CHAPTER THREE

NOVELS OF KAMALA
MARKANDAYA (1963-1973)
The novel is a tragic portrayal of an impractical youth. Being the son of a poor peasant, Ravi, along with other villagers, was leading a miserable life of poverty and hunger in his village as he recalls here:

They did not lie, they did not cheat, they did not steal. But then in that small struggling farming community what was there to steal? As far back as he could see they had all lived between bouts of genteel and acute poverty—the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old ones and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the 'falling fever,' 'recurrent fever,' and any other names for what was basically, simply, nothing but starvation.¹

Initially, his demand at Apu’s house was only for food and shelter. Even his attraction for Nalini was partly for food. However, his wants explode like crackers for a new shirt, a safety razor, a mouth organ, a bed, a nice new sari, a new shirt for himself and other “essentials and luxuries the list of which grew daily longer.” Then he must have higher wages and a separate room—“a refuge, a place they could call their own, where he and his wife could talk, plan, dream, make love, undisturbed.”²

Ravi’s desire for a room as a substitute for a house can be understood on the ground that it is one of the three basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter. Nor is there any justification, as he

1. *A Handful of Rice*, P. 81
2. *Ibid*, p. 86
maintains, for some of the luxury for increasing his efficiency. One such item is a bicycle “that beautiful machine with the flashin silver spokes he had ridden so often in his dreams” which neither Apu had nor Ravi’s finances allow him to have.

His growing longings and the inevitable non-materialization of his dreams make him in his unhappiness like a child again “who could sleep through any disturbance” but the insurmountable burden of feeding the hungry mouths of his entire family forces him to seek solace in easily-available items of luxury like Apu’s bed with springs instead of the string-bed.

The problem of hunger or non-availability of a handful of rice affects not only Ravi and Nalini but their children as well. Nalini feels concerned as her twin babies “cried after every feed for the milk she could no longer give them. He remembers how his mother used to give him a good meal but which he now cannot give to his own children:

One good meal, his mother would have said, clasping pious hands together thankfully, indicating the rice, the dhal, the vegetables, the thin chilli-water brew. One good meal, and he had to watch his children sucking their fingers, grown silent and anxious, long before the next one was due. This one good meal not enough for him. He wanted more. It was his right, his children’s right. In the heavy ferment of the close hot nights he swore in their name he would see that they got it.

1. *A Handful of Rice*, p. 217
The constituents of society against whom Ravi protests are the big memsahibs, the rich people as also the people of higher middle class. He blames them. He had not yet forgotten the beating he had had from her in their first encounter. All he had got from Jayamma was an indifferent, kind he had always got from society. "How like her, how like them, he thought, filled with a great contempt". Ravi, of course, does not accept this cold attitude without a murmur. For him, Jayamma and the society she represents do not have skin but "hide, what they get after years and years of toughening up".

The main thrust of Ravi's protest is against the prevalent economic system which is at the root of all social disparities. He hits out at the prevalent craze for foreign objects, unhealthy government controls, quotas and import restrictions. In order to protest against the inefficient administration, and its wrong policies, Ravi, among others, lifts goods from the warehouse.

The economic exploitation begins, Ravi believes, when people accept injustice without a protest. In his own village, his father had helped economic injustice to accept poverty without protest. In an effort to touch even distantly the fringes of the rich, Ravi becomes so much obsessed with money that he is prepared to have the vasectomy operation for it. Markandaya writes about this:

Sometimes envy of wealth—not displayed, but there—overcame Ravi. The cost of just one of those motor-cars that purred along the Marina, he felt, would keep him and his family over half a
lifetime. How, he wondered with a burning curiosity, did anyone ever earn so much? He never would, not if he sewed a dozen shirts in a dozen hours every day of the week for a dozen years! No wonder then that young men like himself, felt the itch, as he himself had done, to get into these same cars and drive away—only most of them couldn't have got far, unless they'd had a lesson or two first from a taxi-driver!

In their quest for happiness of individuals and of the family, disregarding social considerations, Ravi and Nalini together could be, as Markandaya suggests, "symbolic of new India". For Nalini has what Ravi lacks and together, complementing each other, they can be very effective where most people in the new generation fail. Nalini has some traces of Apu's uncomplaining temperament, endures poverty, faces other difficulties, and puts up with thrashing at the hands of her husband even in the advanced stage of her pregnancy. Ravi had seen her fighting for breath, massaging "her abdomen or arching her back for relief against the cold granite-stone, but he had never herd her complain" against anything, including his carelessness. This stoic, uncomplaining attitude of her towards the troubles of the world belongs really to the old generation symbolized by Apu, now adopted by Nalini because she has a good traditional upbringing which Ravi lacks. "She confronts things whereas Ravi evades, delays or faces them clumsily. He had "evolved a method of staving off his worries by promising himself to think about it later". It is this sense of evasion, a habit of finding

excuse which is so common among many people of the new generation and
which ultimately brings about Ravi's downfall. The deterioration of the
economic condition of the family which was slow after Apu's death becomes
rapid later, pointing out to Ravi's increasing failure to cope with the new
situation. Consequently, at nights, when confined to four walls and being
alone "the image took on terrifying near reality" and "he pictured them all
hurting downward, always downward, towards destruction".

It is at this stage that Ravi, the representative of new generation, learns
a lesson, unfortunately, not from the experiences of Apu, the old one. He
thinks of halting the slide but does not know how. He thinks of starvation
and of bribing "the watchdogs of compound wall and bungalows into the
memsabib's presence" but the options are not very good. The starvation could
make Nalini dry, necessitating buying of milk for the babies. To him the old
man's palm greasing, made abundant sense now : "What trouble him now
was not having to bribe but not being able to do so".

This, however, is not his mood of final resignation. There are still
moments when he rebels and quarrels with those used to accepting bribes.
His use of abusive language worsens the situation. Contrary to his
expectations, he fails to get even a word of sympathy for the injuries caused
to him. When he is insulted and pushed out of the memsahib's house, he
cries out in exasperation : "What chance had he now, if he had ever had any ?"

Ravi had other difficulties too—other competitors in the domain of his
customers who had traditionally belonged to Apu. The customers of the old
generation were reserved like one's territory or house. "This was the old
tradition; muscling in was new”. Even in the new game, Apu, with a firm grip on his business, and knowing the art of manoeuvring could have done better by destroying his threatening rivals. Ravi, belonging to the new generation, can do nothing of this kind. His rebellious attitude has its own consequences now. In the new emerging world of competitors, everything is threatened by those people who hanging around the big houses for hours “one had to fight, fiercely, with whatever weapons or go under”.

Here Ravi’s dilemma is that, believing in the new generation’s concept of free trade, he cannot accept the traditional territory circumscribing his business activities. The competitive world of business becomes identified with Damodar’s world of violence. But Ravi, unlike Damodar, belongs to a jungle of civilization in which he cannot even fight freely because of his sense of honour, and of the respectability of his wife and children.

Damodar’s prosperity is because of the firmness of mind : Ravi’s bankruptcy because of its absence. Damodar’s success is concretized in his palatial house, good furniture and hookah at his side which to Ravi seems “to symbolize to cool repose awaiting the steadfast man, the man who kept his course unswayed by the weak babbling of myth and conscience”. Ravi has a conscience and hence ponders a great deal before doing anything while Damodar lacks it and rightly succeeds in a conscienceless, ruthless competition. The tension in his mind is the tension to select one of the two Damodar or Nalini. A.V. Krishna Rao says, “Damodar symbolizes a certain kind of freedom—a freedom that is completely self-centred and divorced from ethical sensibility. He is a law unto himself; he is not accountable to anyone.
He seeks pleasure by all means and any means. Since money holds the key to the chambers of possessive pleasure, Damodar should get rich quick by whatever means available,... In contrast, Nalini symbolizes the subtle fragrance of life, a clean healthy and traditional life. She promises 'sweet life' but demands hard and honest labour.¹ Damodar scornfully turns his deaf ear to Ravi's difficulties in paying rent and the instalments of his sewing machine. Finding Ravi empty and with "no heart, no spleen, no lights, no guts" so much needed for urban economic world of competition, Damodar advises him to go back to the village. Ravi probably does think nostalgically here of his past when in his village his dreams were as humble as a string of bullock carts going creaking by on the street far removed from him— "there storys below" and to which he cannot return now. But Ravi, like the new generation itself, had reached a stage where he could neither go forward nor backward. In Srinivasa Iyengar's words, "Caught between the pull of the old tradition that all but strangles him and the pull of the new immorality that attracts as frightens him, Ravi lurches now this side now the other side, and has the worst of both."²

In *Two Virgins* Lalitha obviously can be associated with, what Miss Mendoza calls, “a town mouse” even if she was born in a country. Like the town itself, Lalitha represents external beauty in contrast to Manikkam’s wife whose beauty consists in her benevolent activities. Lalitha is so much intoxicated with the idea of urban life that she considers her village house as primitive and barbaric in the absence of a refrigerator and a phone. With her superficial knowledge of the city, Lalitha symbolises the modern youths who glorify the urban life and ultimately become its prey. Margaret Joseph considers her “a symbol of the social forces that drive modern youth to the magnetic city.” A.V. Krishna Rao feels that Lalitha symbolises “the impetuosity of the youth.” Lalitha is captivated by Miss Mendoza’s modern ways—her manner of sitting in chairs, and her use of forks and spoons in taking meals. Unlike her crumpled-looked rural sister Saroja, Lalitha wishes to appear flower-fresh all the time. Besides being crazy for slimness, she spends hours to bathe and braid her hair, piles her tresses in a new style and exhibits her phenomenal eyelashes. She prefers English to Indian dance.

Typical of modern youths educated in public schools, Lalitha begins to criticize the Indian religion and culture in an attempt to prove her liberal attitude to life. By comparing Lachu’s act of dallying with girls with that of Lord Krishna, she exposes her shallow ideas infected in her mind by Christian Mission School wherein Indian gods and goddesses were often spoken of disparagingly. She also talks of the resurrection of Manikkam’s
dead child as opposed to the Hindu view of transmigration of its soul.

Convinced that her soul belongs to the city, Lalitha derisively terms her backward village as a one-horse town, and an outpost of civilization having a primitive life. She tells Aunt Alamelu, “your day, dear Aunt, is as dead as the dodo”. Deciding to leave the village, Lalitha takes to the path of suicide well and subsequently falls into a bog surrounding the well. The incident symbolises the pitfalls and dangers that a rural-born person posing to be a “town mouse” confronts when she leaves her protected home. Caked in mud and badly soiled due to her fall, she is cleaned with water by Appa and Amma—her father and mother—and their cleansing exercise becomes symbolical of their subsequent act of decently covering up the entire abortion affair after Lalitha comes back pregnant and spoilt from the city. The entire urban world is a bog into which a rural virgin like Lalitha is bound to fall the moment she ventures out of her protected limits.

The other symbols which have been used in relation to the various stages in the evolution of Lalitha are the butterfly, the dove, and the eagle. In the first stage, Lalitha’s feelings are symbolised by a dove and a butterfly, the common traits of which are innocence, purity, beauty and dreaminess. Lalitha has her dove-like innocence, is beautiful as a butterfly and a certain amount of flitting modernity characterizes her. For C.G. Jung, “The butterfly is a symbol and allegory of the psyche”¹ and here it is of Lalitha’s psyche. The idea finds support in Tom Chetwynd who thinks that the butterfly represents one of the functions of psyche as well as “a symbol of growth and

¹ C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, P. 250
transformation of psyche." Furthermore, the evolution of a butterfly from a caterpillar symbolises "the transition from physical, earthbound sensation to the flight of the mind experienced inwardly." A dove signifies the quality of being soft, smooth and gentleness of the feminine in nature. The symbols usually refer to the inner reality, particularly so when adjectives are not specifically mentioned. Chetwynd writes: "The image of the bird is a reflection of the thoughts, fantasies and symbols which dwell in the upper regions; it is a representation of those symbolic flights of fancy which carry man into the realms of the unconscious."¹ The qualities of the birds suggest which aspect of the mind's content is being symbolised. The eagle suggests the bright, conscious and positive side. Dove, in particular, has "the attribute of the Love Goddess as well as the Holy spirit. This is the Archetype of Relationships and values which arise from feeling. The union of distinct, individual entities." Lalitha's belief that she is meant for a place far superior to the village, that she has beauty that equips her to become a film actress, and that she has a dreamy, romantic temperament that urges her to find a lover in Mr. Gupta, the film producer, are reflected in these images. When she expresses her desire to be an actress, even when opposed by Aunt Almamelu, Lalitha feels "like a dove on the wing" and that she "could soar away, away, like an eagle to the topmost peak of the sacred mountain". She considers the city and the acting as "heaven" and to look beautiful "worth all the trouble in the world". She flitted gracefully butterfly-like from place to place, creating new dance patterns as if she were with some other bats or

¹. Tom Chetwynd, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 404
birds. She executed a colam pattern in saffron and white and designated “a dove on a rellis in a garden”. The trellis and the garden were common but Lalitha had added the dove to them. Mr. Gupta’s act of blurring the dove by carelessly shuffling his feet symbolizes his act of deflowering Lalitha of her virginity and dove-like purity.

Lalitha’s subsequent drawing of an egle after the dove was blurred away by Mr. Gupta’s shuffling feet symbolises the second stage in her transformation from innocence to experience, and from simplicity to aggressive nature. Commenting on this transformation, Madhusudan Prasad writes that the “dove-like Lalitha loses her purity and grows ambicious like an eagel.” In Anand’s novel *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Gauri initially becomes a symbol of cow but after being troubled by her husband Panchi and her mother-in-law Kesaro, she subsequently becomes a tigress. An eagle can soar high in the sky, look down upon the puny, earth-bound creatures and can swoop down anywhere at will. It has the capability not only of protecting itself but of launching an offensive against others if need be. It is natural that Lalitha, brimming with self-confidence, explains to Saroja that the eagle represents her as well as her ambitions. She reveals too the secrets of sexual pleasure to Saroja, and her romantic life with Mr. Gupta which culminate in her abortion. In her pregnant state, she becomes a strayed heifer but who, after abortion, looked “like burnt-out wood; only just holding her shape”. Since Lalitha is associated with the butterfly, Mr. Gupta can be with the bats. The description given in the novel becomes quite symbolic:

The bats were after the butterflies, which were dying, whose cay...
was over. They fluttered their wings feebly, were seized, were finished. The gauzy wings spiraled down, unattached, aimless without their host. It was tragic to see but the bats were happy, it was their hour. Everything had its hour. Everyone too. It made her wonder when hers was due, it definitely wasn’t the present.¹

Saroja, treading on Lalitha’s footsteps, becomes attracted to Devraj though she is saved from being exploited by him. Thus both Gupta and Devraj are the bats chasing butterflies named Lalitha and Saroja. Margaret Joseph writes: “Butterflies are easily linked with pretty girls, and the bats that destroy the butterflies with city slickers like Gupta.” Lalitha, who was exquisitely fashioned, “demanded beauty and perfection out of life” but who like a spoiled butterfly after abortion lay half-dead in darkness “like felled timber”. She looked coarse and ugly; the lily quality of her was gone.

Saroja symbolises the dewy freshness and innocence of village life, gradually withering in the aftermath of India’s rapid industrialization. She looks yearningly to the city and to the West, has a taste of urban life, but feeling disappointed, she comes back to her rural life, where lay real happiness for her—all else being ephemeral. Because of ehr living in the village, she has a healthy attitude to life, and believes life to be long and colourful “like a shining ribbon, yards and yards of it coming abundantly off a heavenly blue spool”.²

Saroja can be considered “a country mouse”. Having rural habits and

1. Two Virgins, p. 229
2. Ibid, p. 57
tastes, Saroja has ambitions befitting only rural women, such as, having lovely cuddly babies, or like wishing to be rounded and curvy rather than slim. When she takes deep breaths to inhale tender vapours and odours emanating from the earth after the rains, Miss Mendoza calls her the “child of the soil”. Saroja has beauty but not that polish which could find appreciation in the eyes of the city people. She is timid, has conscience and is considerate to others, including animals—something that Lalitha lacks. Buffaloes obeyed her but resisted Lalitha. Being rural oriented, Saroja opposes the introduction of machines in the village. In the beginning, she had no knowledge of the town beyond a faint recollection of what someone had commented that in town it was “a bit of a thieves’ kitchen...you have to have your wits about you”. She noticed some kind of hardness on the faces of city boys she had not seen in the village.

Being unaware of the city noise, the activity and the bustle, Saroja disapproves of the cramped way of the town without open spaces or greenery but with brick and cement buildings. She is also conscious that the village cannot remain permanently insulated from urban influence and that their innocence and virginity could be spoiled by the acid touch of the city through movies and other influences. In the beginning, she failed to understand what a packet of condoms was meant for, but realizes the implication of illicit relations when she notices dozens of unmarried girls with babies in the village. In the city, Lalitha appeared so much to shake the stream of her life that even Saroja herself was momentarily charmed by Devraj and wanted to fling herself into his arms. But she continues to win the confidence of her
mother who prides in Saroja's innocence and her act of blushing in contrast to Lalitha's shamelessness. After staying in the city for sometime, Saroja hated it and wanted to go home in the village. K.S. Ramamurti considers Saroja "a symbo of a healthy reconciliation of two different attitudes to life."

The country and the town are contrasted through Saroja's eyes:

She wanted to go home. At home there were fields to rest your eyes on, colors that changed with the seasons. The tender green of new crops, the tawny shades of harvest, the tints of freshly turned earth, you could have told the week and the month of the year by these alone. You knew each grove, each acre, each homestead on it, who owned them, and the owners of the names. You knew each grove, each acre, each homestead on it, who owned them, and the owners of the names. You knew every pathway. No one could ever be lost, not by trying. The wells, the fields, each had its name the well, inside the water meadow, the well by the banyan, the field next to the mill. You always knew where you were. You knew who you were.

The city took it all away from you. You were one in a hundred, in a thousand, you were no longer you, you might have been an amoeba. You drifted, amoebalike, through the baffling streets, wondering where you were, what business you had. What on earth, people echoed you doubts, eye-brows arched, faces pained, in their moments of enforced awareness of your existence. You knew what you were doing on earth, all right, but
it grew blurred here in the city. You couldn’t answer, in any case your lips were sealed. You stood, buffeted, like a tree in a storm like some stubborn tedious obstruction people implied, their looks, their sighs, their jabbing elbows were eloquent.

Appa and Rangu can be associated with the river which comes up from the mountain and moves impetuously overcoming all hurdles and obstacles towards freedom in order to merge itself with the ocean where other rivers fall. Appa symbolises that spirit of freedom in which impediments are thrown away. When India was under the colonial rule of the British, Appa and Rangu fought and suffered for its freedom. Appa had printed pamphlets for which his house was burnt while Rangu was beaten up and killed. In his general attitude to life, Appa becomes a symbol of the rational individualist and lover of the country but without its closed-door culture. He becomes an advocate for an open-minded society and a spokesman of Markandaya. When Aunt Alamelu defends the joint-family system by talking of ancient scriptures, Appa angrily asks which of them lays down that youngmen should rot upholding the joint-family system or that they should not seek opportunities outside the village. The champion of freedom in him opposes curbs and compulsions. Wishing Indians to be progressive, even Westernized, he welcomes the introduction of machines, wants Saroja to visit the city and desires Manikkam to go in for family planning operation.

In contrast to Appa, Amma is religious-minded, somewhat orthodox and even superstitious in a material world religious feelings are shrinking

1. Two Virgins, pp. 243-244
very fast. Her position and plight is symbolized by the tulasi plant, the shrine and the prayer room as Markandaya writes:

It was very small, just enough for two or perhaps three to sit and pray. There was a wooden platform a few inches high, on which were arranged God's pictures, all of them garlanded. During festivals and holidays the garlands were made of real flowers, roses and chrysanthemums and jasmine but the rest of the time they were paper or pith. They gathered the dust alarmingly, Aunt and Amma were forever taking them off for dusting. In the centre of the platform stood the tulasi, in a brass container. It was a sturdy plant, it had to be to survive in the tiny room which didn't have much light, although Appa did have it in and out of the courtyard.1

Amma's praying was ritualistic--"a reverent mumbling," as a part of the Hindu tradition and not emanating from her soul--becuase she had copied it from Sanskrit. She has all praise for Sita's purity and her unwavering devotion to Rama. In her view, Mr. Gupta was responsible for Lalitha's pregnancy. She admires Miss Mendoza for running her school well, for teaching lovely things to Lalitha, but not for leading an unmarried life. Kind-hearted as she is, she cannot bear the pain of the injured monkey who becomes identified with her children, particularly with Lalitha, after she suffers in the city at the hands of Mr. Gupta.

Appa's family with Aunt Alamelu symbolises the disintegrating joint-

1.  *Two Virgins*, p. 111
family system which is outdated, anachronistic and good-for-nothing. Aunt Alamelu belongs to the older generation which believes in Fate and in traditional wisdom. She does all the work but being a widow has no status in the family or society. For Appa, she is an “old meddlesome bag,” for Saroja, “behind the times;” for Lalitha, “positively antediluvian”; and for herself, she is less than dust. K.S. Ramamurthi considers her “a symbol of tradition.”

Aunt Alamelu disapproves of Miss Mendoza’s “modern” ways which Lalitha terms “cosmopolitan.” She is opposed to the girls riding bicycles or associating themselves with people below their class. She opposes Lalitha’s acting in films on the ground that a girl from a respectable family is not supposed to act like a devadasi and that no one in their family for twenty generations had ever done such a thing. It was shameful, without any propriety, “totally contrary to the code of our Hindu decorum which has safeguarded the virtue of our youth for a thousand years”. In her view, the girls must be kept in complete obedience within four walls of the house if they are not to be spoiled which is what the sense of freedom does. Aunt Alamelu opposes Appa’s talk of the rights of children which had led to Lalitha’s corruption, saying “you have given your children rights and they have come home to roost” as also his proposal to take Saroja to the city, saying, “you’re putting virgins in a whorehouse.”

Miss Mendoza with her English shoes, well-stitched clothes,

2. Two Virgins, P. 177
3. Ibid, p. 180
sophisticated manners and a sense of superiority symbolises the Western culture which has infected the mind of Indian youth. As the Englishmen claimed to have civilized Indians, she believes that the missionary school gave not only artistic opportunities to its students but also developed the character of the girls. However, as Indians knew then the pragmatic nature of the British colonizers behind the altruistic facade they maintained, so do Appa and Aunt Alamelu know about Miss Mendoza who is derisively called “that three-rupee convert” because her ancestors had embraced Chri$tianity on receiving payments at the rate of three rupees per person. Aunt Alamelu satirises her as “that strutting peahen with the fancy notions” for putting ideas into Lalitha’s head while Appa blames her pernicious influence for Lalitha’s fall. Miss Mendoza shows her sense of superiority in humbling Appa by sanctioning funds from her school for Lalitha’s trip to go to the city for viewing films. She stands up symbolically straighter than usual and crushes Appa the same way as the British rule had suppressed nationalists and national culture. Appa feels humiliated on realization that being poor he could not manage the money for his daughter’s trip. Sanctioning funds to his Lalitha could be equated with the loans being sanctioned by the West to India at the cost of its self-respect.

Mr. Gupta too is modern and has immense impact on Lalitha. For Margaret Joseph, he becomes “a symbol of Western materialism corrupting rural values.” For A.V. Krishna Rao, Mr. Gupta “symbolises the fast-changing, superficial and immoral exploiting system of the city.” To Lalitha,

1. A. V. Krishna Rao, *Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya*, p. 21
he appeared as attractive as a “man from another planet.” The incident of Mr. Gupta’s car being taken out of the bog by a team of two bullocks and a dozen men implies that whenever the citymen are caught in a mess, as were Lalitha and Mr. Gupta, it is the village people who may come to their rescue. Symbolically, chetwynd writes, the bog could be associated with the earth which was initially a ball of fiery mud. A modern man is hardly capable of grasping “his precarious position semi-stuck to a big ball of fiery mud, spinning through endless space and time.” Mr. Gupta and Lalitha symbolise modern men and women who madly run after materialistic comforts and sensuous pleasures only to be bogged down in spiritual wasteland. The car is an indisputed symbol of urban life as the bullock cart is that of the village. Appa and Amma save Mr. Gupta by not filing against him a criminal complaint of seducing their daughter Lalitha, and by agreeing for her abortion. For Aunt Alamelu, Lalitha’s pregnancy was the mud thrown at the girl a part of which was bound to stick to the family. This idea gets further reinforced by the grapevine at Mr. Gupta’s place which has grapes coated with city dust as if to show what defiles nature’s purity.

The modernist outlook of Miss Mendoza, her act of living alone and leading an unmarried life invite criticism from Amma. She would not like her daughters to remain unmarried. Saroja too does not like to lead an unmarried life like Miss Mendoza’s; instead, like Amma, she wishes to have lots of lovely cuddly babies. In this respect, Miss Mendoza fails in moulding Saroja but succeeds in the case of Lalitha who calls Saroja’s desire for children as a peasant’s ambition and prefers to go along Miss Mendoza’s way.
Miss Mendoza poses to be a good mother for gifted girls like Lalitha—“one of our most promising pupils”, teaches her English dances and brings her to the attention of Gupta so that the girl’s full potentiality could be realized. Even though Western and Christian, Miss Mendoza apparently seems to care for social decencies and does not enter a tent with so many men to watch Gupta who was preparing to shoot a film. Saroja and Lalitha too accompany her. Since Miss Mendoza fails to mould Saroja to her view, she calls her “a child of the soil,” implying her rawness but calls Lalitha “a child of grace”. After being introduced to Lalitha, Gupta begins to visit Appa’s house frequently for Lalitha and that ends in her doom.

Under Miss Mendoza’s influence, Lalitha dances happily, feeling “like a dove on the wing,” soaring “away, away like an eagle to the topmost peak of the sacred mountain”. She flits about the place gracefully and fels some kind of a bird in creating new dance patterns. It is worth remembering that under Amma’s influence, Saroja remains a girl of the soil, deeply attached to the place of her birth and upbringing, but under Miss Mendoza’s influence Lalitha becomes entirely a different creature—a creature of dreams and imagination.