CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
Indian novel in English can rightly be said to have begun with the publication of Bhankim Chandra Chattarji's novel, 'Rajmohan's Wife' in 1864. For the next three decades there could not appear any great novelist on the scene. In the year 1905 B. Rajan Iyer published his 'Vasudevan Shastri' and Balkrashna's 'The Love of Kusum' appeared in 1910. These novels did not show the maturity of the later-day writers. It was the lack of vision and maturity of the novelists that prompted some critics to ridicule and debunk the Indian creative writing in English. Some of the critics have compared Indian writing in English to a dog's walking on the hind legs. Even an Indian critic like Uma Parmeshwaran compares Indian literature in English as "immature and in significant". She has concluded that,

"Indo-English literature seems destined to die young."  

A close review of the early novels reveals that there was a stereotype of themes in the novels and the authors grip over the language was feeble and uncertain. That is why the novels written during the initial phase could not achieve universal acclaim.

The moribund spirit of the novel writing in English received fresh impetus and inspiration with the emergence of three stalwarts-Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayana. In this context R. S. Pathak writes:

"The emergence of the big three- Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayana on the literary firmament
brought new hopes about the creative activity in the form of fiction.” 2

Further a great critic William Walsh has rightly commented that,

“It was in 1930’s that the Indian began what has now turned out to be there very substantial contribution to the novel in English and one peculiarly suited to their talents.” 3

The major thematic concerns of these writers were the matters related to freedom struggle, nationalist movements, untouchability and other contemporary social milieu. The influence of Gandhian thought and philosophy was quite predominant on the novels of these stalwarts.

By the year 1950 there was a new turn in the Indian English novel writing. A host of female writers joined the scene to give a new direction to the Indian fiction writing in English. The interests of these women novelist

“moved from public to the private sphere”. 4

Novelist like Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai and many other women novelists, contributed to a further development of the Indian fiction in English. The history of Indian women novelist begins with Taru Datta whose novel includes Bianca. It is an auto biographical novel.

Taru Datta died at the age of 21. She was followed by Cornelia Sorabji. She is known for her three important works-
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Love and life Behind the Purdah (1910), Sun-Babies in the Child life of India (1904) and Between the Twilight (1908).

She concerns herself with the female problems like the Purdah system, and subordination of women in the male-dominated society. She belongs to what Show Walter calls “the feminist phase”, which is characterised by the protest against male values.

After the second world war, the Indian women novelists began to deal with new themes. They became more realistic in the portrayal of Indian villages, their customs and cultures, rites and traditions etc. The prominent novelists of this period are, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawar Jhavala. In this connection Iyengar has rightly opined:

“It is, however, only after the second world war that woman novelists of quality have began enriching Indian fiction in English. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding.”

Commenting on the major preoccupations of the women novelists Seema Jena writes-

“They preoccupied themselves with the problems of women had contributed to fiction some very intimate pictures of woman, isolated, as the Brahmin or Purdah-clad families, particularly during the period of adolescence when vigilance over the virgins was very strict. They not only attended to problems of women
in the Indian society, but were keen on portraying the social world, but in this respect they had rather a circumscribed vision. They were as it were, viewing society from their sheltered homes, not directly involved in the turmoil most of them came from upper middle class families and consequently did not have the opportunity to see the new society emerging out of a decaying colonial order.

Some of these women writers did try to give a realistic picture of India in its poverty, squalor and oppression, of the human suffering injuring from the evils of an unjust social system. But their perceptions lack depth largely insulated and distanced, they view the broad social phenomena around them as curious observers not entirely familiar with the basic cultural and emotional conditions. This inadequacy of understanding some time manifests itself in starting ways rendering the pictures they, naive and spurious.”

In fact, the women novelists went on gradually widening their scope of subject matters and made significant contributions to the growth of Indian fiction in English.

Emboldened by the success of the early women novelists a number of women writers joined the fray to take the fiction writing in English to a new height. Prominent among them are, Shantha Rama Rau, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Veena Paintal, Nergis Dalal, Anita Desai, Geeta
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Mehta, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shoba De, Bharati Mukharjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor and many more.

In the present research an attempt has been made to study the novels of Kamala Markandaya in the light of depiction of man-woman relationship in her novels.

Kamala Markandaya’s first novel, is Nectar in a Sieve (1954) portrays village life of south India. This novel has been compared with Pearl S. Buck’s ‘The Good Earth’ and K. S. Venkta Ramani’s, ‘Murugan the Tiller’. It is a story of the poor peasant family who works hard to earn his living. But the irony is that the nature frustrates all their hopes and aspirations. Markandaya writes that fear, hunger, gloom and despondency are the constant companions of the peasants. Rukmani, the narrator heroine has to face lot of adversities and calamities despite this she does not lose faith. She has to suffer her husband’s infidelity, her daughter’s sacrificial going to prostitution to protect the family, the premature death of child ‘Kuti’, alienation from the village and adoption of ‘Puli’. Rukmani trusts her husband, she is a very loving mother but she has to allow her sons to go away to find out sustenance for themselves, because she could not afford to support them. She swallows the disloyalty of her husband because she loves him and supports him at every step. Nathan and Rukmani’s alienation from the village and their subsequent wandering in the city in search of their son and job and the resultant demise of Nathan is quite pathetic. This situation tends to bring tears down our eyes. The trial and tribulations of Rukmani was common among the peasant women of the contemporary society. Calm after storm, spring after winter in the
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unending cycle what is needed is hope and faith if one desires to discover, “Nectar in a Sieve.”

Commenting on the nature of peasant condition which is depicted in Nectar in a Sieve Uma Parmeshwar writes:

“Nectar in a Sieve is a story of the faceless peasant who stands silhouette in the unending twilight of Indian agrarian bankruptcy the horizon showing through the silent trees now with crimson gashes, now with soul-exalting splendour, alway, holding out the promise that the sun will rise again after the night, the night ever approaching yet never encompassing.... It is easy to wring tears of pity for the plight of the peasant, underfed uneducated exploited; it is easier still to arouse anger and contempt for the superstitious and slow-moving masses. They stand there, vulnerable and open to every attack, be it indifference, contempt, or emasculating charity. But to evoke admiration, even envy for their simple faith and unswerving tenacity required empathy and skill. Kamala Markandaya has both.” 7

Thus there is a combination of “desperation and aspiration” in Nectar in a Sieve. Even in the midst of troubles and pains life asserts itself.

A Silence of Desire (1961) is the third novel of Kamala Markandaya. The title of the novel indicates the theme. The title is taken

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from Longfellow, who refers to the three types of silence—silence of a speech, of desire and of thought. The story concerns the middle class family. The theme of the novel is a clash between faith and reason. Dandekar and Sarojani being the husband and wife, are the main characters in the novel. Dandekar is a government servant. He claims to have the knowledge of modern science. Sarojani is a typical traditional wife. She has no trust in modern science and scientific developments. She dislikes hospitals because her mother and grandmother died during surgery. She, therefore, decided to undergo a kind of faith-cure, for her cancerous growth in the womb. The Swami is the third important character in the novel. Sarojani, becomes his disciple and hopes that Swami would provide her the right treatment. She does not tell Dandekar about the Swami. Her absence from the family makes Dandekar doubtful about her character. The peace and the tranquility of the family is disturbed. Dandekar comes to know about the Swami's influence on his wife. He persuades his wife to get operated in a hospital. Sarojani does not change her mind. Finally only after the removal and departure of the Swami, Sarojani becomes disillusioned and undergoes an operation in the family hospital. The peace and harmony is restored.

The novel presents a comprehensive account of the different nuances of man-woman relationship. The relationship not only between husband and wife but between father and daughter and other male and female is also highlighted in the novel.

The story in the novel is narrated through Dandekar. Commenting on the different issues embodied in the novel, Uma Parmeshwarn writes:
"The central issue here is the inarticulation that is present in a husband-wife relationship. The second issue here is the conflict between rationality and spirituality, scientific objectivity and intuitive subjectivity. Then there is the issue of the Hindu concept of detachment as essential for real faith.

Finally, we have the feminist angle of women's expected role and predictable restraints. The distinctive feature of this novel is that the narrative point of view is a male protagonist's. This is the first novel in which Markandaya adopts a third person limited point of view that as a man's. She repeats it in later novel, but never in this undiluted manner where everything is seen only through Dandekar's eyes." 8

The fourth novel of Kamala Markandaya is Possession published in 1963. Iyengar considers this novel as, "a continuation of A Silence of Desire". Valmiki and Caroline are the chief protagonists of the novel. The story of the novel is narrated through Anasuya who is perhaps the author herself. The novel presents an encounter between the East and the West. The wealth, talent and the treasures of the East are desired to be possessed by the West for commercial purposes. The talent of Val is exploited by Caroline for her own personal gratification. The presence of Swami brings this novel closer to A Silence of Desire. The swami in this novel is different from that in the previous novel. The swami in Possession flies to London and continues to influence Val. The monkey image is very appropriately used. The pet monkey 'Minou' stands for the pet Valmiki.
Other important characters are Ellie and Anabel. Ellie has got nightmarish experiences of Nazi concentration camp where she was defiled and deflowered. She develops a relation with Val. The disclosure of this relationship irks and angers Caroline. Ellie is summarily dismissed from service. Caroline wanted to possess Val completely. Anabel is another character whose brief relationship with Val reveals that Val has come under Western influence where what matters much is the physicality of relationship. In this regard Uma Parmeshwarn says:

"what I have said interacts with themes in Kamala Markandaya’s Possession at all levels; in Possession, they appear as materialism spirituality polarities, British-India contrast and the value of art.”

What Markandaya suggests through this novel is that, desire to possess and dominate over other is the root cause of the lopsided growth of relationship between man and woman. Iyengar has rightly opined:

"while the deeper insights in the novel are about the secret informing and sustaining power of art, the folly and futility of the average human desire for, “Possession” is overtly underlined again and again. Caroline takes possession of Val, dresses him up in the habiliments of civilization, and has him in tow, even as Val himself buys the tiny monkey puts a scarlet hip-jacket upon him and leads him by a gilt leather collar. The desire to possess, the perilous act of possession (for the possessor is himself possessed
as Val), the constant fear of losing—what is all this except, "a grey and ugly trail of human misery, such as, horribly swollen but not unrecognisable, one saw stumbling in the wake of power-societies and empires." The violence of the language here makes one almost suspect that perhaps, Anasuya (or Kamala Markandaya) is trying to make the story of Caroline and Valmiki something of a parable of colonialism, the passing of an empire and the current insidious movement of neocolonialism. A novel built round a spiritual truth, Possession is rather less, satisfying as a human story than its predecessor. There is no lack of incident, no death of characters. But although the interests doesnot flag, the situation and the principle character do not quite carry conviction. The contracts are looking striking the demonstration of Swamiji's victory over Caroline is too overhelming. But for what it may be worth, Caroline has the last word in the novel."

A Handful of Rice published in 1966 is the fifth novel of Kamala Markandaya. The scene of the novel is shifted to an urban area, unlike Nectar in a Sieve where the rural life and economy find delineation. Indian critic Prem Nandakumar compares this novel with Bernard Malamud’s The Assistant. The major protagonists in the novel are Ravi and Nalini. While treating the relationship between man-and woman, Kamala Markandaya shows how the relationship is influenced by human experience and
behavior which are in turn affected by external forces. The female character Jayamma in the novel is a contrast to Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Ravi hails from village but he dislikes the village life. The novel begins with the incident of Ravi’s forceful entry into the house of Apu. Apu is a tailor by profession. He has a large family to support. The other members of the family like Puttanna, Kumaran, Verma are all parasites upon Apu. Apu is a very simple-minded fellow who has his own theory of politeness and promptness, which are indispensable in business. Jayamma is a dominating figure. Most of the actions and decisions of Apu are influenced by Jayamma. Instead of being despised and chased away, Ravi is allowed to marry the beautiful daughter Nalini. In the same way as in Malamud’s *The Assistant*. Frank Alpine is allowed to marry Helen. ‘Ravi’s desire to become rich and provide all kinds of comforts to his wife, remains unfulfilled. There are certain reasons for this. The first reason is that his wife Nalini prevents him from indulging in any immoral act which would tarnish the image of the family. Ravi is greatly influenced by his wife though he has the urge to rebel to fulfil his financial commitment to his wife and children but he cannot rebel against moral integrity. The second reason is that initially he feels attracted to Damodar. Damodar has relations with the underworld. He lives the life of a criminal. In his eyes women are no more than flesh to satisfy the sexual instincts of men. But later on, Ravi, develops repulsiveness to Damodar. While Damodar possesses the constant threat to Ravi’s honest life Nalini is the constant counter-foil to the dishonest one, that Ravi would have otherwise embraced. Ravi says,
"But now my wife-she does not want me to do anything dishonest, she and family, I mean, they are respectable." 

The third reason is that, Ravi's sense of responsibility to Apu, to Nalini, to his children and to his own self keeps him away from Damodar. After the death of Apu the responsibility of running the house is delegated to Ravi. He turns out all the parasites away from the house. Ravi has to face a lot of unpleasant situations like a death of his son and other economic problems. But he overcomes all of them with the help of Nalini.

In this novel Markandaya seems to be affirming the value of personal relationship, family bonds and relationship between man and woman.

Commenting on A Handful of Rice K Venkatta Reddy writes:

"A Handful of Rice portrays the sociocultural economic class very vividly. Once again Markandaya gives a picture of the Indian village where people lived between bouts of gentle and acute poverty the kind in which the weakest went to the walls the old ones and the babies dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the falling fever, recurrent fever and any other names for what was basically simple nothing but starvation. In the city, life for poor is no different but no one complains not even Nalini. She says people of their kind can never be rich the memshahib who had a lot of clothes stitches in India because things were so cheap here,... knows she would never be able to afford so many..."
clothes once she leaves India. She had no sympathy for the workman who made this possible. She has no sympathy for Ravi for he delay in delivering the clothes due to Apu’s death. Ravi is shocked at her callousness. Did this woman realise how they lived? In her community did they simply carry straight after a death as if nothing happened? Marriages in India are not found on love. Jayamma was much younger than Apu. She did not love him but she nursed him devotedly as a wife should out of a strong sense of duty.” 12

The Coffer Dams is published in 1969. British engineer Clinton comes to India for building a dam across a south Indian river. The British technician are assisted by Indian engineers like Krashnan, Bashiam etc.

Clinton is married and brings his wife Helen also to India. Helen lives the small British colony where chief engineer’s wife Millie Rawlings also lives. Helen is drawn towards the tribes. She is very much fascinated by Bashiam. Her fascinations for Bashiam culminates in sexual indulgence between the two. Clinton sees Helen as a soulmate. Helen on her side can intellectually subscribe to Clinton’s way of looking at life, though emotionally she cannot. Helen and Clinton separate from each other. The separation causes much more anguish for him than for her. Clinton needs her for his wholeness. Helen drifts away from Clinton because he lacks certain qualities, she thinks essential in a human being. She finds these qualities in Bashiam. For Clinton what is more important is the dam and
machine than the life of the tribes. Forty men, most of them tribes, are killed during the work. But for Clinton it does not matter, he says, "their bodies can be incorporated in the structure". Clinton does not find any difference between the dam and the tribes. Bashiam also dies and his death shocks Helen. She doubts Clinton’s hand in Bashiam’s death.

The man woman relationship is treated very skillfully in this novel. Kamala Markandaya tends to say that relationship between husband and wife based upon instincts, urges are more important and lasting than that based upon customs and traditions.

Two Virgins was published in 1970. The novel is criticised on account of different kinds of shortcomings and failures. Uma Parmeshwarn writes about the novel—

"... the strength of Two Virgins does not lie in its plot or characterization or theme but in the handling of language and structure. The story is stripped of objective details and tries to adhere to fundamental verities. Even more than usual Markandaya uses such devices as flashbacks and vignettes and thought sequences to make the narration subjective. She uses a very small number of major characters and even fewer minor ones." 13

There are other critics also like Mrs. Joseph, K. S, Ramamurthi, P. K. Singh who finds several flaws in the novel. But the fact is that Two Virgins is laudable work of art by Markandaya. The novel depicts very truthfully the relationship between man and woman. In the male dominated
society a widow like Aunt Alamelu has no value. Her existence is not at all important in the eyes of Appa and even Amma. Saroja and Lalitha, the two daughters of Appa, can no longer remain virgins in the society which is sex-starved, materialistic and male-dominated. The virginity of Lalitha is defiled by the film maker Mr. Gupta, still Lalitha does not repent that her loss of virginity has tarnished the image of her family. Very contrary to the character of Lalitha is that of Saroja. Saroja lives a restrained life. She is afraid of the male company because she has observed how her sister has suffered. Despite her restrained behavior and her honest faith in Chingelput she has to undergo the nightmarish experience of her being embraced by Chingelput.

What Markandaya seems to suggest is that the relationship between a woman and a man who are not blood relations cannot be entirely a spiritual one. The attraction between opposite sexes is natural, and it is beyond human capacity to prevent the attraction.

Amma is depicted as a very sensible mother and devoted wife. Appa is very dominating. Despite all this Amma has some secret relationship with other persons and these relations can be labelled as extramarital affairs. It is not only men who flirt with and spoil women, women are equally bad.

This novel has been interpreted in the light of modern communist theories, which throws a new light upon the delineation of man-woman relationship in the novel. A female critic like Sunaina Kumar has rightly commented that in the novel Two Virgins:

"The author intrudes to comment on the British rule,
the status of women and the virtues of Hinduism versus the defects of Christianity. The intrusion conveys the message but diminishes the value of the story element in the novel.” 14

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most outstanding novelists in Indo-Anglian fiction. Her novels reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India. Markandaya has seen India very closely and her observations regarding ideas and various modes of life influencing man woman relationship is very appropriate and proper. The major themes of her novels are social, cultural and economic clash of these two modes. East-West encounter is also one of the major themes in the novels of Kamala Markandaya.

Kamala Markandaya is often compared with Ruth P. Jhabvala. Commenting on Markandaya and Jhabvala Mrs. Shakuntala Singh writes-

"Markandaya and Jhabvala have both had the advantage of mixed sensibility. Both have first hand knowledge of the countries of their adoption. With an intimate understanding of the traditions and values of both the cultures. Both novelists have viewed the challenges of the contrasting cultures from very close quarters. They have found enough in their experiences to keep the East and West apart. But it is equally noticeable that underlying their observations in the optimism that an understanding can be reached. Each of these authors has stipulated her views on issues related to
the intercultural and inter-social encounter. These views find expression in their novel." 15

Both Kamala Markandaya and Jhabvala have tried to recapture the socio-cultural life of Indian society. Kamala Markandaya tends to raise her voice against the sufferings caused by social tension. She is still haunted by the memories of colonial past. Jhabvala’s novels reflect the European predicament in India.

Both of these writers are actually sensitive to India’s grinding poverty. The apathetic attitude of the wealthy Indian is very shocking to Jhabvala. Indian women, according to Jhabvala, have been influenced by western culture. According to her, Indian women follow into practical life, the Western culture because she finds them attractive. Indian women feel it disgusting to keep up the “Seeta-Savitri” image which they are asked for by their parents, brothers, friends and husbands. For Jhabvala an Indian wife is a silent sufferer. Markandaya has glorified the image of the mother in her novels. Mother always protect the daughters in her novels. The girls or daughters as depicted in her novels are not merely docile and obedient, but they are depicted as taking their own decisions. They act in a defiant way when the situation warrant them to do so.

It would be right to say that, Kamala Markandaya’s novels present the picture of India struggling against odds and trying to rise above them. Markandaya concentrates on economic, political and cultural problems of India.

Niraj Banerji has appropriately said about the novels of Kamala Markandaya that:

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"Her novels are, thus, as crystal-clear as the waters of the hilly lake there is undoubtedly a kind of classical clarity and transparency about them. The novelist does not get lost in the meandering of a Jayceas Ulysses; she rather emerges such and successful with each successive fictional narrative. This speaks of the continual growth of her mind and art which alone can ensure her a permanent rank among the major fiction-writes of common wealth literature." 16
## Notes & References

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