The Markandaya criticism largely hinges on the various issues pertaining to her social criticism, search for identity, the autobiographical element, her view of reality and the modern dilemma of morality and value, yet no full length study has been made of her novels to explore the theme of identity predicament of female identity as experienced by a woman under patriarchy and her bid to transcending the inadequacies of the system that denies her individuality. The female protagonist rejects the existing scale of value and evolves a strategy of survival based on human decision to assure her freedom which brings her closer to the vision. Thus the present thesis is an examination of Kamala Markandaya’s novels in context of the crisis of woman’s identity in a social milieu powered by male-chauvinism and plagued by the racial disparateness and divergent political philosophies and ideologies. In the wake of the moral and cultural upheaval as created by these anti-human forces the woman is robbed of her femininity and is paled into insignificance.

Markandaya is critical of those sinister forces which are responsible for assigning a secondary place to the woman, such as religion, philosophy, culture, politics, history, education and law. The institutions governing a woman’s predicament are myopic and suffer from ambivalent norms of morality. How farcical that the
cultural differences which seem to engulf her very identity. She finds herself being stationed between the two opposing value systems, one which is her own and the other which is inherited and which cannot be wholly subsumed. As such, there is a clash of the two worlds manifesting itself at the philosophical and sociological levels. Since Markandaya is born in a traditional Brahmin family of South India and later shifted to England and has settled there, her experiences as an expatriate have been in one or the other measure autobiographical flashes. Any significant episode which is at the centre of the action is a reflection of her own life thereby introducing greater realism. But the fact that she has settled in a country which once ruled her own has kept her memories of oppression and racial hatred alive and made her feel alienated at socio-cultural level. This has left her to the crisis of her identity and has sharpened her vision which is essentially tragic. Her chief characters are torn within by a conflict between good and evil and it is this moral vacillation and contrariness that has created scenes of tragedy. Some others find her novels rooted in the tradition of ethical humanism which stresses the fusion of freedom and responsibility. They view her as a crusader fighting out the forces of disvalues to retrieve human dignity. She herself calls that her novels are the “Literature of
only image of a woman identified with a 'pativrata' is characterised by those norms which man himself formulated to assert his male dominance.

How is it that the piety of the word 'pativrata' is characterised by those values which sanction to man untrammeled rights but deny the same to the woman? Even a slight gesture of protest is promptly interpreted as a case of hipsterism and wantonness. But in a fast changing world of today, if the woman being less dependent on others for survival refuses to bow to her master in an abject manner, it does not mean that she is unwilling to seek compromise and create harmony within the bounds of humanity which have been tying man and woman in togetherness.

Critics have discussed the four major themes in Markandaya's novels - the theme of hunger, poverty, the socio-economic inequalities and their resultant dehumanizing impact on man, the political agitation, the essential incompatibility between tradition and modernity and the East-West encounter which in the words of Prof. A.N. Kaul, is a subject that "seems almost inescapable". As a matter of fact, the Indo-Anglian writer, while abroad, becomes conscious of his Indianness and the socio-

Concern", "Socio-Literature" and defines herself as to what she means by this social context of art:

"The literature of concern has a part to play, therefore, and will be more effective than other media such as a television. For news, is often forgotten, or people develop a kind of defence mechanism that shuts off unpleasant truths. Socio-literature erenvents this, for "it tells what it is like to be there and feel it happening to you".

Some others have praised her novels for architectonic skill and structural tautness: the structure varies with the theme and is built carefully what we discover in a classical play:

"The plots unweave at a sure and swift pace. There are no secondary plots, no political or philosophical digressions, no lyrical descriptions, or extraneous characterizations. The narratives are continuous and the lapses of time between incidents are often dismissed in a phrase. This gives forward surging motion to the stories."

Markandaya has kept balance between the form and the content in some novels which are structured on the pattern of the classical tragedy. Fred's own destruction in the fire (The Nowhere Man), for example, he himself ignited speaks of the novelist's deep insight into the demeaning impact of evil on human heart. They seem to

1. A Seminar paper titled "On Images"
suggest "the seeming endlessness of life circle.... A narrative unit might be over but the life's narrative does not end. The novels conclude but they are not quite conclusive, obviously for an intended artistic effect."¹

Stephen Hemenway has noted the skill of telling tales' and the remarkable capacity for aesthetic control and selection. She is "a fine story - teller whose handling of point of view in particular reveals a serious commitment to explore the potential of English language fiction of India. Her first person narration, though flawed, contribute much originality to the Indo-Anglian novel."²

The recent criticism is critical of her view of reality, they underline its imperfection in context of a wide gap between contemporary Indian reality and her realism caused by her stay "too long in the West." As compared to Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, her novels, they contend, lack that typical Indian flavour and idiom, which shows that the novelist is less conversant with the fast changing social reality of contemporary India.


But this is not all. The critics have passed their verdicts on the basis of the extant material available on her works. As a matter of fact a careful study of her novels shows that Markandaya is ceaselessly struggling to uphold the honour and dignity of a woman both in and outside her household. She exposes the vile mechanism of evil forces and lashes out at their sinister designs which marginalise a woman's identity. Markandaya deals with the major themes which have become the prominent issues in the feminist writings of Simon de Beauvoir, Bettuy Friedan and Kate Millet.

Broadly speaking there are three levels which are operative in the process of sharpening her vision in regard to portraying the predicament of a woman's identity, they are:

1. the East-West dichotomy, and the politico-cultural upheaval,

2. tradition versus change and the ensuing rootlessness, loss of identity, despair and loneliness which have a direct bearing on the growing image of a woman,

3. the forces of materialism and progress, economic and commercialisation of the socio-cultural norms.

However, the broad dimensions of disorientation which are alive to corrode feminine sensibility are religio-
cultural dislocation, the socio, economic phenomenon and the resultant moral and psychological turmoil. In patriarchy, a woman's identity is discussed in relation to the status of her husband and thus it is no surprise that the stature of her rank is determined by the predicament of her master. The situation worsens if within this framework, there surfaces the clash between the native and the non-native ego.

A serious reading of Markandaya's novels brings out a pattern of evolution of 'feminine consciousness' moving from passive acceptance and resignation to rebellion and then finally to transcendence. And thus the novels under study are clubbed into three different categories in the scheme of chapterization keeping the two factors in view: the thematic closeness and the structural unity and the narrative pattern. This process of evolution takes place in stages. It does not come in a flash as a revelation and has a philosophy of its own. The female protagonists of the novels of the first phase1 are passive sufferers and if there is any protest against the crucial conditions of living, it is marginal. The desperate struggle for existence in the grip of poverty, hunger perverts human values, man is exhausted, physically and spiritually in his struggle against the odds of natural

calamities such as famine, floods or failure of rains. The theme constitutes the central action of the two novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*. Ravi, the protagonist is Rukmani's son, Murugan. Murugan leaves the village hoping to make better living in a town, so does Ravi. But Markandaya drops fatalism in *A Handful of Rice* which deludes Rukmani and the poetic explanation of human miseries. Nor is she contended with making mere casual remarks about effecting a change by eradicating poverty, social injustice and economic inequality that continue to plague the society. Rather she seeks to probe deeper into the moral dilemmas that an individual is forced to face in the wake of the forces of change. The beatings which Ravi heaps on Nalini are not the manifestation of his humanity but a token of his failure to overcome the hardships of the household. He sees some wrong somewhere in the social muddle.

Ravi's moral progression from a criminal to a hard-working, honest gentleman is symbolic of the novelist's faith in the affirmation of human potentialities: from a licentious, free-booting 'ganging up' with Damodar to eke out his livings on petty thefts, he comes to realise the real significance of freedom and moral responsibilities in his marriage with Nalini. In Raju's death he sees less the role of cosmic determinism rather than man-made economic inequalities which prompts him to go back to the
world of Damodar. But he is rejected there with contempt, "You are empty. No heat, No spleen, No lights, no guts." The artistic twist at the end of the novel has its moral implications: Ravi joins the hungry mob for robbing 'the nob' for a handful of rice but he is checked by his moral conscience with the utterance "But tomorrow, yes, tomorrow" It is assumed that the 'tomorrow' symbolising moral violence will never rise. His humanity and with it Nalini's as well will continue to be crushed if the moral universe turns on his head. In The Coffer Dams the theme of technological advancement and the economic progress is at the centre which in parts has already cast its shadow on human mind in Nectar in a Sieve: the tannery devours human values by degrees in its relentless growth of materialism and instead of making man aware of its benefits and the counter balancing disadvantages converts man into passivity which is reflected in Rukmani's resignation to fate: "Don't concern yourself... We are in God's hands", she answer to Kenny.

Rukmani in 'God's hands', Nalini in the coils of the system accept their fate and so calmly does Vasantha (The Nowhere Man) to save her identity in an alien milieu. With the loss of identity of her husband, Srinivas, Vasantha is 'nowhere woman', having no place to go and no person to call her own. Sarojini (A Silence of Desire)
is also an extension of Rukmani with the only change in material prosperity. She has her deep-rooted faith in the guiding star and, therefore, runs to a holy man for faith-cure when she suffers from a malignant tumour in the womb. Dandekar has a Renaissance world-outlook and advises her to go for a scientific cure. Sarojini's answer signifies the clash between faith and reason that without faith she "shall not be cured".

The image of the woman in The Coffer Dams, Two Virgins, Possession is of progression. Unlike their fellow-sufferers in the earlier novels, Helen, the two sisters Lalitha and Saroja and Caroline Bell do not accept defeat in face of the overwhelming odds of life, they struggle to create their own meaning by asserting their individuality. Lalitha and Saroja are brought up in a traditional moral milieu, the other two, Helen and Caroline, are the English women. It is the education in a Christian school that fires Lalitha's imagination, she becomes conscious of her duties to carve out her own independent life. The village, she feels, has stifled her talents, her ambitions and thus she dotes on staying in the city where she thinks she belongs to. Caroline is the daughter of a British Resident, she is rich and a divorced lady of fascinating looks. Anusuya's character analysis of her is significant to speak of her
inheritance of the unshakable belief in the domineering tendencies of imperialism.

"She was supremely confident, born and brought up to be so, with as little thought of fallibility as a colonial in the first flash of empire, as a missionary in the full armour of his mission, dogged by none of the hesitations that handicap lesser breeds."\(^1\)

Carolin's attempt to possess Val is symbolic of overcoming the spiritual scar, the west suffers in the grip of materialism. She turns to the spiritual heritage of India to seek fulfilment and overcome the crisis that her inner experiences. And thus anything stands in its way must therefore be ruthlessly destroyed. The failure of Val's relationship with Annabel (a distant relation of Caroline) and Ellic, a Jewish girl, is a natural corollary of Caroline's desperate bid to realise selfhood, but what she loses in the process is her own humanity. Little does she understand that the Sartrean implications of the third modality of the Being - "Being-with-others". That is it, is only in the midst of the other selves that the self - attainment is made possible. Her formidable efforts to possess the artist in its wholeness debases her to indulge in treachery --she writes forged letters on behalf of the Swamy for Val's inspiration. However, Val's ultimate return to the Swamy is the triumph of the

\(^1\) The Coffer Dams, Hind Pocket Books, 1969, p. 15
spiritual over the material. That the woman in these novels is alive to her individuality is manifest in the conflict they are locked in to transcend the facts of existence. The self becomes conscious of its potentialities and limitations. The realisation of one's own humanity brings the protagonist in clash with the harsh nature of reality. Caroline's conflict with the Swamy and with Annabel and Ellie and her ownself, of Helen's against Clinton's authoritarianism and of Lalitha and Saroja is symbolic of a stirring consciousness. In the first phase, the self has a glimmering notion of reality to assert its individuality and if there is any conflict it takes place in the inner realm of mind leaving the protagonist a symbol of impassiveness and stoicism. But in the second phase, since the protagonist has to attain the profound truths of life, she develops an understanding that the frontiers of the world of passivity are to be pulled down to escape the terror of history.

Helen's humanistic attitude to the tribals brings her closer to the climate of the valley, the idiom and their hospitality. When the action unfolds there are revealed layers after layers of discord in human relations but that of Helen-Clinton discord is a moral reflector that if one can transcend the racial prejudices, why can't the other do so? Helen is much
moved by the mute submission of the tribals of the white man who drive them away from valley "like animals". To Clinton's query as to how she came closer to the aborigins her answer is a reflection of a highly human idiom. "It is nothing to do with age. I think of them as human beings, that's all... You have got to set beyond their skins darling. It's a bit of hurdle, but it is an essential one". Her words to Bashiam show that she fully realises the significance of each other's alikeness for the total good of community which alone can avert identity-crisis.

'Look at me. I've never been a memsahib. You're not some kind of freak to me. We're alike, we're freaks only to the caste we come from, not to each other. I thought you knew. Was I wrong? If I was, I'll go.'

The third phase is that of transcendence. The protagonist enters into the stage of 'becoming' and gains an awareness to change the conditions of living. The change from inertia to activation could involve certain problems of ontology but the shift brings illumination that the romantic liberation of self has its own limitations and it is in the acceptance of these limitations that the self gains an awareness of its identity. The existential humanists look upon man in

1. Ibid., p. 136
possession of himself and entirely responsible for its existence which means that he is not responsible for himself but that "he is responsible for all men".¹

Mirabai (Some Inner Fury) overcomes the identity-crisis by transcending the East-West conflict. The action verges on tragic irony: how one's humanity is wounded and the identity obliterated by the chaos of senseless violence and a perverted display of beastliness. The problem that Mira and Premala encounter is not much freakish. But whereas Premala joins a village resettlement scheme sponsored by the British to seek fulfilment, Mira rises to the occasion and accepts the facts of history to at once reconcile with separation from a lover, Richard Marlowe. On the advice of Roshan Merchant, a one-time journalist but now runs her own paper, Mira takes a job on it and stays with Premala and Kit. The intimacy between Mira and Richard which develops into love has radically changed her world outlook, that it is difficult for a man to overcome evil, especially in the wake of the eruption of 'inner fury' which destroys the illusion of harmony between a man and a man and a nation and a nation. The political agitation reaches a crescendo in the Quit India Movement of 1942,

Hickey’s school is set on fire in which Premala is suffocated to death, and Richard is hit in a bomb thrown at him, the moral connotations of his words - “It’s a terrible thing to feel unwanted. To be hated” - is a sad comment of the novelist how nature turns beastly in absence of recognition of identity.

You belong to one side, if you don’t you belong to the other. It is as simple as that, even children understand it. And in between? There is no in between. You have shown your badge, you have taken your stance, you on the left, you on the right, there is no middle standing. You hadn’t a badge? but it was there in your face, the colour of your skin, the accents of your speech, in the looks on your back. You didn’t ask to be there? Ah, but you had no option, whatever you thought there was no option for you there was no other place.

Manjula, the Dowager Maharani, Mohini, a commoner and the mother of Rabi, the prince to inherit the state of Devapur, and Usha, the daughter of Dewan are the illustration of women characters who never let their identity pale into insignificance. They are fully conscious of the role they have to play to shape future rather than to be moulded by it. The Britishers introduced the system of Subsidiary Alliance to control the princely state in India but little did they know that the concept of a native state and the ruler approved by them is a transient phase of history, a little more than

"a fragile golden honeycomb". The Maharaja is placed under an English tutor to grow into a "Brown Englishman" but Manjula is conscious of its ironic implications that it is a clandestine ingenious stroke of the Englishman to alienate Maharaja from his people. Therefore she takes upon herself the responsibilities of Rabi's education, partly to hasten the march of democratic forces and partly to keep the prince near to the earth. Her patronage of Mohini, a concubine to the Maharaja is not an act of fear but of free choice. Mohini does not feel drawn to the glamour of royalty, she is a low girl but the Maharani is her guardian and thus she has no fears. Her refusal of marriage—offer of Bawajirao III shows her clarity of vision that as a co-wife her identity will be damaged in the royal palace.

'Ah, Mohini!' he sighs again. He has taken to pleading with her; it is becoming quite an exhausting business. 'I beg you, will you not marry me?'

'No'.

'It would make me the happiest man alive.'

'I can make you happy without that. I have no wish to be your official wife. I have no wish to be your second wife either.'

Mohini's final words to the Maharaja are not the utterance of one in the state of servitude, the overtones of moral promises which a ruler keeps to his own-self and to his people speak of self-realisation and freedom.

1. The Golden Honeycomb, p. 32
For once in your life you're behaving like a father to your people. You're actually letting them keep a fraction of what's theirs, instead of grabbing the whole lot for yourself and your bania friends. You ought to be pleased for their sake.1

It is not only Mohini but Janaki and Jaya also are the illustrations of the women who, irrespective of rank, station and position are conscious of their womanhood. They never feel attracted towards living a life of princely comforts when they happen to be in Rabi's company. Both are proud of their rank, being commoners. Never for a moment do we get an impression of their moral laxity. Sophie is also a case of transcendence in the sense that unlike Caroline Bell, she attaches little importance to race or colour. It is the human dignity and value that she prizes most. Helen has no inhibitions to be in the midst of the tribals, nor does the primitive tinge of the valley destroy the sophistication in her because the only morality she holds in esteem is 'how to stay human'. Sophie shares this humanistic aspect of Helen which is reflected in her being in the midst of the revelers of Holi-festival.

Thus it is evident that it is the rottenness of the system that threatens the harmonious growth of a woman's individuality and partly it is the woman herself who for want of illumination is betrayed and surrenders to male

1. Ibid., p. 465
dominance thereby reducing herself as a non-existent entity. She can overcome the imperfections within self and rise above the vulgar petty romantic day dreaming to escape the identity-crisis.