the delicacy of the matter. Women are considered an object of lust. She is supposed to live a restrained life. A woman should not go beyond the reasonable limits and shouldnot violent the traditional norms of Indian society. Any attempt to
cross the limit would prove disgraceful and fatal. Amma admits that her lack of control over Lalitha, ultimately lead her of misery and social disgrace. She tells Saroja:

"Your sister wandered too far, she said weakly. She was lured outside the code of our community and is paying the penalty that is all." 49

In the world of men Lalitha fails. A women is required to be tactful enough to survive in men’s world. Lalitha’s dreams are shattered into pieces because her aspirations are based on feminine beauty and sexual liberty. She suffers also because she does not value the traditional roots. She gets herself uprooted from the traditional patterns of Indian society like Ramma Bovary and Anna Karenina, she has excellent beauty and high expectations from society but ironically ends with utter disillusionment as is evident from the following lines:

"Lalitha who demanded beauty and perfection out of life, who was herself so exquisitely fashioned. But it gave you no claims none at all, no guarantees, whatsoever." 50

Lalitha does not improve herself. She does not feel guilty for what she had done. Once she tried to jump into a well to commit suicide but she is prevented by Saroja.

A new dimension in man-woman relationship is provided in the novel through the dream of Saroja. Woman cannot live without man. It is not only matter of protection and support in the society but also a matter of
satisfying biological instincts for which women has got to come closer to man. Women is incomplete without men, - is what is known as traditional belief of Indian society. How strongly and desperately a women needs the company of a man is exemplified through Saroja. Saroja, during her stay in the city dreams that Devraj has come closer to her.

“He lay down beside her and started to caress her. She allowed him to, she discovered she had no sense of shame in revealing in yielding the shyset, most guarded recesses of her body to him. Each caress was like a passing flame. The sensations were exquisite, were mounting she couldnot bear them but she wanted more, she begged him to pierce her entirely and give her peace. I will he cried and lunged. Lalitha appeared she was naked, her belly was enormous but she didn’t seem to mind. Her eyes were shining, reanwet, diamonds hung as the lashes. It’s so lovely, she said, there’s nothing like it when they spill their seed. Saroja brust into tears. She twisted herself away from Devraj, his sucking, clinging, spilling body. Your are killing me, he cried, you’re killing my baby, Saroja shouted at him. She woke.” 51

The main difference between the character of Saroja and Lalitha is that Saroja is an intelligent girl. Saroja observes minutely. She experiences and her experiences help her in taking a decision. She decides not to associate herself with Devraj, because such association may tarnish her image in the society. That’s why when Devraj comes closer to her and...
Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya.

touches her she reacts sharply.

"Saroja leapt up. Her flesh was molten. She knew what he was asking. She knew where it ended. She had dragged her bloated gravid sister out of the bag, she had been the bloody pulp of the baby." 52

She asks Devraj:

"What do you take me for, she screamed a virgin in your whorehouse?" 53

Saroja acts like a mature woman. She is very practical, in her relationship with Devraj and Chingelput. She has experienced how her sister has suffered and so she takes all precautions to stay off from vilification. She is more careful in her association with Chingelput. Chingelput embraces her.

"He clashed her, his organ was hard, was nuzzing don’t be afraid I’m a man. I can’t help it. Said Chingelput." 54

Saroja trusted Chingelput in every matter. Rather, she shared her happiness and worries, with him, but the sexual experience she denied with him. She withdraws herself from Chingelput.

"Saroja wasn’t afraid. She knew too much, she had gone through too much to be afraid of anything. But she knew, she want for him. She would never be, so she drew away from him. She got up and mounted her bike." 55

A Ph. D. Thesis. S. R T. M. U., Nanded
Saroja knows well that sex between man and woman is legalised only through marriage. She is of the opinion that a life of woman without the marital yoke is incomplete. Marriage is essential for the sense of completeness of a woman. It is her firm conviction in marriage that prevents her from developing an affair either with Devraj or Chingelput. Saroja thinks and acts like a mature woman. It doesnot mean that she doesnot have the natural instincts of an adolescent girl. She has natural instincts of woman. She is equally desirous to know the details of sexual life. She has learnt a lot about sex from her association with Jaya and Mankkam’s wife. She feels highly delighted in watching the growth of her feminine organs. She is aware of a natural attractions of a girl for young man. But she is aware about its fatal consequence, if limit is crossed.

Moreover, Saroja is aware of the limitations of a woman, which have been forced upon her by the conventions of a traditional society. She thinks:

“Women had no bolt holes. There was no escape for them. They had to stayed where they were and take it.” 56

Saroja has full of sympathy for Lalitha. Lalitha suffers because of her over-ambitions and for alter disregard for the traditional ethos. She is against the abortion of the child, whether legitimate or illegitimate. Saroja thinks that why should a child suffer for no faults of its own? Why should a woman alone pay the penalty for the sin for which man is equally responsible. She expressed her reaction on this issue like a mature woman.

“If you were married and got pregnant, everyone was
pleased except those unfortunate women who were barren there were little ceremonies to call down blessing on you and when the baby was born everyone come round smiling bringing little presents.... If you weren’t married and become pregnant the picture was quite different.

It was altogether grim. Your husband it up as best you could and your baby. If ever it got born had no future at all. Saroja thought it wrong, she often mulled about it, especially since her sister and always reached the same conclusion. It was wrong a crime against the baby which was the same whether you were married or not but she knew her elders like Aunt Alamelu who were the majority did not agree.” 57

But for Lalitha abortion of the child is not a matter to be much worried over. She is so daring and unscrupulous that she doesnot comply with the instructions of her parents. It is discovered that one morning she disappears from the hotel not because of feeling the shame or disgrace but because she wanted to lead an independent life. Lalitha had hated the idea of going back to the village.

“.... she couldn’t face going back to the village. It stiffed her, her talents, her ambitions. She intended to stay in the city, where she belonged. She couldnot look after herself. They weren’t to search for her, which in any case would be a waste of time because
they would never find her." 58

In this regard a critic like Shrivastava has rightly observed.

"Just as we question the reason for the parents decision to stand behind Lalitha, we question Lalitha’s reason for staying on in the city. Is it because she wants to spare her family the pain of having her at home? Or is it because she loves the city, warts all? I think it is the latter like Kunthis she loves her baby in a narcissistic way and she seems willing to pay the price. So I don’t think we need to fly a feminist banner about society’s cruelty to unmarried mothers. Though we feel sorry for Lalitha, when she wishes she could have kept the child, there is no call for long term sympathy or for feminist rage her decision to stay in the city and not return to the village is clear. She even advises Saroja, in the note hidden in the shoe to join her and stay in the city." 59

What Markandaya appears to conclude is that women has no status without men. Aunt Alamelu has no husband and therefore no status. She says about herself,

"I only a widow less than a dust."

Similarly, Lalitha couldnot attain a niche for herself in the society because she was alone and a bachelor. Had she been married, she would have shot into fame.
It would be quite correct to conclude with Shrivastava. "I think, Markandaya is making a point that she makes in all her novels, that women can grow in strength and be independent when they are cornered. I don't particularly like her characterizations in the novel, but some of the passages of Lalitha taking pleasure in her body are almost sensuous. Whenever Markandaya manages to get away from her staccato prose style."
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A Ph. D. Thesis. S. R. T. M. U., Nanded
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A Ph. D. Thesis. S. R. T. M. U., Nanded
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