CHAPTER - II

HER LIFE AND WORKS
In craft of fiction Percy Lubbock writes: A novel is a picture, a portrait, and we do not forget that there is a more in a portrait than the likeness. Form, design, composition, are to be sought in a novel, as in any other work of art; a novel is better for possessing them, that we must own, if fiction is an art at all; and an art it must be, since a literal transcript of life is plainly impossible. A novel, thus, is a picture of life and life is well known to us. Let us judge the fiction of Markandaya whether it is true, vivid, convincing - life, in fact. It will be better to consider her craft of fiction one by one in all her nine novels available so far.

Markandaya's first novel **Nectar in a Sieve** is a fictional narrative. It seeks to project the responses of an elderly Indian woman reminiscing about her life. Rukmani, the central character, begins her story from the time she comes to her husband's village. She is a child-bride of twelve. The mood of the narrative is one of the gentle nostalgia. It is effectively set in by the two opening paragraphs:

Sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning comes, the wavering grey twins to gold there is a stirring within me as the sleepers awake, and he softly departs.
One by one they come into the Early morning, sun-shine, my son, by daughter and puli, the child I clung to who has not mine, and he no longer a child. Puli is with me because I tempted him, out of my desperation. I lured him away from his soul to mine. Yet I have no fears now: what is done is done, there can be no repining. And Old woman's foibles. A need for comforts.²

The novel also ends with a similar paragraph:

The days went by, Nathan no longer beside me, no more. Ashes and dust, scattered to the winds, moistened by the rain, unrecognisable. I picked the fragments of my life and put them together, all but the missing place; and out of my affliction. I called to puli. I do not know what words I used, when I think of what I may have said I shiver. Rich promise to lure a child before I knew it could be kept. Priceless treasure of health, no mine to give. And he, compassionate creature, who drew from me the arrows of sorrow one by one, listened, and when I came home I was not alone.³

We see that Rukmani's recollection ends where it begins and the narration has a circular pattern. This feature of the narrative adds beauty to the novel. The story has a straight narrative divided into two parts. The first part deals with Rukmani's life as the wife of a peasant. It describes heart-breaks of a peasant's life. The second part records the wandering of the aged couple in search of their son. It also depicts their misfortunes and final disillusionment. The novelist sometimes seems to be describing what she has seen herself, places and people she has known, conversation she may
have overheard. We do not mean that she is literally retelling an
time of her own, but that she writes as though she were.

Here description, in that case, touches only such matters as
anybody might have perceived for oneself, if he had happened to be
on the spot at that moment. Her object is to place the scene before
us, so that we may take it in like a picture gradually unrolled or a
drama enacted. She is telling a story in the ordinary way and we are
placed before a particular scene at a certain selected hour in the
lives of the people whose fortunes are to be followed. It is the way
in which the novel begins and ends. The reader is conscious of no
violent change in the point of view and the novelist is in the centre
of it. The protagonist, Rukmani recalls the events of her life in a
detached and unemotional manner. Her recollection is like a dream.
She captures and recaptures the tragic experiences in a clear and
lyrical manner. She does not miss even a minute detail. The divided
chapters of the narrative keep up the readers’ interest and the story
comes to be a narrative of events in the life of the narrator.

The use of the first person, no doubt, is a source of relief to a
novelist in the matter of composition. The protagonist gives the
story an indivisible unity by the mere act of telling it. Every part of
it is at least united with every part by the coincidence of its all
belonging to one character. When the story is told, the first person
draws a rambling and stamps it as a single whole.

Nectar in a Sieve is a Rukmani’s story told in the first person
singular, the point of view presented in it is that of a woman. The
novelist herself is a woman and she succeeds in the development of
such a point of view. The use of first person enables the reader to
identify with the feelings of the woman narrator. Markandaya also manipulates the limitations useful for the first person narrative. She recreates them all before the reader in vivid terms.

The narrator-heroine, Rukmani, is an elderly Indian woman who sticks to her simple narrative. Though the novelist tries to maintain complete distance from her (Rukmani); there are many moments when the novelist appears to be with her. Rukmani broods over certain situations in such a manner that it appears that it is the novelist herself who is doing it for the narrator. On the whole the narrative technique in this novel is effective and forceful.

Some Inner Fury has also the same narrative technique but with greater artistic success. Mira, the woman narrator, belongs to the westernised upper class society. She is young and has a delicate emotional impasse which often results into emotional outburst such as:

I had not been home for a long time and so I had forgotten the little silver box lying in my cupboard which no one ever touched. A beautiful thing of filigree, with a raised design of lotus flowers which I knew was there though I had to feel for it with my fingertips, it was so worn away. I opened it, and inside was the scrap of material. I saw torn from Richard's sleeve, from his upper arm where the flesh was like milk..... The dust was still there I trembled like a coward standing there and then the slow pain came seeping up, filling my throat with grief, flowing from throat at temple.\footnote{4}
No selection or arrangement is required for it. There can be no picking now; that is the business of the novelist and that has been accomplished. Here the novelist is like a craftsman who knows how to handle the stuff which is continually forming in her mind while she is at work. She must be able to recognise its fine variations and to take them all into account.

No body can work in material of which the properties are unfamiliar. The novelist will be like a man who builds a wall without knowing the capacities of wood and clay and stone.

_Nectar in a Sieve_ and _Some Inner Fury_ have a common circular pattern of narration and a female point of view. Both the protagonists are the narrators but the point of difference between them is that Rukmani is a self-conscious narrator of her past life whereas Mira is an unself-conscious narrator of her life. Both the novels begin on a note of nostalgia but unlike Mira, Rukmani starts the narration of her family's disintegration from the marriage of her sisters. This and many other things betray her conscious attempt at recollection. Rukmani narrates nature, its different moods, the darkness and the brook and in this way she is over-conscious of the situation around her. This is obvious in the following passage:

Sometimes now I can tell quite clearly, the veil is rent and for a few seconds I see blue skies and tender trees, then it closes on me again and once more I am back in the world of my own which darkens a little with each passing day. Yet not alone: for the faces of these I have loved, things that have been are always before me; and sometimes they are so vivid that truly I cannot say whether I see them or not, whether the veil is lifted to allow me the sight, or
whether it is only my mind that sees. Today for instance, I could see the brook that ran near our paddy field so clearly that I felt I had but to stop to feel its water wet on my hands. Yet that brook belongs to a part of my life that is finished.5

This note of self-consciousness is absent in Some Inner Fury. This is because of the fact that though dead, Rukmani's past is still fresh but Mira's tragedy happened ten years ago. This is also due to Rukmani's age factor—she is almost old but Mira is young and has a long way to go in life. In Nectar in a Sieve, the tale begins some years after her husband's death. In the fifth paragraph of the novel she recalls 'her childhood and in the seventh, her marriage to Nathan. There is a straight narrative, detailing the vicissitudes in her fortune until she is widowed in her forties. The time spreads over thirty years. Mira in Some Inner Fury finds the scrap of material she had torn from Richard's shirt, after the mob had attacked him during the "QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT" of 1942 and in a moment she is transported to her past:

The dust was still there no reason why it should not be; not reddish hot and swirling madly as on that day, but faded in this sunless air and settled on the cloth in a fine greying powder.6

Mira faithfully recounts all the happenings right from her first meeting with Richard till her final separation from him, for the forces that pulled us apart were too strong. The concluding sentence is, "outside a wind was stirring: the reddish dust of earth, loosened by many feet, came swirling in, and at last I turned to go".7
The end connects the beginning. Here is the craft of the novelist which displays a greater harmony between motifs and its plot.

In Possession Markandaya uses non-omniscient third person narration. Its central character also is a woman but she is a Britisher. The story is told from the Indian point of view. Anasuya, the narrator of this novel is a friend of Caroline who comes to India and then takes Valmiki, a young talented Indian, with her to England. She narrates the story as an objective reporter. Being a woman novelist Markandaya has created mostly women characters: Rukmani, Kunthi, Ira, Mira, Helen, Jayamma, Nalini, Saroja, Lalitha and Mrs. Pickerings. Rukmani, Ira, Nalini, Mira and Premala are all nobler, wiser, stronger and better than their male counterparts. They are sensitive, sensible and intelligent and possess humanly qualities which are rare. A fine feminine sensibility runs through her fiction. The novelist has an advantage of making her female characters, the narrators of her stories.

A Silence of Desire, though lacks action, is well-knit. Here the novelist's craft succeeds in depicting a clash between faith and reason. Written in the third person narration, the novel successfully presents Dandekar's point of view. The reader identifies himself with the central character and shares the conflict. Fifteen years after his marriage, Dandekar feels upset to find his wife, Sarojini, withdrawing herself from him and neglecting her household duties. Suspicious of her character he follows her to the Swamy's residence. Back home she discloses that she goes there to be cured
of a growth in her womb. The conflict between faith and reason comes to surface. The novelist explains:

"......... You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don't go together, and without faith I shall not be healed."  

Whether the Swamy is a saint, the novelist makes it a public issue. It is publically inquired and the report reveals that Swamy is "an out and out impostor". However the Swamy solves the problem by leaving the place. A note of silence over the issue is indicative of the novelist's stand.

As a mature novelist, Markandaya offers a bald disquisition on the conflict between faith and reason. Its elements are there, loaded into the life of her characters and the fictional milieu they inhabit. The whole action revolves around the lives of Dandekar and his wife Sarojini. The details are sketched in Chapters I, II and III. The pattern of life has limitations and the conversation is mainly about domestic matters. There is no discussion of ideas and issues. Our understanding is gradually increased by a narrative technique that slides with ease from detail to detail about Dandekar and Sarojini, their individual and shared lives. But the novelist does not wait for these details to establish their impact before getting the story going. Sarojini's first absence from home occurs in the middle of Chapter 1. She is forced to lie that she had seen cousin Rajan to the bus stop, with an efficiency that nearly exposes her.

At the above incident our deepest curiosities are aroused, but Dandekar is not suspicious. He meets Rajan who soon reveals that
she had not visited, Sarojini must have made a mistake, the seeds of doubt are sown. Through deft statements the novelist nudges the reader into inferences about Dandekar's state of mind and how it is affected by unfolding events. This shows Markandaya's craftsmanship while dealing with trivial situations.

Like *A Silence of Desire*, *A Handful of Rice* is a well told story of an emotional and moral experience. It has for its central character a male figure and an omniscient point of view. The narrator is not definitely identified as a woman as in the case of her first three novels. The novelist seems to have deliberately switched over to some one other than a clearly identified feminine narrator with a view to securing a ring of authenticity to the narrative. The story is told almost as a straight narrative in a chronological order except for an occasional flashback of the central character who thinks of past life, especially of his village days, once in a way. The novelist brings out Ravi's past life by suggesting it rather than by narrating it.

The story of Ravi is at its climax or near-climax. The course of action is set clearly once Ravi comes into the house of Apu. We come to know of his past life only when he goes to Damodar or from an occasional comment of the narrator. The narrative is also unfolded through Ravi's remembrances of past things and his dialogues with Damodar. The novel ends where it begins. An attempted act of violence marks both the beginning and the end. Violence stands defeated both the times in the beginning by forces outside Ravi and at the end by Ravi's own moral sense. With a craftsman's ability the novelist operates the system of parallels and
contrasts. The juxtaposition of the rural life and the urban life is well-brought out. Ravi leaves his village in utter despair, hoping to make a better living in Madras, but he is equally disappointed there. No viable solutions are found there. The novelist sketches Ravi's agonies which is remarkable for her language:

Terror was beating at Ravi, paralysing wings, but he fought it off and gathered his child to him and held him tightly, feeling the kicking muscles and nerves as if they were joined to his own tortured body, not putting him down until they ceased.10

Markandaya's The Coffer Dams is a mature work which seeks to integrate the Indian and British attitude into a realistic tale. Various incidents that upset the traditional moorings of the tribals, change of values and new modes of living are carefully built into the plot. The interaction and conflict of values are worked into the pattern of the tale through both plot and character which reveals the artistic skill of the novelist. The plot of the novel finally leaves us aware of the fathomless depth of a seemingly ordinary tale: the construction of a daman Indo-British Project and the liaison of an English woman with a somewhat disillusioned tribal crane-operator. The skilful way in which the novelist weaves a conflict of sensibilities and attitudes makes it not a tale of sexual promiscuity or racial prejudice but a pulsating record of human suffering and cultural consciousness against the backdrop of formidable elements of nature.

Markandaya's novels have three facets: a personal story, a wider conflict and a social background. She extends this narrative technique to this novel also. Here the focus is on Helen, caught
between two radically different systems of values, beliefs and attitudes. The novelist deals with the situations that are authentic and relevant to the theme of the novel. She internalises the narration most of the time in terms of two or three characters. Her particular stance helps her to dig deeper into the motives of the individuals. The particular plot is motivated to it - to present the conflict of ideas operating within the cultural context in a particular milieu. It works towards the poetic truth.

The novelist projects the image of the individual consciousness against the backdrop of shifting landscape and humanscape, leaving the form itself open-ended. She gives an objective layout of feelings, emotions and their interactions. The stream of consciousness technique enables her to maintain a fine artistic balance. She employs the observer's point of view in her narrative to project the consciousness of each character.

The Nowhere Man structurally resembles A Silence of Desire and A Handful of Rice. There are static motifs underlying the plot. It is characteristic of the personalities involved and well-connected to make the novel an organic whole. Written in the third person method of narration, the novel focuses the reader's attention on Srinivas throughout, thus, the point of view is consistently of Srinivas. It is very objective, balanced and truthful account of Indian-British relations of past and present. It is filtered through the genuine artist's imagination. It is pointing to the final view echoed by half a century later, after the Kipling vogue has come and gone. It has, thus, the mark of authenticity.
Two Virgins occupies the lowest position in the order of merit. There is little attempt at plot construction and the story is merely a tedious description of village life. It has stereotyped contrasts between pre-and post-independent India, village and city. It is not more than a documentary about rural living. The novel is written from the point of view of Saroja, but the narrative is meandering.

Markandaya is a fine craftsman. Her craft in The Golden Honeycomb is one of forceful narration and occasional description. Her style reveals the person behind the work. It tells us a lot about her educational and cultural background and about her love of the motherland. Generally speaking, Markandaya's, novels have well-made plots. The structure in most of her novels is carefully built like in a classical play and the plot is unfolded step by step. About this aspect of her novels Uma Parameshwaran observes:

The plot unweaves at a sure and swift pace. There are no secondary plots, no political or philosophical digressions or 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.11

The notable feature of the plots in most of her novels is that the stories are inconclusive and at the end point to the ever-moving wheel of life. Thus Markandaya is a first-rate teller of tales. From beginning to the end, her novels capture undivided attention and it is her craft of fiction that works. Kamala Markandaya's novels of contemporary Indian life are peculiarly marked by their distinctive
modes of expression and narration. Her skill as a novelist comes out vividly in the remarkable handling of story and plot, in the pointedly relevant social commentary that she offers on events and characters, and in the deft arrangement of the material at hand. The subtle distinction between 'story' and 'plot' must be kept in mind while approaching her technical art, however, in this context, the noted English writer E.M. Forster’s views are apt:

We have defined a story as a narrative of events in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The King died and then the queen died', is a story. 'The King died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot.\(^{12}\)

Markandaya is a conscious artist, who moves in her circle with sure steps and perfect poise. She is quite aware of the subtle dividing line between 'story' and 'plot' and pays due attention to both (which we will examine hereafter as 'narration' and 'plot-construction'). She may not be so deep in her art of characterization as Anita Desai and Arun Joshi (who portray a certain character with wonderful psychological insight), her technique may be devoid of the complexities of Raja Rao and G. V. Desani, her outlook upon life may not be so profound as that of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, but she has admirably succeeded in evolving her own mild-natured technique and vision of life and her novels tend to be an index of the current time in all its manifestations -sociological, political, economic, cultural, and communal. Her single-minded devotion to the task of writing fiction has earned for her worldwide fame and recognition. Reviewing her novel, Possession (1963),
Robert Payne once remarked thus about Indo-English novelists in general and Kamala Markandaya in particular:

They now write superbly, with a command of their unique rhythms and an understanding of the potentialities of the sentence that sometimes shame us. It is self-conscious writing, but they know what they are doing to a hair's breadth.\textsuperscript{13} Taking into consideration Markandaya's overall contribution to Indian novel in English, Uma Parameswaran has rightly observed as follows:

She was artistic instinct enough to know where the roots are but not the artistic care to keep in constant touch with her subject. Her chief merit lies in that she presents Indian ways of life without authorial commentary.\textsuperscript{14}

While the graphic presentation of "\textbf{Indian ways of life}" in Markandaya's novels is unquestionable, it is certainly debatable that she does not offer any "authorial commentary". She may not directly be involved in the act of such commentary, but there are several female characters, especially the leading narrators like Mira and Anasuya who have a remarkable resemblance with their creator, and hence we do not find complete detachment in her novels, at least in the earlier ones.

Mere description of scenes or situations is the work of a dilettante, but the narration of events in sequential order is the task of an artist. In fact, we find both - description and narration - in the novels of Markandaya. She is idyllic and naive when she writes such descriptive passages as the following:
In the valley sirens were blaring, modern muezzins announcing the end of the working day. The distant humming slackened, like a run-down dynamo. After me daily pounding, blasting and drilling the air seemed strangely still, the tremors that traveled up from the valley and were felt even here, finally subsided. In the mounting silence the purl of the river grew stronger.¹⁵

In giving such descriptions, she does not however, become another Hardy. Very quickly she applies brake to them and switches on to the short, crisp and racy dialogues. The above scenic description is immediately followed by the truncated conversation between Clinton and his wife Helen:

'All alone, Lennie?'

... ... ...

'All alone, darling. Except for cook'.

'Can't stand the man. Where's Das, Das he shouted.'

... ... ...

'Millie's borrowed him', Helen said.

'What for?'

'The party.'

'What party?'

'Millie's.'

'My God,' he said, 'do we have to go?'

'Only if you want.'¹⁶
This is the usual mode of her narration, which furthers the story step by step, sentence by sentence. The above conversation reveals that Millie has arranged for a party to which the Clintons must go. In fact, dialogues and conversations occupy more space in Markandaya's novels than scenic paintings and descriptions do, and the main objectives of the novelist have unfailingly been the telling of the tale, the furtherance of the plot, and the revelation of socially relevant situations and characters.

The narration in Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), takes place through the mouth of its principal female character, Rukmani, and that too in the first person. Rukmani is seen here reminiscing her own past, since she was twelve, when she was married as a child-bride to Nathan, a village boy. The novel is, thus, written in a reminiscential mood, and Markandaya's technique rises to meet its tensions and complexities. Rukmani's recollection of her life ends where it begins, winding up the story in a circular form. The story is straightforward and divided into two parts. The first part tells us about Rukmani's unfortunate married life, and second depicts the painful wanderings of the couple in search of a job in the city and their disappointment. Writing of the novel's technique, K.S. Narayan Rao has remarked:

In a detached and yet not wholly unemotional manner, Rukmani recalls the events of her life in a chronological manner. The dream-like quality of her recollection is particularly impressive. Rukmani recaptures the tragic intonation of her life in clear, lyrical manner. She misses nothing, not a detail. Divided into short chapters, which have a psychological advantage of keeping
the reader's interest, the story purports to be a narrative of events in the life of narrator.\textsuperscript{17}

The end of the novel is tragic, and its seems that the novelist cleverly contrived it in order to capture the reader's sympathy for the poor and the destitute as Rukmani is. The overall impression of the novel on the mind of the reader is that the story is somewhat tampered and that the plot has not been permitted to grow naturally. R.S. Singh has nicely put it thus:

The writer has probably exaggerated the circumstantial pressures on the narrator to create tragic effects, but the fact remains that the novel is, on the whole, melodramatic. One gets the impression on going through the ordeals of Nathan and Rukmani that the whole thing is engineered, contrived a little too cleverly, rather than developed on chance events alone.\textsuperscript{18}

The narrative of \textit{Nectar in a Sieve} highlights Rukmani's reactions to the events of her-life and not so much the happenings themselves. As such, action is subordinated here to an individual's thoughts and feelings. Yes, subordinated, because it is not completely ignored. The opening of the tannery, for example, brings industry to the otherwise sleepy village, and provides jobs to many though not to the owners of the land where it is located. Rukmani and Nathan have to leave the village to seek their livelihood in the town which also rejects them, and the latter dies in abject misery and misfortune. Rukmani, old and hapless, returns to the village to count her days and to nostalgically recollect what has happened to her since her marriage with Nathan.
Some Inner Fury (1955) is also a female-dominated novel where the narrator-heroine Mira recounts the tale in the first person. But Mira is a young, lovable woman, and not a haggard like Rukmani. Mira is a westernized lady of the upper class society. One day, she opens her little silver-box and finds the scrap of material she had once torn from Richard's - her true lover's - shirt after the nationalists mob had attacked him during the "QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT" of 1942. Immediately she is transported into her past and recounts all the happenings of her separation from her first meeting with Richard till her separation from him for good. The story is gripping unto the last and wonderfully recaptures the tense moments of Indo-British relationship in the pre-Independence era. There are autobiographical elements in the novel, and the reader feels that the sophisticated Mira is no one else than the author herself. In the words of R.S. Singh, "Their" dates of birth, interest in creative writing, birth in the Brahmin family and visits to England in connection with publications and their infatuation with some Englishman (Markandaya herself is married to Mr. Taylor, a Britisher) lead one to believe that they are one and the same."19 The narrative pattern remains 'circular' here too as in Nectar in a Sieve. A sudden discovery of the little silver-box and the material kept in it leads Mira to recollect her past tragedy that took place ten years ago. This sets off the story of the novel which is so well-managed and so well-narrated to the very last detail.

In A Silence of Desire (1960), like all other later novels excepting Possession (1963), the novelist adopts the method of the third-person narration, and in this it marks a departure from
Markandaya's previous novels. It is also different from the previous
novels in that it presents Dandekar's point of view, and not that of a
dominant female character. The main interest of the novel lies in
the revelation of the complex character of Dandekar who is
depicted as hovering between the twin pulls of his love for his wife
Sarojini and children and his jealousy for the Swamy. Its interest
also centres around the conflict between science and superstition
represented by Dandekar and his wife respectively. There is a
wealth of suggestion to be found in this novel. Of this, Iyengar
writes in this way: "Perhaps her most ambitious novel, A Silence
of Desire, dares the invisible and the writing is competent enough
to forge here and there coils of intricate suggestion that almost
seems to bridge the chasm between matter and spirit, doubt and
faith."  

In Markandaya's fourth novel, Possession, the narrative is
once again, as in the first two novels, managed by a woman of
sensitive nature, namely by Anasuya, who is a writer of stature and
who frequently visits England in connection with the publication of
her books. Her frequent visits enable her to keep in touch with the
developments of the story in England where Caroline, the
possessive woman of wealth and influence, has whisked away
Valmiki, the peasant- boy of India, in order to avoid his contact
with his spiritual teacher, the Swamy. Since the scene keeps
shifting here - from India to England and America, and back to
India again - there is "an extravagance in scene and situation".  
Unlike Nectar in a Sieve and Some Inner Fury, Possession does
not have the central figure as the narrator of the story. Anasuya
remains largely detached and objective, like the author herself. In one more respect, she stands apart from the dominant women of previous novels, from Rukmani and Mira to be precise, and that is in her social status. Whereas Rukmani belongs to the poor and suffering section and whereas Mira belongs to the rich and well-to-do class of society, Anasuya belongs to the rare class of writers having a certain amount of detachment in their outlook upon life.

All other novels of Kamala Markandaya - A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffer Dams (1969), The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977), and Pleasure City (1982) - are third-person narratives. These third persons are usually omniscient and omnipresent in order to be able to know each happening and detail concerning the plot. Barring Two Virgins, we do not have domineering female characters in any other novel, and even in Two Virgins everything seems to be messed up. Some scholars feel that the novelist should have presented here the narrative through the mouth of Lalitha, the elder sister of Saroja whose view point constitutes the real fabric of the novel. Evidently, it does not have a compact plot or a solid story, and in this matter it corresponds with the first novel of Markandaya. The narrative thread in A Handful of Rice is put in the hands of Ravi, the principal character in the story. Prema Nanda Kumar feels that this novel is clearly based on Bernard Malamud's The Assistant (1957), wherein Frank comes to steal from a Jewish grocer's store but stays on to help the latter and wins his daughter's - Helen's - love. Frank becomes indispensable for the whole family when Helen's father suddenly breaks down. In Markandaya's novel,
too, a similar situation is created when Ravi being chased by the police enters into a tailor's shop where he is beaten, but all the same he is attracted towards the tailor's daughter, Nalini. The tailor, Apu, offers Ravi a job in his own shop, and the latter accepts it gladly. Ravi marries Nalini in due course, and after Apu's death he becomes the head of the family. The novel forcefully voices its concern against the conditions of alarming poverty and starvation in India, and implicitly pleads for the creation of better opportunities for the suffering poor.

The Coffer Dams is a moving narrative of "the East-West encounter or of the problems of industrialization", as Uma Parmeswaran puts it. Herein we witness a profound "understanding of human motivations, and a bold experimentation in prose style". The Clinton-Mackendrick engineering firm comes to India to construct dams across a South Indian river, and strives to complete the work before the monsoon begins. Indian engineers like Krishnan and local technicians extend their helping hand to it. But the dreaded monsoon comes, and the dramatic suspense deepens. The dying tribal headman, Bashiam, provides the clue as to how the flooded river may be contained - "when the ridges clear "And the ridges clear by morning, the water levels fall, and the great dam is safe. In this novel, the principal characters are Clinton, Helen, and Bashiam, but some others like Mackendrick, Millie and Bob Rawlings, and Krishnan also come alive in its pages. The art of characterization touches a new high. The novelist's technique rises to evoke a proper atmosphere for the dam-construction and the onset of the rainy season. It offers technical descriptions about the
construction work and the machines and the cranes. It would be worthwhile to quote Iyengar here at some length:

There is a quiet efficiency in the technical descriptions, and there is an eerie quality, in the early-morning adventure in bird-catching. Kamala Markandaya writes with increasing mastery of the medium, and although there is some obvious contriving and some ingenious formulations of contrast, the novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life. Markandaya offers meticulous details about the dam-construction, thereby displaying her amazing narrative and descriptive powers. As there are more British than Indian characters in it, it seems that the novelist is gradually trying to capture the life and temperament of English people.

But in The Nowhere Man the scale is once again turned in favour of India. Here Markandaya shows Indians - Srinivas and his wife Vasantha - as victims of British tyranny and terrorism. Afraid of undue harassment at home, Srinivas and Vasantha leave for Britain and settle down there for good. But there they are always treated as 'aliens', and though they build a house in London and are prepared to go to any extent to make themselves acceptable to Britishers, the latter being represented by Fred and his companions who adopt a relentlessly rigid attitude and aggravate the whole situation to the tragic end of both Srinivas and Fred. The novel is undeniably tragic in its vision - in fact, more tragic than Nectar in a Sieve, where the death of Nathan is circumstantial rather than intentional. It is more pessimistic in vein and style than A Handful
of Rice and truly comes very close to the unredeemable pessimism of Hardy's novels. Obviously, it has an explicit moral purpose to serve -unlike many other novels of Markandaya - and seems to suggest that the undesirable hostilities and tensions between the East and the West are never to prove beneficial to either; they rather breed a chain of reactions harming the interests of both. And again as in Thomas Hardy's novels, we find "a chorus in the neighbours" of Srinivas, such as Mrs. Fletcher, Mrs. Glass, and the men in the pub. They come out with their comments on situations and characters. The practice also recalls Greek tragedies and in recent times T.S. Eliot's plays wherein the chorus plays a very significant role.

As already mentioned, Two Virgins is decidedly a hopeless novel, its theme being slight and its technique never rising to the occasion. Even the details given herein are loose and incoherent. The narrative is meandering, and the plot is ill-conceived and mismanaged. One, therefore, feels a measure of relief when one turns from this work to the stupendous The Golden Honeycomb.

Markandaya kept a silence of four years before she came out with her most ambitious novel, The Golden Honeycomb in 1977. It is a historical novel by all means and records the history of India on a grand scale. Divided into three parts-and each part being preceded by an epigraph-and containing a prologue which quotes from Lord Randolph Churchill and an epilogue which refers to the formation of the Indian Union after Independence. At least three generations of Bawajiraj (from I to III) have been minutely traced in it. The attitudes of the British and the King of Devapur are
almost identical, and they both tend to exploit the Indian masses. The difference is to be marked only in their situation. The one is all powerful, cunning and crafty, having fixed his eye on the interests of the *firangis*, the other is cowardly and helpless. The tables are turned by Rabi, the son of the Maharaja, and Usha, the daughter of the Dewan, and their followers. The mode of narration in this novel is not different from its immediate predecessors. It is noticed that true to the grain of history the narration is carried forward with utmost detachment and impartiality. However, the novelist takes control of the whole situation when she comes to describe the historical background, the uncontrollable strikes and agitations for freedom, and her point of view remains perfectly patriotic and nationalistic throughout. At least, the motherland is freed from the clutches of a foreign yoke. The impersonal narration of the story that we find herein often leads to "a strong vein of irony that runs through the novel". The irony is mostly directed towards the British or the Maharaja.

As soon as we open the novel, we find an ironical sentence like "The British cannot do without him" (i.e., the Bania - the Merchant). Also, the grand Durbar of Delhi is mentioned as a 'bun-fight' and 'a circus', and Sir Arthur, the Resident of the State of Devapur, is called a 'Bania Sahib'. By referring to the British as 'Bania' time and again, Markandaya is trying to draw our attention to a great historical event, since the Britishers had originally come over to India for seeking new markets for their finished products and for collecting raw materials to manufacture them at home. Even in presenting such minor details Markandaya does not forget the
facts of history. In this way, the ironical mode often stands her in good stead, and she expresses her views and attitudes without getting directly involved in the exchanges between the characters. This she does by evolving the technique of Via Media, which does not make it compulsory upon the writer to insert the use of 'I' in the story as Mulk Raj Anand practises in his Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953). Both are historical novels, no doubt, but their technique widely differs. In this context, we may also mention Manohar Malgonkar, another well-known Indo-English novelist, who also employs 'I' in his historical novel, The Princes (1963). Kamala Markandaya, however, does not toe any other novelist, and it is all the more to her credit that she has followed an independent and authentic course of her own. But it does not imply that she has never taken to the first-person narrative while depicting the chequered history of India. In truth, Some Inner Fury (1955) is a living example of it, though in this work the political or historical note is quite subdued and it emerges only towards the close of the novel in the shape of intense nationalistic movement against the British.

The latest novel of Markandaya, Pleasure City (1982), employs the third-person narration. Neatly divided into 51 chapters (which are of variable length indeed) this work highlights the British co-operation with India, after her independence in a changed shape, participating in the latter's developmental plans and programmes and constructive expansions. The multi-national organization AIDCORP takes up the invitational assignment of building a holiday pleasure-resort known as Shalimar in a coastal
village of South India. Mr. Tully comes to India as one of its directors to supervise the construction of the resort. Shalimar is successfully completed with the willing co-operation of Britishers and Indians, and offers opportunities of familiarity and friendship between Tully and Rikki, a hardworking Indian of barely sixteen. These two further cement their friendship by working together in the renovation of Avalon, that deserted castle which was once built by Tully's own grandfather who was then Proconsul to the Southern province. But the novelist has skillfully tried to show the subtle differences between the two and through them between the two races of the East and the West. Until the completion of Shalimar, the novel seems to be moving in the right direction, but once the work is over it becomes highly fragmentary and episodic in character. A kind of Smolletian spirit dominates it thereafter, and the content tends to be insubstantial and slippery. Without solid content, technique goes awry and structure becomes loose.

A broad survey of Markandaya's novels to this day reveals that she has amply used flashback and flashforth techniques in them. That is why most of them follow a 'circular' pattern and reminiscental mood. She does introduce variety at times, and in The Golden Honeycomb this technique is discarded in favour of a direct, linear technique. The historical narrative actually requires it to be otherwise. The arrangement of events has been done on a chronological pattern in some other novels too; for example, in Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, Possession and A Handful of Rice.
The plot-construction in Markandaya's novels often adopts a neat, clean and straightforward approach. Her plot is usually well-knit and properly balanced, but in such novels as *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Two Virgins* and *Pleasure City*, it is superseded by the story. Even the story tends to be episodic and loose in *Two Virgins* and *Pleasure City*. Otherwise, the plot is well-structured in *Some Inner Fury*, *A Silence of Desire*, and others that follow. It provides space for wit and irony but not for humour. *The Golden Honeycomb* has some appealing flashes of irony in it. Markandaya often makes use of at least three things in her plot - a personal story, a social background and a wider conflict. There is a kind of 'classical' quality about her art. Speaking of this, Uma Parameswaran writes:

Each novel is organised as a classical play, A microcosmic equilibrium is upset giving rise to conflicts; the focus is always on the main character, the plot is unfolded step by step, there is a rapid denouement after the climax. Some classical 'machinery' is also used. There are symbolic forewarnings in each story.24

As in a classical play, the story of a Markandaya novel is complete in itself. There are only a few threads in it which are neatly drawn and tied together. This does not evidently permit the use of a secondary plot, and Markandaya's novels are conspicuous by its absence. They also lack philosophical ruminations, lyrical outbursts of feelings and extraneous characters. As a result, Markandaya may lag behind in depth of thought as compared to such writers as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and B. Rajan, but she makes up the loss by rendering her narratives run forward without
any barriers and by using pure and chaste language free from unnecessary adornments. She usually presents her stories without any commentary or criticism on character and situation, and this makes her an artist of perfect detachment and objectivity.

Markandaya mostly draws her characters from the store-house of knowledge. They belong to various sections of society, the rich and the poor, to the high-class gentlemen and women and down-to-earth rustics and vagabonds. Both Indians and Britishers figure in her novels of abiding appeal. The novelist tries to study minutely their inter-cultural and inter-racial relationships, rising above the considerations of caste, creed and clime. In this respect she is definitely superb, almost next to none in Indo-English fiction. She presents both individuals and types in her novels. Bukmani and Nathan, Mirabai and Richard, Sarojini and Dandekar, Lady Caroline and Valmiki and to a lesser degree, the Swamy, Ravi, Clinton and Helen and Bashiam, Srinivas, Vasantha and Mrs. Pickering and Fred, Saroja and Lalitha, Rabindranath and Usha, and Tully and Rikhi: all are living characters of flesh and blood. But there are others like Nalini in *A Handful of Rice*, Rawlings and his wife Millie in *The Coffer Dams*, Chingleput in *Two Virgins*, the Swamy in *A Silence of Desire*, Janaki, Das, Jaya and bearers in *The Golden Honeycomb* who never grow fully and act individualistically. The examples of types may best be found in nameless Indians and representative Britishers coming into contact with one another and furthering the interests of their respective countries. *The Golden Honeycomb*, we witness the type of those who stand for nationalism and patriotism, such 'as Manjula,
Mohini, the Dewan, and the Pandit (Rabi's teacher), and of those who symbolize tyranny and exploitation, e.g., the Political Agent, the Resident, Bawajiraj II and III.

Though Markandaya does not attempt to portray characters psychologically as do Anita Desai and Arun Joshi in their searching novels, she adroitly juxtaposes them and brings out their individual merits and values in society. Certainly, she is not the novelist who displays the emotional or intellectual turmoils of an individual, but she can ably set him or her in a given situation and study him or her from various angles through the view points of other characters. If one closely examines the world of Markandaya, one discovers that she has largely been tragic in her outlook upon life. This readily recalls Thomas Hardy to our minds, but with the difference that whereas Hardy is pessimistic to the core without any hope of redemption or delight, Markandaya is not. She does not try to see her creatures raped before her eyes as does Hardy in Tess (1891), but she has her own ideas of looking into the evil. In The Nowhere Man, Fred is the evil incarnate who is bent upon wrecking the poor, helpless Srinivas; in The Coffer Dams, Clinton is a feelingless person straining every nerve to achieve his selfish ends; and in The Golden Honeycomb, the Resident and the Maharaja are both seen as instruments of terror and exploitation. One might mark that there is a healthy and bright evolution of characters in Markandaya's novels. Rukmani and Nathan in Nectar in a Sieve are totally tragic in portrayal who find no prop in their village or in the town they visit for a suitable living, but in The Golden Honeycomb Rabi appears as a messiah of freedom and patriotism. The forces opposed
to him do not come out to crush him completely, and in him the novelist's "tragic sense seems to be modulating itself into the harmonious concord of maturity". Sometimes she is found guilty of creating creatures (as well as situations) of indistinctness, and in this context one may cite the example of Two Virgins where she does away with proper nouns of 'Appa' and 'Amina', which are actually generic terms for 'Father' and 'Mother'. But such lapses are few and far between, and Markandaya more often than not rises above them. From the viewpoint of the art of characterization, Some Inner Fury is indisputably the best. Similarly, the protagonists in The Nowhere Man and The Golden Honeycomb are certainly drawn with masterly strokes.

Then follows the technicality of adjusting expression to character and situation. In this matter Markandaya can't be totally vindicated. No doubt, she handles her medium with the touch of a consummate artist and uses flawless and chaste English, she occasionally slips into the error of forgetting the real status or rank of her characters. Uma Parmeswaran may be right in her own way when she remarks that "the most prominent feature of her early writing is simple and effective language", but the truth also remains that she has misconceived the nature of her rustic creations - such as Rukmani - and thrown a halo around them by making them speak in what is termed as 'anglicized idioms'. This may be taken as a minor lapse by her admirers, but it is certainly awful to a specialised reader who is accustomed to the nuances and delicacies of the English language. Otherwise, her expressions are forceful and lively and her idioms and phrases are precise and controlled to
the last detail. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand or Khushwant Singh, she does not indulge in literal translations of Indian words or expressions, and in the most mannered a way like a well-bred gentlewoman, she articulates her feelings and thoughts, paying no heed to their abuses or unnecessary Indianisms. Some scholars have found fault with her because she does not always stick to Indian setting or character or expressions, but this is an unjust demand from her, - 'unjust' keeping in mind her peculiar position as a writer and her immediate social surroundings. Isn't it a strong proof of her 'Indianness' that the still carries the name of her pre-marriage days - Markandaya - though she is married to an Englishman? We should rather be proud of the fact that here is a writer who interprets the spirit of India to the West in a language as the westerners use and meets their standards inch by inch. There are, no doubt, incongruities here and there - for instance, Janaki in The Golden Honeycomb does not sound natural when she speaks English fluently, and so is the case of Jaya, a Bombay mill-worker - but they may be considered as born of her alien situation, as "the price the expatriate writer has to pay". The novelist, however, sounds very natural and impressive when she puts proper words and expressions in the mouths of her British Characters; for example in the reproduction of English speech and rhythm, through Sir Arthur and Lady Mary Copeland in The Golden Honeycomb.

Lastly, comes up the question of style and its execution by Markandaya. In the first place, style is not something static; it rather modulates itself to answer to the demands of the story. It has to adjust itself to cope with the flux of situations and the variation
of characters and their moods and fancies. In the second, it is an index to the inner workings of a man's mind to which the vehicle of expression is tailored in an appropriate manner. The use of tenses, inversions, hyphens or hyphenated expressions, and truncated or involved dialogues: all these are only of secondary importance. Markandaya's prose style is dynamic in nature, and though it does not probe a character psychologically so much as situationally it is peculiarly suited to the expression of his varying moods, feelings and thoughts. Occasionally it tends to be impressionistic, as in the impressive description of the colourful Holi festival in The Golden Honeycomb. Markandaya moulds her style in such a fashion as to portray the diverse traits and temperaments of her characters effectively. In The Golden Honeycomb, the Maharaja, the Dewan, and Rabi do not think in an identical way, and the novelist has skillfully depicted their divergent views and tempers. It is likely that she does not show "sufficient attention to small details", like the location of a particular village (as Raja Rao has done in his Kanthapura (1938), or Khushwant Singh in his Mano Majra, (1956) or the site of a dam-construction (as one witnesses in The Coffer Dams), but the lack of these details does not detract the attention of the reader in a substantial way, despite the fact that a scholar like Shyamala Venkateswaran seems to be highly sore over this. As a novelist moving in her chosen domain and locale, Markandaya tries to be realistic in the portrayal of certain social foibles and emotional conflicts of human beings without much derailment or digression. Her style does not permit aberrations of
mind and distortions of facts. One is rather tempted to quote Uma Parmeswaran again with regard to her prose style:

Kamala Markandaya's is not a translated language. She does not attempt to adopt vernacular idiom or tone; the language of her earlier work is always unobtrusively pure. Yet she succeeds in bringing out the texture of the social classes by varying the degree of simplicity and articulation. A distinct note of experimentation with prose style is present in The Coffer Dams and later novels....

Markandaya's style shorn of superfluities and unwanted details moves, in fact, between the twin polarities of simplicity and complexity, and thus draws a dividing line between her earlier and later works. It is totally devoid of rhetorical raptures and lyrical effusions, as may be seen in Anita Desai; it is also free from philosophical reflections and metaphysical abstractions as witnessed in Raja Rao, B. Rajan and Arun Joshi. Although it admits of the ardent social considerations of Mulk Raj Anand, Bhawani Bhattacharya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, it is not committed to any particular ideology or doctrine. And though it is wedded to wit and irony, at least on appropriate occasions, it does not show its propensity for the sense of humour that one usually encounters in the enlivening comic style of R.K. Narayan and Ruth Jhabvala. In the final analysis, Markandaya's style follows the moderate path of reconciling the disparate experiences of individuals and transmuting them into an artistic whole of powerful appeal and charm.
REFERENCES

3. Nectar in a Sieve, p. 188.
9. Ibid., p. 20.
15. The Coffer Dams, pp. 57-58.
16. Ibid., p. 58.


25. Ibid. p. 90.