CHAPTER TWO

TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS

A rich tradition can well be an integral part of modernity. Both can coexist and supplement each other. It is a matter of adjustment. Modernisation can be adopted to an extent desirable, depending on the need and receptivity of a society. (Jaisingh 33)

Contemporary India is plagued by confusion, violence and spasmodic cultural, social and political convulsions. The confrontation of the Indian society which is rather resilient by nature with the onslaughts of the ongoing phenomenon of modernization has unfortunately led to "the dehumanization of social environment and the depersonalization of human beings" (Raghava 158). The external distinctive characteristics of modernity are felt in the hysterical process of industrialization, urbanization and mechanization of human life. With the rapid introduction of industrialization and the frantic establishment of urbanization man seems to have lost his traditional roots.

Writers of contemporary Indian English fiction have expressed their great concern for the loss of traditional and human values amidst the sweeping Western influences and
expanding urban monstrosities. They have shown in their novels how a spiritual vacuum formed during the transitional phase and how the old traditional values were disappearing without being properly replaced by new ones. Contemporary Indian English fiction exposes this predicament. Owing to the emergence of new values of modern mechanization and the morbid octopus of Westernization, people who lived during the transitional period found it quite difficult to preserve the existing traditional and human values. As Bhagwat S. Goyal rightly observes: "The conflict between a decadent tradition (though marked by certain positive values and spiritual resilience) and a runaway modernity (verging many times merely on a blind aping of the West) is one of the central themes in most of the novels written by Indo-English writers" (47).

The growth of industrialization means in the Indian context, the peasants being uprooted from their land and their familiar surroundings, the oppression of common workers and the vulgarization of their traditional life and their ancient culture. People who have so far adhered to deep-rooted cultural habits are caught unawares by the sudden intrusion of modernization and its evil impact.

Kamala Markandaya deals with the two conflicting forces of contemporary India viz., tradition and modernity in her
novels. The remarkable quality that distinguishes her from other writers is her sharp awareness of shift in values that has been taking place in the post-Colonial India. She understands that the clash of the values stems naturally from "a nostalgic idealization of tradition and a compulsive urge for modernity" (Shiv K. Kumar, "Tradition and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 85). Her awareness of the dichotomy of values is certainly related to her expatriate experience in her personal life. It will be quite pertinent to quote the words of Prem Kumar in this context. He says:

Like her, most of her characters find themselves in situations where they must confront values rooted in opposing cultural milieus, historical processes, economic systems, political ideologies, and philosophical traditions. Some are able to resolve the tensions and inequities that threaten to disintegrate psyche and spirit. Others, however, succumb to their innate weaknesses or to inexorable forces beyond their control.(22)

The conflict between tradition and modernity forms a main thematic concern in the novels of Markandaya. The novels reflect the author's concern with the evil effects of industrialization on the agrarian Indian society and the
resultant social, economic and political subversion. As a highly sensitive writer Kamala Markandaya is conscious of the various powerful agents of change that have been sweeping across India at present. She voices her genuine concern in her novels over the degradation in human values in the wake of industrialization. With an acute historical sense she delineates the changing image of man and society. Tensions and conflicts resulting from mindless Westernization make man a dehumanized victim. Margaret P. Joseph rightly points out:

Kamala Markandaya's novels are generated by the tragic vision that finds in contemporary life a fruitful seed-bed for conflict. She is sensitive to the suffering that is a result of the struggle between the traditional and the modern, the individual and society or one race and another. She is torn asunder by the difference between things as they were, as they are, and as they ought to be; between the ideal and the actual; or between the East and the West. (211)

Tradition signifies some definite customs, habits, beliefs and convictions which have been prevalent in the country for a long time or for centuries together which consequently acquires a contextual value. Tradition is quite
often associated with religious motifs and ceremonial systems in the religious and even the temporal order of values. Some of the basic distinctive features of tradition are its inexactness and its ancient roots. It, moreover, establishes a link between the present and the future by underscoring certain desired traits.

A society is considered traditional if its behaviour is governed by customs and beliefs and its ways of behaviour get along with little change from one generation to another generation. Such a tradition-oriented society is exemplified "by particularistic values as opposed to universalistic values" (Parimal B.Kar 342) which mark a modern society.

Modernity denotes a change in the attitudes, ideas and beliefs of the people generated by the drastic and impersonal forces of urbanization, science and technological advancements. Modernization in India which is basically an offshoot of industrialization and Westernization introduces a new society. The traditional customs, habits and outlook naturally undergo tremendous changes, bringing in new problems.

The constant process of urbanization, of mass exodus from rural to urban centres has often led to the disorganization and the total disintegration of well-founded
traditional rural communities and the older types of urban setting. Westernization has even created fissures in the well-established and deep-rooted social organization and brought about sheer misery. Transition from rural to urban condition has had several undesirable consequences. Personal relationships were replaced by impersonal ones and a previously orderly society was forced to become chaotic.

Kamala Markandaya is aware of the tensions and conflicts caused by the technological invasion and urbanization on the traditional agrarian community in India. Her sincere and objective delineation of the uprootedness of Indian villages on account of the alarming growth of industrial civilization derives its vigour from her perceptive awareness of the historical and social changes that have been occurring in the modern Indian society. Modernity always appears in her novels as the worst epidemic in modern India. She censures ruthlessly the very process of modernization which is devoid of concern for human values. Ramesh Chadha aptly points out:

In almost all her novels her major theme is the delineation of the cultural clash of the Western and Oriental modes and the resultant painful process of modernization. Each of her novels portrays this conflict in various facets such as tradition versus modernity,
village versus town, faith versus reason, mysticism versus science and spiritualism versus materialism. Each directly or covertly suggests how the modernity set in by the Western culture provokes the protagonists to revolt against the existing moribund conditions and to seek their fulfilment by carving their course independently. ("Cross-Cultural Interaction in Markandaya's Pleasure City" 57)

The novels of Markandaya gain their poignance through their presentation of simple characters who do not know the momentous nature of the process they are involved in. They look upon the process as some inscrutable force that brings them sufferings.

Like Thomas Hardy who has expressed in his novels his deep humanistic concern and anxiety for the loss of human values due to large scale industrialization, Markandaya also exposes the social tremors caused by wide-ranging urbanization in her novels: *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *Two Virgins* (1973) and *Pleasure City* (1982).

*Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) portrays a picture of the agonies of industrialization which ruins the age-old village
structure. Set in an anonymous village in South India, the novel depicts movingly "how life flows in an Indian village standing at the periphery of urban civilization" (Asnani 26). The novel especially is a family chronicle and in the same dimension a chronicle of the sufferings of peasants in Colonial India.

The quiet and peaceful life of the peasant family is first and foremost affected by the undesirable advent of industrialization. The novelist indicates how the unwanted arrival of the tannery, an offspring of modernization, in the village where Nathan and Rukmani live, brings greater hardships and more adversity in the life of the villagers. In the words of Samares C. Sanyal:

Nectar in a Sieve is the story of a South Indian village where life has not changed for about a thousand years. Now 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)

Many critics of the novel see it as the presentation of the conflict between traditional life and modern
industrialization. They consider that Rukmani, devoted wife of Nathan, a tenant farmer, living a simple and harmonious life in her little village "suddenly finds within this Garden of Eden a serpent in the form of a tannery that begins to rear its ugly head, devouring green open spaces, polluting the clear, wholesome atmosphere, and tempting simple, gullible peasants into greed, ambition, and immorality" (Shiv K. Kumar 86). However, to see this novel as a system of such simple and obvious opposition is to oversimplify it. This would mean ignoring the goodness offered by modernity in the form of Dr. Kennington.

The foundations of an industrialized society are laid by the owner of the tannery based on the principles of exploitation of labour and commercialization of life. Rukmani becomes aware of this perceptible force of modernization which, she knows, will actually jeopardize the blissful and the harmonious life of the village. Before the encroachment of the tannery upon the village, the villagers led an innocent life and certainly there was an intrinsic harmony within the family and the society. As Joan F. Adkins aptly points out:

... Mrs. Markandaya portrays the advent of industrialization, 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 in the factory. (93)

The setting up of the tannery brings about sudden changes in the lives of Nathan, Rukmani and other villagers. While discussing the rich traditional basis of an Indian agricultural community, Ramesh K. Srivastava rightly points out:

An Indian village is not a colourful picture of a fascinating exotic object to be viewed and exhibited at will; it is a concrete manifestation of centuries of Indian culture, traditions, myths, religions, crystallized wisdom and philosophical ideas, preserved and embittered by each succeeding generation, but now being constantly invaded by sweeping Western influences and expanding urban monstrosities. It has within a magnetic power that draws its natives as if with affectionate silken cords. ("A Village in Transition in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve" 101)
Rukmani is not prepared to accept the tannery and its town people because they have caused ecological vicissitudes in the village atmosphere. The tannery disturbs the tranquil atmosphere of the country side with its noise, foul smell and crowds. The birds in the village have stopped singing their beautiful and melodious songs due to the harsh noise of the tannery. Unable to cope with such polluted surroundings, Rukmani feels like flying from them in order "to go back to the sweet quiet of the village life" (46). The tannery which is a symbol of modernity has completely ruined the natural beauty of the village. It has made the comely village an ugly sight. All that was natural has long been sacrificed.

The tannery not only disrupts the ecology but also the economy of the village in a harsh manner. The entire business and trade structure of the village community collapses due to the establishment of the tannery. There is unreasonable and rash competition. As a result, prices go up sky-high, inflation grips the poor and the desperate villagers. The businessmen of the village raise their prices in order to exploit the situation.

Rukmani resents the encroachment by the tannery and all that it epitomizes. To her, the tannery exemplifies city, modernization, exploitation of the poor labourers, and
finally the uprooting or the complete destruction of the village community.

Kamala Markandaya's indication of the crude effect of industrialization through the "imagery of creative evolution" (Adkins 93) is shown in a most compelling manner. The original fertile nature of the land is transfigured into an image of strangulation of the life forces. Though the villagers know that the land does not provide fruitful production due to the vagaries of nature yet they have not lost their hope of survival. As long as they have their land they are sure of their own identity. Since the tannery now consumes more and more land the hope of their survival through their traditional means is practically destroyed. Joan F. Adkins aptly observes, "the imagery of strangulation is particularly forceful: clear, soft, green fields are replaced by loads of bricks; and the cool silences of village life are now filled with noise, dusty men and the clamor of their work" (94). In this context, the meaningful words of Rukmani deserve to be mentioned:

... it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way. It changed the face of our village beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways. Some -- a few -- had been raised up; many others cast down,
lost in its clutches. (Nectar in a Sieve 134)
The botanical imagery is significant because it underscores the psychological impact as well.

The tannery is the root cause of the absolute disintegration of Rukmani’s family. When the entire family is on the verge of destitution and starvation, Rukmani’s two eldest sons join the tannery despite their mother’s strong opposition. Those who have belonged to the earth so far begin to have a sense of belonging to the machine. The tannery is obviously responsible for their turning away from their traditional job of cultivating the land. It has also developed in them a craving for money.

Rukmani knows very well that after the establishment of the tannery young men including her sons are too much engrossed in earning money. Rukmani, being a traditional woman, does not want her joint family to be shattered. Therefore, she becomes quite miserable when her sons announce their desire to go to Ceylon hoping to become easily affluent there.

The tannery is quite responsible for the moral debasement of Ira, the only daughter of Rukmani and Nathan. She is forced to take to prostitution in order to save her youngest brother, Kuti, from starvation. But ironically she
does not realize that she will have to bear somebody else's burden when she sells her body to the people of the town. Rukmani laments: "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" (Nectar in a Sieve 134).

Unable to get work in the tannery and at the same time finding it very difficult to adapt himself to the hereditary work in the fields in the wake of the changing atmosphere, Murugan, the third son of Rukmani and Nathan, leaves the village for the city in search of a job. There he gets married without the sanction of the elders. Since his marriage is not a traditional marriage he deserts his wife and children and begins to live with another woman without any compunction. No doubt the breakdown of such well-established traditions affect the lives of the villagers.

The tannery, again, represents the values of a mercenary society in which human life is meaningless or cheaper than monetary strength. After claiming two of Rukmani's sons who fall victims to its captivating manoeuvres the tannery claims her another son, thereby revealing itself as a "monstrous pit of death" (Goyal 113). Rukmani becomes quite pathetic and her condition is heartbreaking when the dead
body of her son, Raja, is brought home by the tannery officials.

They tell Rukmani without any qualm that Raja was caught in the act of stealing a calf-skin and when he attempted to escape he was knocked down by a lathi. They even tell her that the tannery is not responsible for the untimely death of Raja and therefore she should not claim compensation for her dead son. Describing the cruel nature of the heartless tannery officials, Bhagwat S.Goyal says:

No human feeling flows from these officials' hearts, which are as deadened as a lump of wood. Tannery has killed a boy in his prime and they have come only to tell Rukmani that she should not think of claiming compensation. At a time when the sorrowing mother is cruelly struck by the ghastly absurdity of death, the only concern of these robot-like monsters is to disclaim all their moral and financial responsibility for Raja's death. One of them even suggests with a domestic invidiousness that perhaps it is all for the good of the family, since there are so many mouths to feed. The stupefied mother, for whom values like love and fidelity mean much more than
money, is struck dumb with a sense of total incomprehension. (113)

The tannery not only plays havoc with the family of Rukmani and Nathan but it brings destruction to other families also. Unable to compete with other business people Janaki's family has to quit the village in order to earn their livelihood somewhere else. Kunthi, who welcomed the advent of industrialization in the beginning, now has become a victim of its destructive forces.

Finally, the establishment of the tannery has led to the complete dispossession of the family of Nathan and Rukmani. The land which they have been perseveringly cultivating for nearly three decades has been purchased by the tannery owners at a high price from the landlord. The family of Nathan and Rukmani suffers the cruellest blow when they are asked to move out of the land. Nathan sadly articulates his as well as his wife's fears, "Where are we to go? What shall we do?" (Nectar in a Sieve 133). The peasant is very much attached to his land even if he is merely a tenant. Land whether it is his own or the property of somebody else always gives him hope. Therefore, the ordeal of being uprooted from his land becomes a horrible and nightmarish experience to him.
The entire family of Nathan has to undergo a harrowing experience because they do not know that under the existing socio-economic system even the village does not belong to the villagers but to those who own the land there. After the land is forcibly taken away Nathan feels as though his being becomes desperate. The emphatic words of Rukmani in connection with the evils of industrialization deserve to be mentioned here:

Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the day carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men... It had changed the face of our village beyond our recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in myriad ways .... My sons had left because it frowned on them. One of them had been destroyed by its ruthlessness. And there were others its touch had scathed. Janaki and her family, the hapless Kannan, Kunthi even. (133-134)

Rukmani becomes a pathetic woman when her land is forcibly taken away from her. While feeling extremely sorry for her present and desperate condition she says, "this hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing. I thought" (135).
After eviction from the land and the familiar rural community Nathan and Rukmani are forced to migrate to the sterile and unsympathetic urban society. Owing to their futile attempt at finding one of their sons, Murugan, supposed to be working there, both Rukmani and Nathan are driven to the unprofitable occupation of breaking stones in a quarry. Unable to cope with the work and the new environment Nathan dies. Rukmani then returns to her village. To quote Samares C. Sanyal:

The author points out indirectly 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. (91)

Kamala Markandaya makes it very clear that Rukmani and Nathan, epitomizing the whole of the Indian agrarian order, happen to be the desperate victims of three predominant evils namely Nature, Zamindari system and industrialization. She meticulously brings out the distinction between man as a victim of Nature and as a victim of modern industrialization. Though the peasants who earn their livelihood by the soil cannot very often be sure of a rich harvest every year, yet they can be hopeful of retaining their identity because to them the land symbolizes hope. But
man as a victim of modern technology is assaulted by agents of implacable and unrelenting factors. Since these are quite different from the forces already found in his unsophisticated society, they seem to be something beyond his comprehension.

But one should not forget that the village community and its social system are essentially devoid of some inherent defects. Even before the arrival of the tannery the villagers were subject to the harsh vagaries of Nature. No doubt, the entire village community had to suffer due to heart-rending famine, starvation and the ruthless tendencies of the money-lenders and the businessmen. Hunger often happens to be the sole cause of human degradation and moral debasement as it is evident in the case of Ira, the only daughter of Rukmani.

While censuring the evils of industrialization, Kamala Markandaya does not fail to strike both at Nature and at landlordism in rural India. Pointing out how the disastrous vagaries of Nature ruin the blissful harmony of a peasant's life, Rukmani says:

Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but
look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by your throat.
(Nectar in a Sieve 39)

The entire village has to face the cruel phase of hunger and starvation due to ceaseless rain. Again the crops of Rukmani and Nathan fail because of severe drought. Nathan, being a tenant farmer, has to pay his dues to his landlord for the use of the land irrespective of the good or bad circumstances. Rukmani and Nathan have to sell everything at home in order to pay the dues. That is why when they are asked to quit the land which they have been cultivating for nearly three decades, due to the rapid expansion of the tannery, Rukmani observes:

... the tannery cannot be blamed for everything we suffered. Tannery or not, the land might have been taken from us. It had never belonged to us, we had never prospered to the extent where we could buy, and Nathan, himself the son of a landless man, had inherited nothing. Again whatever extraneous influence the tannery may have exercised, the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather, immensities not to be tempered by man or his creations. To those who live by the land there must always
come time of hardship, of fear and of hunger...(134)

A sensitive writer like Kamala Markandaya knows well that despite the inherent and inescapable hurdles embedded in the life of a peasant he can survive with the inner strength which he draws from the soil. But with the advent of the tannery, a new intimidating force, he is confused and therefore he suffers a lot when tragic incidents take place. The comment made by Nidhi Srivastava holds good here:

... 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, from the matrix of human existence in rural India. (13-14)

Thus, through Rukmani, Markandaya presents a powerful criticism of industrialism and its intrusion on a traditional village which is symbolic of rural India. The personal story of Rukmani and Nathan acts as a commentary on the impact of modernity on the traditional Indian society. The novel clearly depicts the inevitable changes that modernization brings about in the socio-economic aspects of life in India. Rukmani is a part of the society and obviously her tragic tale is the tragedy of the poor
peasants in India. Ramesh K. Srivastava underscores the universality of appeal of the novel:

The story of *Nectar in a Sieve* is also the story of a village shaken to its roots by the onslaught of modernization. The author might have exaggerated the tragic incidents in the novel but the basic fact remains that such tragedies are bound to occur in India when our villages are on the threshold of modern era. The story has universal touch in the sense that Nathan and Rukmani are the representatives of rural society with all its traditions, cultures, rites and rituals which face extinction under the impact of modern ideas so clumsily embraced by the new generation. ("Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* as a Tragedy" 109)

*A Silence of Desire*, brings to light another very important dimension of the conflict between tradition and modernity. In this novel, the novelist is basically concerned with the tension between faith and reason, and spiritualism and scientific rationalism. The clash between the traditional mode of spirituality and modern materialistic attitude happens to be an important issue in the context of the Indian society of today. Kamala Markandaya with her
exquisite historical vision of the transition period in Indian history portrays how these tangible and historical forces have even affected the domestic harmony of a bourgeois couple in this excellent novel. Describing the chief thematic concern of the novel, Madhusudan Prasad says: 

... A Silence of Desire explores the theme of the clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple in the novel. Although the theme has the immediacy of a common contemporary problem that faces most of the Indian couples, "the real achievement of the author lies in the projection of this theme through the awakening of a mind developing from thoughtless complacency to tremulous introspection." ("Introduction", Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya V)

A Silence of Desire deals with the theme of tradition and modernity through the conflict between Dandekar and Sarojini. Dandekar is a senior clerk in a government office. After leading a blissful wedded life with his wife and children for fifteen years, he begins to suspect the fidelity of his wife, Sarojini. Since he has been so much used to obedience and loyalty from his wife, a slight disruption to
the routine upsets him. He feels that his well-founded domestic world is shaken because his wife has been slowly withdrawing from the family. At the outset he thinks that Sarojini is morally wrong but later his wife confesses that she visits a Swami to cure her disease in the stomach. Since Sarojini has so much faith in the spiritual power of the Swami, she refuses to heed the advice of her husband to get treatment for the disease in a modern clinic. Dandekar attempts to remove the Swami from the ashram and finally from the town itself. Meanwhile the Swami himself goes away from the place. Finally, Sarojini agrees to undergo an operation in the nursing home and is ultimately cured of her disease.

Their respective attitudes towards superstition and religious and social rituals mark first of all the basic difference in the characters of Dandekar and Sarojini. A man of progressive ideas, Dandekar does not have faith in the outmoded superstitious beliefs of his forebears, whereas Sarojini has strong faith in the deep-rooted traditional ideas of Indian life. She regards the tulasi plant as the avatar of God and treats it with the utmost deference. Even at the outset of the novel the novelist is very careful in depicting the antithetical natures of the husband and the wife:

Dandekar did not pray to it, he was always
careful to say it was a plant. One did not worship plants: but it was a symbol of God whom one worshipped and it was necessary that God should have symbols since no man had the power or temerity to visualise Him. (A Silence of Desire 5)

Dandekar's attempts to educate his wife fails because Sarojini's roots in the Hindu culture and religion are quite profound. She does not accept anything which goes contrary to her faith. The dining room in the house is rich with prints of "gods and goddesses, singly and in groups, tableaux that showed them holding court in their heavens, or warring, or being miraculously born of earth or the sea"(11). Though these things form part of his culture Dandekar cannot describe "a single of them in detail"(11).

The tension between the faith of Sarojini and the reason of Dandekar further worsens when Sarojini visits the Swami regularly for her treatment without informing her sceptic husband. But when he develops an unwarranted suspicion about her fidelity she confesses her reason for meeting the Swami daily. She also discloses that the prime reason for not telling her husband was that he might prevent her from visiting the Swami. She observes:

Because you would have stopped me going to be healed....you would have sent me to a hospital
instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You would not let me be -- No! you would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith because faith and reason do not go together, and without faith I shall not be cured.(87)

Dandekar, however, would prefer his wife to have her stomach tumour cured by some efficient doctor at a well-equipped modern clinic. He is quite certain that he cannot tolerate any nonsense about healing by faith. Unable to convince her husband and about the power of faith-healing and at the same time underlining his agnostic nature Sarojini adds:

I do not expect you to understand -- you with your Western notions. Your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out. To you the tulasi is a plant that grows in earth like the rest -- an ordinary common plant. And mine is a disease to be cured and so you have sent me to hospital and I would have died there. (87-88)

Dandekar is exasperated. His Western scientific rationalism gets for a moment rattled. Faith-healing is quite customary
in India where even at present people are superstitious and have unswerving faith in the spiritual powers of Swamis. But Dandekar miserably fails to perceive that there are certain enigmatic things which exist beyond man’s logical domain. Edwin Thumboo rightly observes:

A Silence of Desire is built around issues relating to tradition and change, faith and scepticism attached to a modern, mainly Western-derived attitude. Dandekar’s expectations of what life is and ought to be are revised by the experience he undergoes in the novel. He is to a degree Westernised. But there are values, beliefs and attitudes, especially in matters of faith, which are immemorial and which refuse to be cast aside in the process of change -- Sarojini’s faith, for instance. The theme is introduced as a domestic problem but develops into a consideration of how faith and the acting out of that faith, are met. The action it generates provides the central images of the changes occurring in the society. (121)

Dandekar, however, does not want his wife to get herself cured with the help of a faith-healer. Like Sastri, his colleague, Dandekar is of the view that Sarojini should
approach only a well-qualified doctor and not a Swami. But Sarojini is quite adamant in her opposition to an operation for she fears that like her mother and grandmother she would certainly die in the hospital. Dandekar does not want to dissuade her from meeting the Swami for she may lose her faith in him nor does he want to force her to get operated, because her cure is not out-and-out guaranteed. This dilemma in him reveals Dandekar's equivocation regarding the contradictory worlds namely the scientific and the traditional. Explaining the conflicting nature of faith and reason, Edwin Thumboo observes:

In matters of belief there are no absolutes, no overriding consensus to provide a basis for arbitration. Moreover, at the point of fundamental transitions in society other factors complicate. Those very forces responsible for new attitudes -- 'reason,' 'scientism,' that reliance on cause and effect -- are themselves less confident than they appear because those who recently learnt to exercise them cannot ignore the disturbing residues of tradition itself. Whatever its label, rationalism sits uneasily on new shoulders, remains in the grip of doubt, is never consistent or robust enough. (122)

Commenting on the conflicting nature of the character of
Dandekar, Edwin Thumboo further remarks:

She (Sarojini) is consistently, deeply orthodox in her faith, convinced of its total beneficence. On the other hand, Dandekar, exposed to modern ideas, particularly those which question or reject the older notions and practices of religion, is caught between the residual power of that world and a newly acquired one which has yet to achieve full confidence. Herein lies his dilemma. That he feels powerless explains his continuing anger and frustration. (131-132)

Though Sastri is quite vehement in his hostility to faith cure yet he lacks guts to confess his scepticism about the Swami's powers and his spiritual capacities because "healing by faith, the performance of the impossible, the revelation of the divine mystery and beautitude all these coursed in his blood"(A Silence of Desire 113). He knows very well that one cannot very easily give up these things because they are part of one's culture. Hence he prevails upon Dandekar to verify his wife's disease from the hospital and also the veracity of the Swami's powers. Dandekar, who actually belongs to the category of Sastri and whose cultural roots and critical outlook are the same as that of Sastri, endorses Sarojini's explanation that she feels
better when she meets the Swami. Though he tends to accept Sarojini's explanation for the time being, his rational mind wakes him up and keeps him steady. He then makes fresh attempts to dissuade his wife from meeting the Swami. He perceives that the world of the Swami is completely different from his and the coalescence of these two different worlds would lead to disastrous consequences.

Kamala Markandaya attempts to establish a balance between faith and reason by making Dandekar conceive the spiritual abilities of the Swami. His interaction with the Swami creates an indelible impression about the genuineness of the latter in his mind. C. Paul Verghese rightly observes: "This conflict between the husband and wife is treated in the novel as part of a conflict between science and superstition in which the novelist attempts to strike a balance between science and superstition" (117).

When Dandekar goes to meet the Swami in order to wear away his wife from him he finds that "in his (Swami's) presence time comes to a stop, all questionings and misgivings are suspended, all activity is petrified, and all nagging urge to investigate and scrutinize is blunted and overcome. Now he realises the illusion of all material possessions" (Shiv K. Kumar, "Tradition and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 93).
To his astonishment Dandekar finds that many men and women with all sorts of physical and psychological indispositions visit the Swami in his ashram. He understands that his wife is not the only disciple that the Swami has. He realizes that the Swami "functions not as an individual who lives his own life, but as a public figure -- a fulfilment of certain needs in society" (Sanyal 95). When Dandekar asks the Swami to stop his wife from coming to him the Swami calmly replies: "Compulsion is the beginning of corruption... It is an eating away of the spirit of whoever does it, and whoever has it done to him. Is that what you want?" (A Silence of Desire 155-156).

Dandekar's interview with the Swami is over-conscious. He comes to know that the Swami freely gives of himself all the time. He receives things from others in order to distribute them to the needy. He caters especially to those rejected by society. The selflessness and the beneficial nature of the Swami is conveyed through the dwarf and the various activities performed by him in the little ashram. Dandekar has not so far understood the undoubtfully beneficial side of the Swami. The service rendered by the Swami is so practical and indisputable that the converted Dandekar offers a five rupee note.

The fact that Kamala Markandaya does not take sides is
proved as the Swami quits the town and Sarojini goes to the clinic. Even Dandekar wants to have the Swami back in the town when Sarojini tells him that "he (Swami) has not attachments to keep him in this or that place... it was the people about that formed an attachment to him though it was against all his teaching" (A Silence of Desire 216). The self-eviction of the Swami from the town puts at rest all the doubts the reader might have had about the Swami. This is quite significant in the context of writers like Jhabvala exposing the corrupt Swamijis' fraudulence in novels like A New Dominion and In Search of Love and Beauty. Sarojini's assent to get herself operated in the hospital is not a total denial of faith and the blind acceptance of reason. On the other hand, it is again her predominant faith in the Swami and his advice to get her tumour operated makes her agree to undergo the operation at the hospital. Despite his medical inability to cure the tumour in the stomach of Sarojini, the Swami succeeds in his effort of preparing her psychologically for the operation.

Kamala Markandaya portrays the transformation of the character of Dandekar from a sceptic to a spiritually elevated being by highlighting the power and the potentiality of faith. Sarojini's spiritual relationship with the Swami is apparent. But to bring about a complete transformation in a man who has so far been regarding the
Swami as his arch-enemy, a fake and cheat shows the true spirit and the genuine powers of the Swami. The departure of the Swami from the town definitely brings about a change in his attitude which establishes Dandekar's marital relationship with Sarojini on a spiritual level.

While confessing this new kind of spiritual relationship with his wife to Chari, Dandekar says: "My wife is part of me now -- I didn't realize it in all these years it has been happening, but I know now that without her I'm not whole" (196). Before the departure of the Swami, Dandekar knew very well that his relationship with his wife was purely on the physical level. That was the reason why he disliked having any physical relationship when there was actually a spiritual vacuum in their relationship. If he had forced her to go to the hospital she would have gone there for treatment. In that way he would have been successful but in reality it should have been a miserable failure because being unwilling in the venture she would never have got cured.

The confrontation between Dandekar's body and spirit forms part of the conflict between Oriental backwardness and Occidental progress. More light is thrown on this aspect by the novelist in the dialogue between Dandekar and Wilson. It is quite obvious that Dandekar is not out-and-out a
traditional character because he does not relish the idea of his wife being cured by the blessings of the Swami. But there are some occasions when he seems to have his concrete roots still in the traditional and orthodox views. The best example which shows his strong attachment with tradition is his firm faith in the stars and horoscopes.

Dandekar is quite orthodox in certain matters though he is modern to some degree. This ambivalent nature of Dandekar is revealed when he staunchly protests against the accusation of infidelity among Indian wives. He even strongly supports the Hindu culture and tradition when he champions the cause of the married woman. His reaction to the views of Sastri, Joseph and Mahadevan about women reveals Dandekar as traditional in his outlook on the sanctity of marriage. Joseph believes in free love. Mahadevan thinks no marriage is safe. After hearing such views Dandekar remonstrates wildly that "our women are not like that... They don't flaunt themselves in front of men, either before marriage or after. They are brought up differently" (24).

It is to this touchstone Dandekar returns constantly whenever he entertains doubts about his own wife. When he comes to know that Sarojini has got only spiritual attachment with the Swami, his faith in the traditional
virtues of an Indian wife is strengthened. Despite her knowledge of the licentious activities of her husband, Sarojini remains a true obedient Hindu wife. She does not blame her husband when she comes to know that he has been trying to remove the Swami from the town.

The juxtaposition of spiritualism and materialism highlights one more fundamental difference between Dandekar and Sarojini. While Sarojini's mind has ascended to spiritual heights and has lost touch with mundane affairs, Dandekar's gets deeply engrossed in the mire of materialism. Learning from his wife that she has given costly objects like the silver cup, the gold chain and the water-lily ashtray as offerings to the Swami, Dandekar pleads with the Swami not to accept them as the former cannot afford such presents.

After winning his wife from the Swami, Dandekar gives little importance to materialistic things. His mind also has ascended like that of Sarojini to such spiritual realms where earthly objects seem to lose their value. The last encounter between the dwarf and Dandekar towards the end of the novel is highly significant. Standing beside Dandekar and returning "the silver cups, the water-lily ashtray, the chain from his son's neck"(224), the dwarf charges him with having increased the misery of the villagers who have now
become forlorn and desolated beings.

Thus, the main theme Kamala Markandaya treats in this novel stresses some of the chief forces at work in society. They form a part of her historical consciousness and her perception of an area of India at a specific time. Through the lives of Sarojini, Dandekar, the Swami and such characters as Chari and Sastri these powerful forces are excellently dramatized. The novelist seems to analyse a clash of ideals i.e. modernity versus belief in the traditional wisdom and values of Indian life. She attempts to stress the need for a happy union between these ideals. The primary reason for introducing a Swami in a domestic novel like this is that "the Swami has a definite role to play in the spiritual wasteland of Indian life. Like Hamlet she wants to tell her readers that there are more things in heaven and earth (Horatio), than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Radhakrishnan 119).

Hence, the world of A Silence of Desire is the world of faith and reason tactfully balanced, each one having its own significance and separate existence. The novelist does not glorify the one unnecessarily and ignore the other unceremoniously. She tries to achieve a reconciliation between the two in the novel. In this context, the apt words
of Anita Mahajan deserve to be mentioned:

Sarojini may have been cured in the hospital but continues to retain her faith in the Swami's healing power. Dandekar may have laughed at the Swami but could not help being influenced by him. Thus, the novelist presents a world where science has its own place but only coexistent with human faith. (144)

In The Coffer Dams, Kamala Markandaya presents the confrontation between the modern machine civilization and the culture of native tribals in a hilly region in the post-Colonial India. Her treatment of this theme in the novel is quite unique for she tells the whole world that like cancer, industrialization and modernization do not spare even a tribal culture which has been existing from time immemorial. She even highlights with her artistic dexterity the corrosion of human values under the stringent pressure of modernization.

The Coffer Dams begins with the construction of a great dam to check and direct the turbulent river in a hilly region. A Western Engineering firm under the supervision of a British Chief Engineer, Howard Clinton, and his partner, Mackendrick, embarks on the construction of a dam across a tumultuous South Indian river in Malanad. Several people are employed including engineers like Krishnan and local
technicians and labourers. The action is revealed through multifarious characters like Helen, Howard Clinton's wife, Krishnan, the engineer, Bashiam, the tribal technician, the tribal chief and the tribals.

The tribal hamlet in *The Coffer Dams* like any other village in India has been enjoying peace and tranquillity for generations. So far it has only been the aggression of Nature that has brought destruction in their lives. But now for the first time an external human agency i.e. the Western Engineering firm is going to disrupt the lives of the aboriginals and their dwelling by way of technological invasion. The adjacency of the huge dams with the hilly tribal village creates a sense of bewilderment in the natives of the jungle area.

Like the frightened villagers in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the inhabitants of the "Maidan and Malanad" (*The Coffer Dams* 8) watch "with awe the precipitate birth of a town in the jungle"(8). The needlessness of the dam in this hilly country is reflected in the words which underline Clinton's confused feeling: "As if a bit of England had strayed on to soil where it has no business to be, -- in this corner site round a bend of a river in India"(11).

The ecological system of the jungle region undergoes a
tremendous change due to the commencement of the construction work for the dam. Where there were the yelps of jackals there now comes up a gigantic dam which is a synonym for modern technology. The "grunting mechanical marvels" (47) of industrially advanced Western world make the inhabitants lose their "sense of belonging" (47). The sirens on the construction site become "wailing devils" (137) to the peace-loving villagers who have not so far known the magical performance of machines. The jungle habitation begins to be crowded with town houses which come up one after another. The autochthonic culture of the tribals begins to receive set backs when strangers with their alien culture start setting down there. The natives have been very often subject to the indomitable forces of Nature. But now with the intrusion of modern technology they become slaves of sundry agencies: "divine, man-made, and natural" (49).

Like in *Nectar in a Sieve* where dispossession takes place due to the establishment of the tannery, the people in *The Coffer Dams* become dispossessed due to the settlement of the builders of the dam. When the poor and innocent villagers are asked to quit their familiar surroundings by the ruthless engineers they begin to sense the impending danger of complete dispossession. Their place is required for the construction of cottages and bungalows for the builders of the dam. With their anger just smouldering and
without a word of protest, the terrified and stunned villagers vacate their ancient dwelling and settle down in a different and strange place. The dialogues between Helen and Bashiam are quite significant in this regard. A gentle and sensible lady as she is she tells Bashiam that the servile and submissive villagers were forced to leave their village willy-nilly and without a word of protest "like animals" (48). She further adds: "There used to be a village where the bungalows are -- where our bungalow is. A tribal village" (48). "It was their land. They did not want to leave it, they were persuaded" (49).

Industrialization generates a complexity of labour problems leading to the clash between the masters and the labourers. The entanglement between the labourers and the masters becomes an endemic feature. The inexorable and heartless British Chief Engineer Clinton represents the state of mastership. Whenever he is informed about the labour problem on the site of construction he reacts sharply and ruthlessly: "We could sack the entire coolie labour force overnight and have a queue a mile long by morning if we wanted and they know it. Organised casual labour -- it's almost a contradiction in terms" (54). Again when Clinton is informed by Mackendrick about labour organization he bellows with anger: "Dock their pay and you will have them wrapping themselves round your feet -- you know what these people
In his dealings with the labour problems Clinton becomes cruel and hard-hearted. The aggressive nature of the masters and the subservient attitude of the labourers are described with minute distinction. By adopting the divide and rule policy the masters of the project work successfully create dissention and split among lowlanders and recruits from the tribals. With the help of a regular strike-breaking force the masters unscrupulously exploit the workers. The economic susceptibility of the poor workers is taken advantage of by the employers. The ironic remark of Krishnan illustrates this: "Look at them! Lined up like passive cows at a back street Christian butchery!" (69) The novelist herself comments on the existence of strike-breaking machinery: "That strike-breaking machinery existed, in the shape of an unemployed army, that would swarm up the hill at the first beckoning by Clinton and Mackendrick ..." (70). The people who are paid "healthiest wages" (71) automatically become the supporters of the employers. The technicians and the experts are beguiled and ensnared by lucrative offers. But only the common labourers who actually "rattled around like peas in the tin" (104) are tempted by low remuneration, unpromising jobs and illusory bribes.

Kamala Markandaya has meticulously portrayed how the
technicians become ruthless and hard-hearted beings. Like the cold-hearted and the merciless behaviour of the tannery officials in Nectar in a Sieve the technicians in The Coffers Dams exhibit their callousness and brutal nature when confronted with problems in the construction work. The gruesome death of forty-two labourers and the problems that follow this grim incident exemplify the cruel nature of the Chief Engineer Clinton. When Clinton is reported about the tragic death of forty-two casual labourers in a dynamite blast in the river course he does not even come forward to show his sympathy for the loss of human lives. Instead he urges the technicians and other workers to continue the work and try to complete it in time. His immediate reaction to the debate over retrieving the two corpses which lie jammed by a boulder indicates how cruel he is: "Rather than delay the work, the bodies could be incorporated into the structure"(163). According to V.D.Katamble, "To Clinton, the dam is the loving embodiment of man's indomitable will, it is to be saved, no matter what the price! For him, therefore the dam has a priority over personal emotions" (58). While commenting on the hard-hearted nature of Clinton Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the view that "the technician in Clinton incarnates the township's idea of ruthless efficiency" (447).

The novelist shows how Clinton's abnormal obsession with
the completion of work on the coffer dams has affected his married life. His excessive love for machines and modern technology results in the loss of human sensibilities. Though they were quite happy in the beginning about their married life, after a few years Helen began to realize that they were people with diametrically opposed views towards life. To Clinton work is important and personal emotions have no place in his life. He gives priority to the construction work and is willing to finish it even at the cost of human values. Clinton, being a man of steel, does not bear any hurdle or delay in the work schedule. Unlike him, Helen wants to perceive human nature and its multifaceted dimensions. While describing the character of Helen, K. Madhavi Menon and A.V. Krishna Rao say:

Helen, intense and dynamic, seeks to enlarge the scope of human understanding. She finds fulfilment in building bridges of understanding while Clinton finds satisfaction in constructing the coffer dams. She is able to perceive the vastness of the tradition sustaining tribal people. ("The Coffer Dams: A Critical Study 171)

Helen's curiosity to know more about human nature draws her close to the native tribals. She even establishes a love affair with Bashiam, the tribal technician. She is shocked to learn about the treatment meted out to the tribals by her
husband. She comes to know that to Clinton the tribesmen are trivial matter and are mere tools to be operated as and when necessary. But to her they are not just "black apes" (The Coffer Dams 35), "but alive and feeling men and women and not blank opacities of total incomprehension"(35). She is astounded at the cold-heartedness in evacuating the inhabitants of the tribal settlement just to make the place free and suitable for the bungalows of the engineers. This cruel nature of dispossession is quite unbearable to Helen whose scale of human values is entirely different from that of Clinton. Describing the character of Clinton, Madhavi Menon and A.V.Krishna Rao say: "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 novelist shows how the age of modern science and technology converts human beings into inhuman and spiritless mechanisms through the character of Clinton. He seems to be the best example of Western pragmatist with no place for humanistic concerns in professional work. Work is important to him and therefore he does not even exhibit his anxiety candidly to Bashiam when the latter comes forward to lift the boulder even though Clinton is certainly aware of the defect in the lugs of the crane. Helen realizes that the success and dynamism of technology has become the rootcause of the erosion of human values and therefore she wishes to
be very close with those whose roots and human values are deep. Unable to live with a robot-like husband she spends more time with the tribals. While Clinton concentrates more and more on his work and finds no time to live a human life Helen becomes more and more aware of human sensibilities. Hari Mohan Prasad rightly observes:

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." (34)

Kamala Markandaya shows how even tradition-loving people are lured away by the material benefits brought about by the advent of modern technology. In one of her routine visits to the tribal habitation, Helen is told by the old tribal chief that the innocent "villagers are becoming money-mad as you foreigners are" (The Coffer Dams 72). When Helen tries to pacify him saying that "it is a useful commodity" (72) the chief angrily bursts out: "Useful you say. What for, I ask you: for that rubbish they buy from the campshop? Tin cans and cardboard boots and scented pig's grease to plaster on their hair" (72). Again when Helen tries to assure him saying, "when the work is done, we shall be gone, you will be left in peace" (73), the old tribal chief replies, "A peace
full of moaning -- the Great Dam will take them, the man-eater will have its place"(73).

The tribal chief typifies the old generation which is immanently allergic to mechanization and modernization. But the younger generation does not oppose the arrival of technology as vehemently as the old chief does. Bashiam, for example, happens to be a prominent member of the new or younger generation in the tribal settlement. Despite strong opposition from his own tribal people, this "civilised jungly wallah"(44) "detribalised"(8) tribal, and "jungly prophet"(134) welcomes the technological civilization.

The Coffer Dams thus brings to light some of the major issues encountered in the process of the technological invasion. The rise of the dam corroborates the rise of typical new values -- commercialism, mechanical life, material prospects, comfort and alienation from tradition. Markandaya does not raise her voice against material progress and technological advancement. What she wants to say is that human values and human sensibilities should not be lost in the process of change. Her great concern for human values as found in the novel seems to be re-echoed in the lines of editorial comment in the Indian Express, 23 April 1982:

The reports of inhuman exploitation of
tribals, especially their women, by privileged classes make painful reading. It has been going on in almost all places where the Adivasis have been brought willy nilly in contact with the plains people in the name of conferring on them fruits of development. In this process of change much of their natural habitat has been destroyed and their traditional source of living, the forest depleted, beyond recovery. The rhythm of tribal life, which our poets have sung about, is now almost a thing of the past. The alienation and de-culturalisation of these communities resulting in large numbers of them taking to the vices of modern civilization -- trafficking in liquor, drug and sex is itself a 'tragedy'. What makes it worse is that it is often the agents of a government which professes deep concern for tribal welfare, who are doing the greatest damage. If this is progress, the Adivasis would have been far happier without it. (n.p)

In The Coffer Dams again Kamala Markandaya does not delineate a one-sided view of modernization. In fact, there are people including the natives who indeed welcome the
advent of modern technology by way of the construction of the dam. To such people the erection of the dam appears to be a boon of technology. Unlike the old tribal chief, Bashiam tells Helen: "Machines are to me what they are to your husband -- they have given me another way of life" (The Coffer Dams 46). To people like Gopal "the dam is its own glory" (173). The novelist is careful in not justifying or admonishing a particular side in the novel. Even the feasible synthesis of two different ways of life is sometimes expressed through the actions of characters like Helen and Bashiam.

The love of the trio, Clinton, Helen and Bashiam provides the necessary design to the basic theme of the novel. Commenting on the role played by Helen, V.D.Katamble says:

Apart from staging the human drama of the love-triangle, she symbolizes the reconciliation between the masters and the tribals, between ruthless technology and pauperdom, and between the white and the black races, between the 'seafaring people' and the 'river people' and most important of all between machine and man. ("Kamala Markandaya's The Coffer Dams: An Apology for Techno-Industrialization of Rural India" 58)
Bashiam, being the only educated tribal technician, proves to be another human agency which accelerates the reconciliation between tradition and modernity. Both whites and the natives used to insult him by calling him "a civilised jungly wallah" (The Coffer Dams 44). He cannot be on a par with the superior whites and at the same time feel alienated from his own tribal community. He knows the traditional job of wood-cutting and also accepts whole-heartedly the wonder-work of modern machines. No doubt, he has a blend of tradition and modernism within himself. He symbolizes the "backward people" (46) who are satisfied with their natural and traditional atmosphere of hills and woods but his rationality acquired through education and experience helps him to persuade the "bewildered clan" (46) to accept and welcome the change accomplished or generated by the "mechanical marvels" (47). He even goes to the extent of appealing to the lowlanders: "Only the dam, my brothers, brings us together" (134).

Another marvellous unifying force is the quintessential old tribal chief who comes forward to save the risked coffer dams with his instinctive knowledge of seasons and the vagaries of Nature when even the highly up-to-date Western technical experts become desperate. Owing to heavy rains for several days the coffers are risked in the river course and the British technicians get utterly confused. They are sure
that the whole area will be inundated if the dams are not breached in time. Even Clinton is at a loss. But the tribal chief on his deathbed says: "When the ridges rise clear --"(220) and provides a clue to rescue the risked dams. The rains stop and then the dams are accordingly saved.

The perception of integration of the two conflicting forces is projected through other means, apart from Helen, Bashiam, and the old tribal chief. Though in the beginning the deprived tribesmen, the labourers and the villagers oppose the arrival of technology in their place now they begin to feel the blessings of technology. Emotionalism being ultimately replaced by rationalism they start welcoming the emergence of the dam on their hilly country. The conversation at the end of the novel between the Indian technicians Krishnan and Shanmugam is very important in this regard. When the dam is called by Krishnan the Clinton-Mackendrick Dam, Shanmugam retorts: "It is our dam, what we call it the Great Dam, the Bharat Dam"(152). Both are willing to accept that "it is their (Englishmen's) brain"(153) and "our (Indians') need, conception, money, flesh and blood and bone"(153). In other words, "it is a joint achievement."(153).

Thus the novelist with her characteristic uniqueness
depicts how the story of individuals caught in moments of crisis develops into the story of direct encounter between the profound roots of Indian tradition, its sensibility and the Western predominance and the ascendancy in the field of modern technology. No doubt, the theories of individualism, materialism and industrialization mostly originate from the West, and the East cannot but register its unavoidable shock, and anger at the West's continued indifference to the preservation of human values and fruitful relationships in the rat-race for progress. This is exactly what Kamala Markandaya attempts to voice -- that human sensibilities are quite important and the human relationships should be based on a sound sense of responsibility at various levels. Illustrating the novel's great concern for human values especially in *The Coffer Dams*, K. Madhavi Menon and A.V. Krishna Rao aptly observe:

If the function of the plot is to further the object of the work, as Elizabeth Bowen says, the plot of *The Coffer Dams* works towards "the poetic truth." Industrial and technological progress are beneficial and so even essential to a nation's progress but we get nowhere when we defy and deny the existence and sustenance of human values and sensibilities that constitute the soul of material progress. In the race of materialism, we cannot shun the
values attached to human life, irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Merely mechanical progress cannot be the end of human existence. The values of relationship, and the question of integrity and communication that enters into them cannot be sacrificed to iron and steel. This, in a nutshell, is Markandaya's concern in The Coffer Dams. ("The Coffer Dams: A Critical Study" 169)

In another novel of hers, Two Virgins, Kamala Markandaya treats the theme of tradition and modernity by depicting the widespread encroachment of Westernization on traditional rural India. Unlike in Nectar in a Sieve and The Coffer Dams where the tensions and conflicts arising out of Westernization are wider in nature, the conflict in Two Virgins is confined only to a family which leads a traditional life in the rural community. Once again the novelist as in A Silence of Desire focuses her sharp attention on a domestic conflict leading to the disintegration of the family as a result of the intrusion of the film industry into a peaceful village community.

Though the setting in Two Virgins is quiet and idyllic as in Nectar in a Sieve, it is subject to the rapid and virulent infringement of Westernization. Village life has, no
doubt, undergone tremendous change with the end of Colonialism and the world of Two Virgins is certainly not an ingenuous and simple one as that of Nectar in a Sieve. While Nectar in a Sieve portrays the sordid poverty, starvation and loss of human and traditional values due to the introduction of modern technology, Two Virgins deals with the problems faced by young people in the modern complex society. As Alice Drum points out:

It is not economic difficulties that create problems in the later novel (Two Virgins), but the difficulty of growing up in a complex society where new ways encroach upon the old and create new conflicts, especially for the young who have not elected one set of values or another. Young Indian villagers like Saroja are confronted daily with the erosion of traditional values, the ascendancy of Western technology, changing roles for the family and society's increasing control over the individual (324).

Two Virgins presents a theme of distintegration of the traditional rural ways of life under the impact of modernity. The novel depicts the story of two spirited young girls who with their zest for life react differently to the changing new society. By using the exigencies of life in the
rapidly changing world of a modern Indian village, Kamala Markandaya offers a fresh and unique treatment to a basic or universal human problem i.e. coming of age. The events in the novel are seen through the consciousness of Saroja. Commenting on the thematic concern of the novelist, Rama Jha aptly remarks:

The novel is written from the point of view of Saroja, although Markandaya focuses more sharply on Lalitha's fate. Village and family remain central in this novel also, but Markandaya introduces a new element -- the individual, in telling a story of modern India caught between the pulls of traditional forces and modernization. (170)

Saroja and Lalitha, the two virgin sisters, live with their father, mother, brother and Aunt Alamelu in a traditional joint family. While Saroja attends an ordinary traditional style school, Lalitha, the elder one, is exposed to a Westernized English medium school. Under the influence of her father who welcomes modernization and her Westernized teacher Miss. Mendoza, Lalitha becomes a flirt. Owing to the type of education she receives at the European style school she finds the village stifling and sparkless. Saroja, on the other hand, is content with what she is and what she has. She learns things slowly from her friends and elders like
Chingleput, the sweet-maker, Manikkam, the milkman, his wife, and Aunt Alamelu.

When the village becomes the subject of a documentary film, Lalitha's dreams of becoming a film star and her longing for a Westernized urban society become a reality to her. Being introduced to Mr. Gupta, the documentary film director, by Miss Mendoza Lalitha begins to picture herself as an eagle soaring upward in its flight not pausing to look back. As Lalitha is indeed beautiful Mr. Gupta chooses her to figure in the film he is making on the village. She is invited by the director to come to the city after the film is completed. Lalitha goes to the city, stays there a few months and returns home enraptured with the film or tinsel world. To her, home becomes a backwater compared to the world of illusion and one day she escapes to the city without the permission of her parents.

The news of Lalitha's pregnancy throws the traditional Hindu family into a shock and the members of the family begin to realize the violent nature of Westernization. Lalitha's pregnancy and abortion bring the family to the city where their problems are aggravated by the heightening pressures of urban existence. After her abortion Lalitha again absconds from her family and Saroja returns with her parents to the village. Commenting on the character of
Mr. Gupta and the tussle between tradition and modernity in the novel, Hari Mohan Prasad says:

Mr. Gupta, the film producer in Two Virgins, is still another metaphor of modernity and urban values. The quiet innocence of the village life and the traditional values symbolized by aunt Alamelu are in constant recalcitrance against the urban ways of life symbolized by the principal in the missionary school and the film producer in the town. Lalitha's potential process to the freer ways of life is actualised through their help. It is a lead towards change. Through Lalitha's growing awareness of the adult world, the novel enacts the slow but irresistible encroachment of new and material values on the ancient beliefs and the old established relationship within the family and the village. (25-26)

Kamala Markandaya brings out the contrast between tradition and modernity through her characters in the novel. While Mr. Gupta, Miss Mendoza and Appa, to some extent, represent modern ways of life characters like Aunt Alamelu, Chingleput, Manikkam and his wife symbolize the old traditional ways of life. Being a childless widow, Alamelu endures stoically the lack of status ancient Hindu tradition
prescribes for widows. Instead of trying to live independently, she does not mind living along with the family of her brother-in-law which is a joint family. To Appa, the joint family system in India has become nearly outmoded. As Alamelu is basically a traditional character, she remains at home in the village which is a seat of longheld tradition when the whole family goes to the city which is again a symbol of urbanization and Westernization. Describing the character of Alamelu, Margaret P. Joseph observes:

Aunt Alamelu is the rock of tradition, the norm of moral behaviour, and perhaps the only convincing character in the book. She is a familiar figure in the Indian joint family combining in herself the poor relation, the widow, and the interfering sister-in-law. She bears a strong likeness to such characters as Dodamma in Some Inner Fury and Rajam in A Silence of Desire. (Kamala Marakandaya 147)

In an interesting incident in the early part of the novel Aunt Alamelu laughs at the maypole dance Miss Mendoza teaches her students. "Maypole, bean pole, bamboo pole bunk" (Two Virgins 15) she bellows, questioning the relevance and the wisdom of teaching European ways to Hindu maidens. Her candid observation is shared even by Gupta who is astonished at the suggestion of Miss Mendoza that he should include the maypole ritual in his documentary film which focuses on the
culture of a traditional village.

If the mentors of Lalitha have been her father and Western-oriented Miss Mendoza, Saroja's have been Chingleput, Manikkam, his wife and Aunt Alamelu. Since all of them have been strong supporters of the native tradition of Indian society they advocate a more traditional way of life to Saroja also. While Lalitha develops a longing for urban existence through her Westernized education, Saroja, being a daughter of the soil, "learns of the real experiences of village existence: the problems involved in having too many children, the difficulty of being a cripple, and most important of all, the significance of being part of a community where customs are centuries old where individuals know their identities" (Alice Drum 327).

Saroja, unlike Kamala Markandaya, who has been often accused of holding a sentimental view of village life, is not sentimental about the problem-ridden village or rural life. She is fully cognizant of the inequities prevailing in the rural as well as urban societies. She perceives that it is cruel to be poor like Manikkam and it is stupid to have unwarranted pregnancies like the wife of Manikkam. She also understands that it is unjust to be alone and crippled like Chingleput. She also learns that it is quite horrible to live without a status like Aunt Alamelu. Commenting on the
well-conceived perception of the character of Saroja and the author's aim in this novel, Alice Drum aptly remarks:

What Saroja elects is not so much one milieu over the other as the opportunity to learn from her own experience and her village's traditions. By having Saroja voice this message, Markandaya sides with the many Third World writers who stress the importance of a nation's maintaining its own cultural identity, dancing its own dances, in the face of encroaching Westernization. (327)

Modernization and the erosion of deep-rooted traditional values are not the only problems of Saroja's society. No doubt, Saroja recognizes the intrusion of the undesired evil effects of an alien culture on a rural community. But the enigmatic cultural and social intricacies of the society of Saroja are more complex than a mere choice between the village and city, the old ways and the new.

Though Kamala Markandaya deals with social themes in the novel Two Virgins, it is neither an out and out propaganda fiction nor is it a polemic against the corrosion of Indian traditional values and its distinguished identity. Markandaya is not only concerned with the problems of the rapidly changing society and its various phenomena but also with the problems and the complexities of the individual
seeking identification within the society. Considering the evolving consciousness in Two Virgins as a significant accomplishment, Charles Larson observes: "Saroja perceives, she changes, she grows. She is not the same person at the end that she was at the beginning" (147).

In Two Virgins, the two different worlds represented by the two sisters: Lalitha and Saroja run parallel in their lives. Lalitha does not mind using her attractive physique to realize her ambition. K. Meera Bai observes, "Her (Lalitha's) narcissistic tendency is responsible for her undoing" (92). Mr. Gupta only serves as an instrument in her downfall because she already possesses the seeds of temptation in her own character. Her beautiful drawing of dove and eagle is highly symbolic of her fate, transformation and future predicament. According to H.M. Williams "Tess is surely the great prototype of Lalitha" ("Victims and Virgins" 36). But it is quite obvious that Lalitha cannot achieve the great tragic dimensions of Thomas Hardy's Tess because Lalitha's moral degeneration happens to be a deliberate attempt on her part and hence it is a downward process for her. Though Saroja is no less enthusiastic and curious than her sister in matters related to the mysteries of sex, she is able to overcome the temptations of Devraj, the assistant of Mr. Gupta.
Saroja learns the lessons of her life as she witnesses the fate that befalls her sister. She empathetically undergoes the experience of "sex, education, motherhood, abortion and snare of the city" (Sarma 33). To her, Lalitha becomes a living example. She understands from her sister's life as to what would happen if one deviates from the roots of one's tradition. Saroja realizes that contemporary Indian society is nothing but a conglomeration of traditional Indian and modern Western cultures. She is aware that modern India is undergoing rapid social changes from within and from without. The people who live in villages are no longer assured of the security of their traditional ways of life. Saroja, therefore, perceives that the stability should come from the inner strength of the characters.

While preferring the stability and the reliability of her life based on the traditional values to the vicious attractions of the city, Saroja does not hate modernity as it is. Her candid acceptance of the bicycle, a symbol of modernity, indicates that Saroja abominates only evil and wickedness and not modernity as such. She is, no doubt, a young woman "standing at the cross-roads of transition, from tradition to modernity, trying to evaluate both and accept the best out of the worlds" (Bai 93). She emerges towards the end of the novel as a unifying factor of tradition and modernity. In his perceptive commentary on the role of
Saroja as a unifying force, K.S. Ramamurti remarks:

She (Saroja) has achieved a wonderful balance and stability partly under the influence of Aunt Alamelu and partly learning from her sister's experience. The ending of the novel for all its crudeness, is symbolic of this wonderful stability which Saroja has achieved and in fact Saroja herself becomes a symbol of healthy reconciliation of two different attitudes to life. ("Two Virgins" - A Problem Novel" 206)

While A.V. Krishna Rao regards the novel "as a fictional epic depicting the two faces of Eve ("Continuity and Chang in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" 21) Nissim Ezekiel in his "Puppet Show" -- his critique of Kamala Markandaya's Two Virgins points out the artistic failure of the novelist. He says that "an Indian writer living permanently abroad cannot always be trusted to write knowingly about life in a Indian village" (The Illustrated Weekly n.p). While talking about various characters in the novel he says that "all of them are puppets manufactured for the entertainment of those who know nothing about India" (The Illustrated Weekly n.p). Ezekiel has miserably failed to examine the novel in relation to its context of situation. Proper analysis of Kamala Markandaya's work involves placing it in the presen
context of the changing Indian society as it is steadily modernized and more Westernized despite its independence from Britain.

Kamala Markandaya's latest novel *Pleasure City* (1982) also deals with the theme of the forcible encroachment of modernization on a traditional coastal village. It depicts the story of the construction of Shalimar, a holiday resort, near a remote fishing village on the coast of India's Southern States. The project is undertaken by a multinational corporation namely Atlas International Developmental Corporation which is more or less like the Clinton and Mackendrick Company of the The Coffer Dams. The primary aim of this luxury resort in a remote place is to cater to the needs of the floating population of the tourists from Western countries and the Indian elite. The Company of AIDCORP consists of foreigners as well as Indians for their staff. Copeland Tully, the British engineer, oversees the construction work.

The building of Shalimar, "an artificial and suspect Eden" 169) takes several months and obstructs forever the traditional life of the fishing village. The arrival of the British firm for the construction of a new sophisticated hotel brings in a new and strange culture to the age-old
fishing community. Like the tribals in *The Coffer Dams*, the fishermen community gets bewildered at the sight of lorries bringing strange materials and machines:

Along the coast the serious work was beginning. The villagers heard the rumbling, and soon breathless children came running to tell of lorries sneaking in, or of mountainous, earth-moving machines grinding across the countryside. Fishwives laid down their whetted knives, and shading their eyes from sun stared at the glinting metal. Fishermen, the flighty ones, were drawn by the peremptory drums, Rum-tum. Ek-dum! dubbing up recruits all day long, for Ramalingam's drums were compulsive. (*Pleasure City* 37)

The arrival of Shalimar brings about remarkable change in the socio-economic conditions of the coastal village. Sons of the fishermen community get attracted towards the construction of Shalimar, a city in microcosm, in the midst. They even go to the extent of getting employed as labourers in the building process while gradually neglecting their traditional job of fishing. So far the sea has been their God and protector but now it is slowly replaced by modern technology, an offshoot of modern civilization.

Though Rikki, the central character in the novel, is the so
of a fisherman whose traditional job is fishing, he joins Shalimar as a tea boy.

Since people can earn money easily through their labour in the building work they actually do not want to take any unwanted risk in the sea. With the introduction of a new culture by men and women who have come from outside, the native culture of the tribal coastal village undergoes a cultural convulsion. This sudden cultural upheaval is felt by the village chief Apu, the foster-father of Rikki. Though the younger fishermen are able to get more money and other prospects with the advent of the luxury hotel the elders get bewildered because of the rapid encroachment of the alien culture.

The author brings out the extreme poignancy resulting from the invasion of modernization on the traditional rural life through the character of Apu. Apu, in Pleasure City, resembles the old tribal chief in The Coffer Dams. Both are highly critical of the unwanted and undesired intrusion of the modern technology. When told about the erection of the dam the old tribal chief portentously spells out, "A peace full of moaning,... and pining for trash. But before that they will learn what is real and mourn what is lost" (The Coffer Dams 73). Similarly when the authorities of
Shalimar approach the village headman with queries he feels constrained to speak out openly for obviously "Apu's headmanship was based upon a different set of values, pertinent to a different kind of living. He did not have answers to their questions" (Pleasure City 26). He never wishes to mingle with the ongoing construction work.

Though Shalimar seems to bring in prospects for others it certainly fails to impress the headman. He appears to be in utter confusion after the arrival of alien men and machines. He always remains aloof from the sudden transformation of the primitive community. When his wife gives an account of the advantages resulting from the building of Shalimar, Apu laments over the things Shalimar has taken from them. Although the destruction of the old way of life and deep-rooted traditional values appear to be inevitable the awareness of what has already been lost causes a lot of damage to traditional characters like Apu who still feels the necessity of retaining the identity of the age-old pristine village community.

The novelist heightens the conflict between tradition and modernity through the symbols of light and shadow. When Valli complains about the gloominess in their house, Amma immediately attributes it to the shadow cast by the Shalimar. After hearing the words of his wife, Apu,
symbolically referring to the effect of Shalimar on the fishermen community, retorts: "It was a reference. The shadow was not visible" (Pleasure City 173).

Kamala Markandaya again explicates the obscure pattern of new culture coming into being out of ultra modern civilization through the symbol of electric bulb and lantern. To Apu, electricity is a symbol of modernity and lantern a symbol of tradition. He prefers the kerosene lamp to the flickering electric light which symbolizes modern civilization. He loves to stick on to lantern from which "light poured... soft and radiant" (302). He hates the electric light "dangling from the rafters, and ghostly at the end of wire" (302). At the click of the switch the electric bulb removes the darkness easily and quickly but at the same time it does hurt his eyes.

Similarly though Shalimar brings in new comforts it does not leave his conscience unhurt. Apu, no doubt, is completely sour about the onslaught of modernity on his primitive fishing community. He is for his original ancient community life which is exactly like the lantern. When the lantern is lit, it "lifted the darkness like a curtain, rather than ripped it apart. Its light did not rasp his eyes, it had never left a feeling of grit under the eyelids" (302). Thus Kamala Markandaya brings out the evils of
modernization through Apu who serves as the solitary chorus throughout the novel.

To say that Kamala Markandaya is in favour of obsolete rigidities and the orthodoxical nature of traditional life will be only to take a lopsided view of her novels. As a writer who understands the complexities of present life, she is fully aware of the inescapable demands of modernization. She, as a woman with historical consciousness, feels that change is quite inevitable. Since the entire world is rapidly changing in response to various requirements and necessities arising out of modern science and technology every society ought to wake up from its slumbering state and try to fit into the main stream of meaningful modern life.

In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukmani cannot understand the sudden tangible force of industrialization and therefore she decries the technological invasion. Though Kamala Markandaya uses Rukmani to attack the intrusion of modern technology she makes use of another character namely Dr.Kennington to build a hospital with more or less all modern facilities to cure the diseases of the villagers. If Rukmani happens to be the symbol of tradition Dr.Kennington is certainly the symbol of modernity in its positive aspects. Though Rukmani hates the disruptive nature of technology she cannot help supporting the establishment of a modern clinic run by a
Westerner. Despite her son, Raja, being swallowed up by the tannery, her other son Selvam actively participates in the construction of the hospital in the village. If the tannery stands for destruction, the hospital built by Dr. Kenny stands for preservation of life.

Similarly in *A Silence of Desire* the novelist establishes in explicit terms that the Swami may have been a threat or a troublemaker to some educated and Westernized characters but actually he is the embodiment of comfort and consolation to distressful souls. Though the Swami seems to be a controversial character to Dandekar, Chari and Ghose it is evident to the readers that the Swami strives his best to alleviate the misery of the people both materially and spiritually.

Kamala Markandaya shows in *The Coffer Dams* that there are some characters who do not want the dam and some who actually like the existence of the dam on the hill. She authentically presents contradicting views of the characters regarding the construction of the dam. The novel ends with a clear-cut optimism that the rural agrarian India should be able to stand side by side with the growing phenomenon of modernization.
In Two Virgins, the novelist makes it clear that one should have a balanced understanding of rural and urban life in order to have a total perspective of contemporaneity. If Saroja confines herself to the age-old village life she cannot become a wholesome person. When she is exposed to an entirely different manifestation of life -- the urban life--she is able to realize the inherent defects in the system of her own village community. She finally perceives that one should stick on to one's life-giving tradition while at the same time adapting oneself to the positive aspects of modernity.

In Pleasure City also Kamala Markandaya portrays the half-hearted reception accorded to the construction of a holiday resort by the village community. Overtly there are some characters like the village headman who objects to the arrival of a luxury hotel in their far-off coastal village. They even feel completely alienated from the forcible intrusion of a new Western culture and the change creeping into their indigenous culture. Others like Rikki, his mother, brother and sister Valli welcome this change. They soon begin to adapt and acclimatize themselves to the new ways of life.

Kamala Markandaya is aware of the fact that every society is in the process of change. Change is very often
the direct consequence of factors like historical consciousness and the sense of contemporaneity. The novels of Kamala Markandaya show how the orthodoxies of a society when confronted by techno-industrialization begin to yield gradually to the demands of modern industrialization. No doubt, with the process of modernization there could be tensions, dissension, heart-burnings and struggle but society changes and it should certainly change. Every society, however, old and ancient, will have to industrialize itself despite the strong resistance offered to it by the age-old customs and decaying social structures.

The process of change, however, is gradual, multi-dimensional and complex. It is not that all that is traditional is good and all that is modern is bad. Kamala Markandaya has presented this aspect quite clearly. How sociological changes affect individuals is her primary concern. She has presented it graphically almost to a pattern. In the traditional environment, modernity creeps in as an intruder. There are pragmatic people who welcome the intruder for the merits while there are tradition-bound people who shun anything that intrudes. A community consists of all kinds of people. With a small landscape, Kamala Markandaya is able to present all the dimensions of a phenomenon with ease and objectivity.