Kamala Markandaya, one of the major Indian English novelists, is interested in the sociological problems around her. Prof. Harris highlights this aspect of her novels when he remarks:

"Each of her novels deals with the different predicaments of identity; of the rural and urban poor, the younger generation lost in the political confusion, dilemmas of East-West clash of codes that is part of modern India."

The barriers of caste, poverty, exploitation of the downtrodden, the destruction of agriculture by the progress of industrialisation, political upheavals in India, and other similar socio-political and economic themes are explored by her in her novels.

Born in southern India and educated casually and at intervals in various schools and later at Madras University, she spent much of her time in travelling about India and Europe. She left her studies to join a weekly paper. On its demise, she did some clerical work which was followed by the liaison and staff work for the Army. After the war, she
began an experiment in rural living. She turned to journalism again and came to England in 1947. From then onwards, she pursued a career of writing, making her mark mainly in the sphere of novel-writing. She has published nine novels dealing with a wide and multi-coloured vista of Indian life.

Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of a peasant couple, Nathan and Hukmani, whose peaceful rustic life is shattered by the advent of industrialization. In the South Indian village, where they lived, life changes according to the bounties of seasons; a good harvest means plenty of food and peace in the family. When nature is unkind, life becomes troublesome but still Hukmani and Nathan like other peasants, have patience to wait for better days. Then industrialization invades this village through the establishment of a tannery; it brings miseries and bad luck to its people in its wake. The crops fail, hunger increases, landlords demand their dues and people turn against one another. Hukmani's children fall victims to greed and hunger. The even pace in the family is shattered through misunderstanding and mishandling of situations. Deaths and accidents take the toll of lives and Nathan is uprooted from the village to migrate to the city, where, at last, the one comes to him, Hukmani, returns to
die in peace, at her village home, with her son beside her.

The title of the novel is derived from Coleridge's famous lines in his poem "Work without hope", which are used as an epigraph of the novel:

"Work without hope draws
Nectar in a sieve, and hope
without an object cannot
live".

'Sieve' is intimately related with the idea of the agricultural background of Rukmani's family. Rukmani, Nathan and their children do not want much from life and are contented with their simple living. But even this little is denied to them and life becomes a series of hopeless, aimless flounderings and accidents. But the peasant instinct in Rukmani is unerring in its search and ultimately finds peace in the soil that gives her happiness though a transitory one.

The novel is a first person narrative, beginning with a nostalgic touch like the story of Richard Llewellyn in How Green Was My Valley or Madame du Maurier in Rebecca. Rukmani, the old woman, goes back the memory lane to describe the incidents of her life, using the interior monologue as a device. The plot begins with the ending, and the tragedy of Nathan's death is revealed at the very
beginning. As is usual in the case of such novels, the incidents and characters are all grouped around Nukmani and it is through her eyes that the actions and reactions of other characters are noted. It is Nukmani whose existential problems form the basis of the plot and it is through her that others find their identity.

The existential predicament of Nukmani is, however, blended with the sociological problems in the novel. It is the predicament of the faceless Indian peasants, underfed, uneducated, exploited and stoical. The problems of existing in peace and freedom is individual as well as a collective one. Nukmani, Nathan, Kanti, Ira and all others struggle to find out their own identities both as individuals and as members of the society. In Nectar in a Sieve Nukmani and others are not conscious of their existential predicament but they are its victims because of their social and economic depression. They are exploited by the rich and ruthless landlords, the greedy industrialists and the apathetic city people. Even natural resources fail to relieve them of their misery. Nathan is defeated by the rains, fleeced by the money-lender and evicted by the landlord. His domestic life also weather fierce storms, his daughter Ira is abandoned by her husband and takes to prostitution to feed her children, his son Naja succumbs to a violent death,
the birth of the albino child to Ira turns them social outcastes, and when his land is sold he drifts apart from his son and daughter, and dies as a heart-broken beggar.

Throughout all these onslaughts on his life, Nathan pushes ahead to continue his search for identity. This existential predicament of Nathan and his family is beautifully expressed by Mukmani:

> hope and fear, twin forces that tugged at us first in one direction and then in another, and which was the stronger no one could say; of the latter we never spoke, but it was always with us. Fear, constant companion of the peasant, hunger, ever at hand to jog his elbow, should be relax; despair, ready to engulf him should he falter. Fear; fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the darkness of death.

It is more with Mukmani and Ira that the double edged knife of the problem of existence creates deep wounds. Both are simultaneously wives and mothers and bread-winders in their respective families. Mukmani builds up a comfortable house, a happy family through blood, sweat and love and she stays a stoical witness to the destruction of her loved ones in one way or another. Her fierce support and possessive love for Nathan gets a jolt when Kunti informs her of his infidelity. Her daughter rejected
by her husband, turns a prostitute by the force of circumstances. Murugan leaves home for better prospects in town, never to return. Aaja dies a violent death. Her land and home are taken away by the landlord, she moves to the city in search of Murugan where Nathan dies a beggar's death. Now, yet, she discovers her source of strength and hope in Buli, the reformed child, to begin life afresh.

Irawacooy, nourished with love and care, blooming like a fresh and soft scented flower, faces the first blow through her husband. He declares her to be barren and leaves her for another wife. Through the bitterest of the ironical situations, she becomes a mother when motherhood for her is a stigma, rather than a symbol of her feminine attribute. Fate does not stop here, but gives her an albino child, a concrete evidence of her shame. She is, however, not deterred from her heroic mission to provide a living to her family even though she has to pollute her body for it.

Men is a victim of both nature's vagaries and social injustices. Kenny, Kunthi and Murugan's lives are belaboured with the latter kind of existential problem while Nathan, Mukmani and Ira have to bear the brunt of both kinds. Kenny, the English doctor who lives in the village as if in an island, shut off from the main stream by his own wish,
faces the existential problems of alienation. He tells Rukmani:

"I have the usual encumbrances that men have - wife, children, home - that would have put chains about me, but I resisted, and so I am alone" (P.71).

A heartrending confession of a love-starved, cynical soul, whose very pride, is the key to his despair and pessimism. Rukmani is the only person, who can touch him to the nearest point, but even she is often puzzled by 'A strange nature, only partly within my understanding' (P.71).

Kunthi perhaps is the most ravaged figure of them all. A voluptuous beauty with burning passion in her body and mind, she is forced to marry beneath her owing to social customs and personal circumstances. Mind with desire, she entices Nathan, and possesses him till his marriage to Rukmani. Fate deals her another blow when hunger rearranges her mind and she stoops to prostitution and blackmail to get money and food. The terrible hold she has over Nathan and Rukmani, is broken at last when the husband and wife are forced to reveal their folly to each other. Thus, she is left to rot in her private hell-fire, till death gives her a merciful release.

Ammu, Murugan's wife is the commonest of the victims
of social injustice. A town girl, married to a villager who leaves his own parents for the glamour of the city life, she is separated from her husband within a short period of her married life. With neither parents, nor in-laws to fall back upon, she takes the easiest profession in the city, that of a keep, under the guise of being a maid servant. She reaches the stage of an animal at bay, when she finds none to be a friend. As a reaction she turns into a rebel and spurns every gesture of goodwill.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is, however, in the main the story of Rukmani, the eternal Hindu wife and mother, selfless and suffering, courageous and sacrificing, whose stoicism and passive mood of compromise, enable her to face life with optimism. It is a tale, told with loving care, woven with realism and imagination. Marvaneya's theme in this novel may not have startlingly new dimensions, for the conflict and clash between the agrarian rural people and the urbanised industrialists, has been explored time and again by other novelists. But perhaps, the relation between the man and earth has never been defined as forcefully, as in this novel. Nor perhaps ever, the whip-lash of agony rose in furious complaint against the demon of industrialization thus:

"Some-how I had always felt the"
Unquestionably, Arkanedya's treatment of characters is nothing less than superb. Mukmani, the central character, is drawn with vibrant colours. Plain in appearance, she possesses extraordinary intelligence, practical wisdom, and honesty or feelings. Literate as she is, her mind is free from many of the common superstitions that shadow the minds of the village women. She takes the case of her husband, which is completely forbidden in the rural society. She also does not believe in the 'lingam' given by her mother but takes the boldest step for a married village woman and goes to Kamy for treatment and later on, takes Ira also, to cure her barrenness.

Mukmani is a realistic character in the sense that she shows her weaknesses as well as the stable characteristics.
A child of only twelve years, she does not want to remember her wedding night even though Nathan is a gentle husband:

"A woman they say always remembers her wedding night. Well may be they do; but for me there are other nights. I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as in body, not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night." (p. 2).

The violence in her character erupts whenever she faces danger to her family. Like a jungle cat, she pounces upon Kunthi, and later on Aru, mistaking her for the former, when Kunthi tries to blackmail her. She is not like Nathan, who treats Aru with gentle concern and blames Murugan equally, for the pain and hunger he feels. She is partial to her son and is ready to utter bitter reproaches, even though in her heart of hearts, she realizes the truth.

Nathan, on the other hand is a unique character, whose principle is, to bend like the grass so that the storm may pass over. All his life, he shows by his actions, his great love for Hukmani. With his own hands he has built a house for her because he understands that Hukmani has 'married beneath her' and is used to better living-conditions. He is a man of few words and native intelligence and respects his wife for her literacy and cleverness. The
The deepavali scene expresses his love with a beauty and depth, that touches the innermost core of the heart. Even when he confesses his relation with kunthi, it is not with bragging or impertinence as is usual in such cases but with humility and concern for hukmani, his wife.

The only time he is angry with his wife, is, when hukmani badly beats up ira, mistaking her for kunthi. Even then, he understands the mac passion that overtakes hukmani. With ira, he is more harsh for he is a father and is in agony over his failure to feed his children. But he never loses his balance even when he realizes that ira has turned into a prostitute and nobody or nothing can stop her. His only protest is that he himself does not touch a morsel of food, bought by that money which he believes is earned through sin.

Docile and religious, he does not have the rebellious attitude of his sons to protest against the injustice meted out to him. A mind like his is always open to new ideas and flexible enough to adjust to any circumstances. He is more patient and understanding than hukmani when he tells her:

"Enough, more than enough has been said. Our children must act as they choose to, not for our benefit. Is it not enough that they suffer?"(1.66). When hukmani tells ira that sacrebani should be told that his father is dead to
to end all questions once for all, Nathan tells her: "Do not interfere... it is for her to decide — such comfort as there is, must come from her own spirit" (p.133).

Kamala Markandaya paints Kenny or Kennington with colours of mysticism and realism blended together. In nearly all her novels, this mystic figure is a recurrent character, be it in the garb of a missionary or a Swami. They are not extraordinary in any respect except that they have chosen the thorny path of solitude and sadness to impart solace to other characters. They pull back the heroes and heroines in the world of reality, if need arises with their practical wisdom and healing touches.

Kenny, is not attractive in appearance, tall and gaunt, with a sunburnt skin and sunken eyes, the colour of a kingfisher's wings, neither blue nor green. He is a doctor and works among the villagers treating them for diseases or distress. Hukmani is specially indebted to him but even she cares not probe into deeply into his life and affairs. She realizes: "he would only have helped us in our need with food and money and skill, yet it was something more than this he offered us, and I could not find words for it"(P.107).

And yet Kenny is a tragic figure, perhaps more in pain than Hukmani and other peasants like her. For they have at
least someone to complain to, a Kenny to turn to in their despair, but who can lend a friendly heart to Kenny? He has chosen his vocation and has to sacrifice much for it:

"Save your wishes," he said unpleasantly, "my wife has left me. My sons have been taught to forget me... my country... sometimes I do not know which is my country. Until today I had thought perhaps it was this" (P.109).

He is never ready with soothing words, because he himself is deeply involved with these chosen people of his. He lives in despair and misery because he is helpless to do what is needed; his efforts are only a drop into the ocean. He is impatient, brusque and even cruel sometimes when pessimism overcomes him. Hukmani remarks about him: "He looked tired and grim, his eyes were burning, there was an air of such impersonal cruelty about him that despite myself, I shivered" (P.56). Even to Hukmani, he does not since his words and gives vent to his feelings bitterly:

"Acquiescent imbeciles", he said scornfully, "do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want or from suffering"?

And yet struggling with a losing battle, in perpetual pain over his helplessness to achieve his aim, in bitterness and wrath, Kenny is a heroic figure who builds his hospital
literally begging for money because he believes that the rich will give only if they are pestered long enough and often enough:

"I have told you before... and repeat it again; you must cry out if you want help" (p. 113).

The minor characters are vividly and swiftly portrayed with a few strokes: some good and some bad, contrasting one another. Wanny and Mali are pitted against Sunthi and Fami. While the clerk from the tannery, Shivaaji and Puli show conscience and generosity, Biswas the money lender, the officer from the tannery and the landlord represent the exploiters of the uneducated and poverty-stricken peasant class. Thambi and Surugan are selfish enough to leave their parents. Raja dies a tragic death in order to get a little money for his hungry family. Sevlen is the representative of the modern youth, intelligent, educated, free-minded and is determined to choose a different path of livelihood. He supports Ira and Jacabani, while his parents go off to Surugan and it is to him again, that Suksoni returns after Nathan's death. Sevlen is the symbol of continuity like mother earth.

Markandeya's novels are peopled with representatives from nearly all the classes: the landlords or the
capitalists, the middle class and the lower middle class, the
peasants and the labourers, the underworld inhabited by
crooks, prostitutes and hired killers. She also brings in
the foreigners, mainly the English as missionaries, rulers
and officers in her novels.

Nector in a sieve presents two definitely different
scenes of action, the village and the town, which give her a
controlled ease in painting the characters. Even though
the novelist reveals her own viewpoint through characters
like Akramani, Nathan, Ira and Savlon, she never manipulates
them, or converts them to suit the authorian stance. They
move and act according to their nature, age and place,
swept in realism and not charged by the conscience of the
novelist. Thus Nector in a sieve presents the almost rare
kind of novel in which the plot and the characters complement
each other, blending into a complete whole.

Obviously Nector in a sieve presents the novelist with
her best material, the Indian people with an Indian background.
Markandaya does appreciate the fact that though she writes of
the Indians, she is read by far in the outside world where
the number of English-educated people, who enjoy an English
novel, is much larger. Thus the customs, rituals and
superstitions in Nector in a sieve are introduced and
explained meticulously and clearly so that people unaware of these may not face any difficulty. In the copy published by Jaico Publishing in 1956, Markandaya also gives a list of Indian words with their meanings in English, even including such words as peons and zamindars. With the mini-dictionary in hand, the English-educated has a guided tour through those parts of India where he would never trespass on his own, and he comes back a thousand times wiser and more generous than before.

Her next novel, *Some Inner Fury* is a story, having a political background to its theme and characters. It is the story of a young Indian girl in love with an Englishman in the tempestuous days of the independence struggle. It is, like *Nectar in a Sieve*, a tragedy as far as the sequence is concerned. But Markandaya does not believe that death ends life and in that sense, the novel ends on a hopeful and optimistic note.

The title is significant to its theme. It presents the dark ominous clouds appearing on the political horizon of India, in the crucial days of the struggle for independence, bringing in its wake passion, fury, and ruthlessness; some inner fury has the possession of every heart. Like Jane Austen, Markandaya’s titles have a mirage of simplicity, hiding a complex idea behind it.
A first person narrative novel, **Some Inner Fury** has an autobiographical touch in its young heroine Meera. It begins with looking back and memorising on the events that separated her from Richard, almost using identical sentences to bring back the imagery of that storm ridden, dust driven fateful day. It is a love story from the first to the tragic last, having the political situation as the background.

Kamala Markandaya has portrayed the wealthy, South Indian, English educated class with a blending of western culture and eastern traditionality. Kitaewa who has brought back his English friend has no option but to prevail upon his parents to let Richard stay in the family quarters, thus unknowingly helps his young, beautiful, collegian sister Meera to come closer to the Englishman. Both Richard and Meera are apprehensive of the staunchly conservative attitude of Meera's family. The apprehensions are justified and Meera and Richard are thrown apart for the time being.

The war comes, bringing with it all the political and economical changes that are usual. The storm clouds gather on the political scene of India and normal life is completely disrupted. Meera suffers tragedy after tragedy and the final rift comes when a jubilant country declares that the British are no more masters. Meera can not leave her people, Richard can not live with them.
The conflict between the East and the West, affects the lives of Meera and Richard, Kitawamy and Kanjana, and others. Meera's parents belong to the select group of Westernized Indians who worked conscientiously for the British government, and the government graciously allocated for them a place in the hierarchy.

They live well. They had big mansions with gardens and lawns, chauffeur, butler, gardener, washerman, watchman, houseboy and other odd-job men. In summer they went to the cool of the hills. Their daily routine was the same wherever they were posted. The men were at their office from nine to five, engaged in games of bridge or billiards in the clubs, had drinks or went to dine with one another.

Kitawamy and Meera carry this legacy of Western oriented culture with them, to the next generation as well. Kitawamy drops the last part of his name at Oxford and becomes 'Kit' to his friends, falls in love with Sylvia, considers his life in India as 'living in the wilus' (p.15), is generally dissatisfied with the innumerable relatives associated with a Hindu joint family, feels civilized in using the European dining room (p.27), is scandalized at the custom of reading every letter publicly as happens in a normal Indian family (p.37), can not bear to see Dodama
the widow, wrapped only in a sari, (P.23) and impatiently
mocks at every Indian ceremony, from his welcome at the
station to his marriage, because it is noisy, meaningless
and time-consuming. For, Kit is a part and parcel of the
Western culture, its codes and customs.

Premala, his wife is not able to sever her roots
completely from Sovinda, Kit's Western counterpart even though
she lives in a Western style house, moves in a Western style
society even eats the European food and has forgotten the
traditional welcome of coors and betel leaves for Kit has no
Indian friends. Premala is unable to overcome this barrier to
achieve marital happiness even though her love for Kit knows
no bounds.

Sovinda, bound by the same chain, has a fanatic hatred
for anything English. His unfulfilled love for Premala can
hardly bear the agony of seeing her destroyed bit by bit.
He assures her "it is not a vital matter, this of moving
among the English"(P.43).

Opposite in every respect to each other in character
and appearance, the two men stand as arch rivals for the same
woman, portraying the encounter between the Western and
Eastern set of values in vivid colours. This encounter costs
them their lives; Premala and Kit dying violent deaths in
the hands of Govinda's compatriots. But perhaps these two are more fortunate than Govinda, who perishes in a self-made hell.

'The went with it, he could not help himself; but there was nothing but ashes in his face... he has chosen to stay, to stand trial in a court of law believing in its justice, knowing that whatever truth he carried in his heart he must still prove it before men and women.'

For Meer and Richard, the problem of existence, though essentially based on difference in culture, are not so complex and soul-destroying as with Kit, Premala and Govinda. Meer's sympathies and leanings are more with the Western outlook than with the Eastern one. She also strains at the restrictions placed on her by her mother and takes the first chance offered by Roshan, to get freedom of individuality: "And though I left my home... I discovered at last the gateway to the freedom of the mind, and gazed entranced upon that vista of endless extensions of which the spirit is capable" (p.61).

She loves Richard and does not find any difficulty like those faced by Premala, for she herself has adopted the Western values unconsciously. But her dilemmas of a different kind, and it is equally capable of bringing tragic despair.
to her:

"Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean more than the man I loved?"

Richard's agony is no less than Meera's or Roshan's. He comes to India, not as a mere tourist to gape at the attractive spots, but he wants to touch the innermost core and falls in love with India and Meerabai. He flings down the ugly statuette of the goddess and tells Meera: "Would you have it crowded then?... more guides, more people filling in and a rupee for a candle?" (P.31). His love for India is as pure and authentic as Kit's for England, and Meera thinks, "I have seen it happen twice before, who has not been three years in the country. For me it would be the first time, and I had come reluctantly" (P.117).

He faces the hatred of the Indians calmly in the bazaar and understands that the mob frenzy cannot single out anybody, but even then he tells Meera: "It is a terrible thing to feel unwanted. To be hated" (P.185). He knows that his love can never be fulfilled. When Meera suddenly asks him: "Do you believe this Englishman's word against mine?" (P.225), Richard's face becomes bloodless and he realizes that the final destruction has been wrought to the bondage of love.
and trust between them.

The theme of love has been tenderly dealt with and binds all the central characters together. Its force changes the course of their actions. In nearly all the cases love bears a tragic consequence but becomes a many splendoured thing for the people concerned. Kit dismissing his Sylvia with an apparent lightness that cleaves his heart into two even as he tears her photograph into pieces, Covind hurting his Fremala because he loves her so much, Meera leaving her home and waiting for Richard and prepared to wait till eternity, Fremala, hurt and bewildered by the love and passion she evokes and feels for the two men in her life, Hoshan, a friend to all, but losing love to personal freedom and lastly Richard, who loves, loses and leaves his beloved for the forces that set them apart are too strong.

Some inner fury has a definite pattern of characterisation that almost borders on being typical. Westernised Indian characters like Kitsawmy, Hoshan and Meera are presented as a foil to the characters like Covind and the nameless, faceless Indian people involved in terrorist activities. English characters like Richard, Mickey the Scottish Jail Superintendent, Mrs. Miller, Mrs. Burst and other British members of the club form one edge of the
theme. Premala, Pedamma, the countless relatives and friends from the other. And doubtless, the English characters and the westernised Indians receive more care and sympathy than their Indian counterparts.

Right from the beginning, Meera's sympathies lie unmistakably with Richard, an Englishman, and she compares him to her own relatives and acquaintances at every step. And not only Richard, for he is her beloved, and she is apt to eulogise without restraint about him, but also she feels convinced when she goes to the party, on the day there is to be a demonstration at the club that the English were far superior; at least in some fundamental aspects, when she looks at the calm and untroubled faces:

"But this I do know: I looked upon the faces of men bred in another country, another tradition and they were fearless" (P.196).

Even in Hickey's case, this difference is shown with certainty. The Indians are violently demonstrative, bitterly accusative and turn the town into the nightmare of a place after dark. But the British never demonstrated their feelings without restraint.

They started a fund for Hickey into which money came pouring. They ranged around him in the courtroom when the
mob supporting Jovino became violent and stormed into kill
him. Even Nicky was changed:

"The missionary had retreated to the judge's dias. Whatever
madness assailed him, it was gone now. He stood quietly, his face
pale but no paler than it usually was, and around him the English
had formed themselves tightly, protectively, and those faces
were fearless still, but grim, with the dawning of cruelty which
comes to Englishmen who see the
codes and decent conduct broken
the rules of fair play flung
aside..."(P.241).

Contrasting with this, the portraits of ancients
collectively and singly are painted with a thin vein of
sarcasm sometimes when pointing out the inordinate delay of
the telegram or the unhelpful crowd always ready to surge
around a stalled car, or even the overcrowded platforms,
trains, buses and bus stations, stinking and filthy. Moore
denounces the meaningless frenzy of violence that goes by
the name of freedom movement and strikes like a serpent at
unwary Richard, as he stands in the bazaar. This same venom
that killed Kit and Premala turned her completely against
Jovino and his followers:

"They are nothing to you,
cried my heart. Nothing,
nothing, if you go now
there will be no meaning
in anything anymore"(P.243).
Markandeya believes that events can not be reshaped, consequences can not be denied, for "of course, there was no such choice" (P.144). Man, however much brags about his achievements, is still a puppet for "no man knows himself" (P.117).

But Markandeya is neither pessimistic, nor fatalistic to be without desires, hopes and temptations. She believes in the innate goodness of man that raises him above the mundane and the selfish:

"For myself, if I had to choose anew, in full knowledge of what was to come, I still would not wish my course deflected, for through here was pain, sorrow and hatred, yet there was also love; and the experience of it was too sweet, for me ever to want to choose differently" (P.72).

Symbolism is used sparingly and with definite effect. The Goddess sent by Richard to Meera has a deep symbolic significance to love for Richard professes his regard for Meera and India in the language of plaster. In the same way the model of the village in the language of pasteboard moves Meera for she realizes "the boldness and forthrightness of the people behind it" (P.113).

The fateful dinner night, that brings out in the open, the deep gorge between Kit and Premala, shows her curious
action, symbolising her life: "Clumsily, probably without thinking, she began to spoon it back, gave up the attempt, and at last we left the room" (p.124). Her whole married life has been an effort to spoon back her mistakes and try to leave a clean table but with no success.

The storm wind that rises and sweeps in the ballroom on the night of the Anti-British demonstration symbolises the political storm that encircled the British in India. The wind has uprooted the tamarind tree which lies as an obstacle on the path taken by Kit, Meer, and Saring to go to Kromala.

At the end, in the courtroom, when she tries to tear herself away from Richard, again she finds: "Outside, a wind was stirring; the reddish dust of earth loosened by many feet came swirling in and at last I turned to go" (P.243). For the wind has changed, it has turned against her, this self-same wind that turns against the British also.

A Silence of Desires takes its title from a motto of Longfellow:

"Three silences there are: the first of speech, the second of desire, the third of thought".

Bandekar and Sarojini, the main characters in this novel, are ensnared in the second one, each smarting under
the strain of keeping a secret from the other. Bandekar is a government clerk who centres his peaceful life around his scored wife, Sarojini, and their three children. They have never known luxury but lead a happy comfortable life. One evening, Sarojini is not at home and Bandekar counts her fidelity but conceals his feelings to double check on her. No finds the man Sarojini goes to visit and finds out the reason too, but in between he passes through sheer hell. Sarojini's world is at the brink of being wiped out, she suffers physical and mental agony, till, at the end, a compromise comes through, and the fundamental values are restored and a new wisdom marks the beginning of a new life.

The plot of this domestic comedy involves middle class people who:

"Lovemony and security and fear emotional scenes... but middle class sensitivity is raw edged, easily hurt... Lower middle class life offers no cathartic escapes. Sensitivity gives rise to hurts, hurts pipe up unarticulated and inarticulation always builds a wall be it inarticulation of love and loyalty or of suspicion."

It has many more currents running side by side, becoming the focus of ancient conflicts, science against superstition, religion against materialism, Eastern tradition
against Western progress and love against hate.

Markandeya has adopted the role of omniscient narrator in this novel and shifts her venue from South India to Bombay. The eight storey tenement, the bazaar with its cheap shops and milkbars, the roads with their gas lights constitute a typical middle class residential place. Bandekar and his family are fortunate enough to have: "the luxury of the ground floor, the court yard, and the first call on the tap mounted on a pedestal in one corner". The rooms are furnished according to the taste and means of a government clerk getting a hundred and twenty rupees as his salary, the food simple but well cooked and Sarojini is the proud owner of two silk saris to wear on formal occasions. Bandekar's daily rituals are regular, his conversation is stereotyped, his physical needs are attended to, he is the Lord and master of his domain, and he is happy as he is. In short, Bandekar and Sarojini live a typical, contented, middle class life, consisting of petty ambitions and trivial achievements.

The Eastern and Western thoughts, clashing with each other, form an important part of the plot. It is easy to adhere to the common fallacy of critical thinking that Bandekar personifies the Western approach and Sarojini the Eastern, because Bandekar advocates hospitalization whereas Sarojini goes for faith-healing, but actually it is Bandekar
whose fundamental values are steeped in Eastern thoughts. He believes in the basic principle of Hindu philosophy that God has no fixed physical aspect and so all idols, holy plants or pictures symbolise, His presence and are revered by the worshippers.

Sarojini has a psychological reason for adhering to faith healing. Her grandmother and mother had been hospitalised, so her family must have been emancipated enough to believe in the efficacy of medicine. It is the fear psychosis which tormented her from the age of twelve (when she was told about the fatal disease of her mother) and it forces her to find another way to avoid certain death. If she believed in the faith-healing as a part of Eastern Philosophy, she would not have left it because the Swami was not physically present but would have followed him to the end of the world. She only needs a person to reassure her that she should not be afraid of knives and doctor, and any psychologist should be able to provide her with that much of balance and stability, whether he is from the East or West. In fact psychological treatment knows no barrier of East and West and is applied in both the hemispheres.

The encounter between the East and the West is never personified in this novel. If to Sarojini's unbalanced
Bandecker personifies the Western belief, he is more Eastern than Western in his opinions, among his colleagues like Joseph, Jastri and Chari. Bandecker believes:

"In any case Hindu wives are not like that, they married for life, did not look at another man (p.39)."

When Jaja accuses him of being trained by the British and faithful to the Western outlook, Bandecker replies with asperity, "The British have been gone ten years, which of their brands does my forehead still bear that beliefs do I lack?" (p.113).

Chari understands the Eastern approach as a practical one, pertaining to the surroundings and climate of India. The physical side is ignored in India, because the country is not able to provide material comforts to the large number of middle class and lower middle class people. Hence, philosophy has been moulded by scarcity of advantages. That the body is less important than the soul, is a thought which brings solace to those who can not afford to give it its due. There are thousands of Sarojini's who automatically turn towards Swami, religion, and faith healing because they have never known and will never know the miracle of a clean, competent hospital, stocked with all the necessary medicines and staff. But even Bandecker refuses to see this practical
side and believes that Sarojini's spirit will not help her body even if she is dragged to the hospital.

Then Chose points out to Chari the spectacular attractions of the Swami's household, including the fact that joss sticks and camphor are used to drive out the odour of the diseased bodies gathered together, he again takes on the practical western approach and Chari, the eastern one. The Swami's glory becomes only a matter of hypocrisy when Chose tells Chari:

"Chose claims to spiritual healing make women flock to him, paying for illusory cures in cash and kind, and in any other way he asks them to" (P.148).

Thus the East-West encounter is between the blindly, dogmatically superstitious and the gradual flowering of real understanding and appreciation of values for their own sakes. When the Swami tells Dancerkar: "Compulsion is the beginning of corruption" (P.110), he reveals the basic principle of all philosophies, Eastern and Western. Thus Sarojini is compelled by her fears to adopt the path of lies, and deceives her husband, and Dancerkar is compelled by his doubts to torture her in his own ways, and their happy household is filled with corruption that rots them physically and mentally. At the end, when both adopt their respective paths they have decided to follow, without any compulsion, they both restore back their
confidence and peace settles in the little house once more.

_A silence of desire_ reads more like a suspense novel with its abrupt twists and action-oriented sequences. It begins with a subdued note, even on an humorous one but suddenly a storm wind of doubt and confusion, brings the basic note of tragic intensity into full play. The disintegration of the family is steady and the tempo is maintained to the last when the surprise ending gives it the necessary fillip. It is a present-period story, inviting no nostalgic comments or reveries about the past, except the reference to Sarojini's mother and grandmother.

This may be the reason that despite of a well-defined story line, the events sometimes are openly manipulated and seem to be artificial. 'Chance' is roped in for more than necessary use and it shows more of the novelist's hand, than its omnipotence in realism. There are sequences, for example like Vandeater's meeting Majam only four days after his conversation with Sarojini, when he has never met her previously, even though both are regular visitors to the market. Again, he buys bangles of different colours for his daughter, who is wearing a skirt of red and green, which are the colours of Sarojini's temple sari and again he begins to doubt her.
In his office, the next day, a conversation about the British has been dragged in that gives Bandekar a thin reason for opening the trunk and provides him with the right opportunity when Chandru begins crying conveniently in the next room. It is another occasion for Sarojini to save the situation by blatant lying. The office staff specialised (at this particular period) in having pointed conversation on wives and their infidelity to poison Bandekar's mind though they are educated and good people working together for a long time in the same office. Even Chosee's entrance at the time when Bandekar finally decides to speak to Chari is a chance one to turn the Swami out because the plot has nothing more to offer.

It is more like a chess board with Bandekar and Sarojini playing moves and countermoves. They are characters out of a detective novel. Realism is flung out of the window when Sarojini manages to walk ten miles in two hours, each day, even though she is afflicted with a painful disease (pp. 56 & 129). Bandekar buys an umbrella and sits on a culvert for the whole day in a busy street, which is next to impossible in a country like India where any strange behaviour is at once noted and the culprit taken to task by the onlookers.

The most unrealistic feature of a typical middle class Indian family in this novel is that the baby, Chandru, sleeps
in a separate room. The European families have this custom and even perhaps the most affluent classes in India, but a traditional mother like Sarojini will never keep her baby apart at night. The dying of both Sarojini's grandmother and her mother of the same disease is too good a coincidence to be realistic. Cancer or fibrous growth is not hereditary and it has been used merely to emphasise Sarojini's need for the hospital and to give her an excuse for going to the Swami.

Markandeya's character delineation is convincing and Bandekar, Sarojini and the Swami, the three corners of the triangle are developed with commendable skill. Bandekar is like the ordinary Indian husband who likes to show off his dominion over his wife and children but underneath he is a soft, tender-hearted person trying to fulfill the duties of a husband and father with sincerity. If he is inconsiderate in some aspects he is more than enough in others, as Bandekar proves in his care for Harabai and Sarojini.

If he has been a brute without feelings for his wife as Sarojini paints him accusing him of subjecting her to sexual assaults then his own agony would not be so acute in trying to nail her lies and find excuses for every deceiving action. Desperate and hurt immeasurably by Sarojini's
refusals he wants to ascertain again and again her fidelity
by the only method he knows that of joining their bodies in
order to find a way to touch her spirit. Vandeekar has never
forced himself on Sarojini but like ordinary husbands again,
has taken it for granted that Sarojini enjoyed giving
passively as all good wives do. It is this feeling that
makes him unsuccessful with the whore, she is too enthusiastic.
Vandeekar goes through hell-fires of physical and mental
torture when he falls a prey to his doubts. His two peaceful
worlds of the office and home collapse like card houses. His
addiction to visiting Obscene place for getting momentary
respite from his excruciating mental agony, his spying on
his wife and his near failure to keep his job at the office,
prepare him for stepping over the brink. But suffering
purifies the spirit and through his intense suffering,
Vandeekar's spirit emerges pure and refined ready to accept
the truth.

When the dwarf accuses him of being instrumental in the
swami's removal from the city, Vandeekar is thunderstruck by
the enormity of his blunder. He is penitent and penance is
the first sign of an honest mind. His final decisive action
in kicking aside the silver vessels and going out to meet
his daughter, symbolises his successful bid to escape from
the stifling chains of possession and compulsion and to face
life with a completely emancipated outlook.

In comparison to his, Sarojini's character is not able to move beyond a certain limitation and stagnates in the pool of her own confused thoughts and actions. A woman can hardly fail to recognize certain definite traits of her husband's character after fifteen years of marriage. It is amazing therefore on Sarojini's part to accuse Bancekar of forcing her to do something, by reasoning or otherwise, for "brutal insistencies like these as much as physical ones, were beyond his nature" (p.38).

The inconsistency of her secretive nature is glaring as and when she demands complete trust from her husband. She visits a doctor on her own without telling her husband because she herself wants to be sure of her affliction. But she is enraged and bitter when Bancekar suggests it to her. The paradox is, if Bancekar himself had taken her to a holyman instead of a competent doctor, the whole society, including his wife would have blamed him not only as an uneducated, superstitious fool, but also as a miser.

If Sarojini cannot trust her husband in such minor things, after such a long period of marriage, how does she expect that Bancekar would trust her even though her behaviour is enigmatic and her reasons are deliberate lies? It is
here that Markandeya makes Sarojini commonplace because she is not able to keep the one thing that marriage is based on and that is mutual trust even though she accuses Vandekar for this very reason. Perhaps she accepts the policy that offence is the best defence.

Sarojini does not visit the Swami for unselfish ends but there is a very vulgar reason behind her visits, she wants to be cured of her tumour. For this she accepts every kind of subterfuge lying, cheating, even stoops down to steal from her own house compelled by her hypnotic faith in Swami's power of healing. No attachment can be pure and holy that forces to degenerate and degrade a human being in his own or in others' eyes and Sarojini sounds pious when she tries to propagate her Eastern belief. Sarojini is a middle class wife, "good with the children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence to his demands... she did most things placidly..." (PP. 6-7). Placidity is not the other name of satisfaction, it is simply a method of good-natured compromise. Her constant dissatisfaction raises its head when she suddenly puts a doubt in Vandekar's mind about the behaviour of Nanabai (P.22), it becomes the reigning factor in her life later on when she
finds her shelter in the Swami.

Death-fear is a compulsive force in all her thoughts and actions. It is not that she can rely on the faith healing with all her mind and heart. The pain comes back to her, time and again but she forces herself to believe that it goes away:

"He asked her once, and she answered, hesitantly, "I don't know... all I know is I feel better every time I go to him, while I am there I know I'll get well". But the actual pain? Does it go?" "It's difficult to tell. It seems to" (P.95).

it is this fear again that makes her seek the modern method for curing her malady when the Swami leaves the town for she knows that if she does not get proper treatment, death will not be patient with her.

As in her other novels, the mystic figure of the Swami dominates the entire background, proving a contrast to the middle class mentality that is satisfied with the common place. The Swami opens the door for Manoeker to have a glimpse of the universality that changes his whole outlook:

'Manoeker sat down, glancing covertly at the thin face, the weather-worn skin, the calm, deep-set eyes. After a while he forgot even those externals, aware only of a quiet that seemed
into him, a stillness in which he seemed to float, detached from every care, warm and serene like a child in the womb’ (p. 109).

To different people, the Swami presents different perspectives. To Sarojini, he is the faith healer, to Vandekekar, he is a hypnotist who steals his wife, to Chari he is an enigma, to those he is an imposter, to the outcast and the dregs of society he is their life and spiritual savior, saint, but the Swami never expresses himself. His silence, his teaching of non-attachment, his detached sympathy for the unwanted, the poor, the sick and his practical care for them makes him the inheritor of the Eastern philosophy of the 'Nirvana' through non-attachment and desirelessness. He never compels, because compulsion is the beginning of corruption.

The other characters are vignettes in the background. Markandeya paints impressively the young girls, Nasabai and Lakshmi, who pass through a storm and come out chastened and wiser with a new tranquility of spirit. Nasabai's helplessness, and her reaching out blindly for her mother at the time of puberty is portrayed with tender care. The parents face the ruthless inquisition of the two girls and realize that they are the best and most honest judges of their actions. Cousin Naja is a personified caricature of the superstitious and garrulous middle class woman, though well-meaning and
helpful.

The office crowd presents the realism based on personal experience of the novelist who worked as a clerk for sometime. Ramman's tin tray, the coffee cups with the line of coffee under them, the loose talks that the clerks indulge into, the two officers Chari and Ghose treating the staff in their own particular ways, Sastri's lunch box with the enamel containers all present the usual hubbub-going on in an office. There is a cosmopolitan touch in the minor characters: Joseph is an Indian Christian, Ghose is a Bengali belonging to the Northern region, Chari, Sastri and Dancerkar belong to the Southern part of India. The regional war and its two protagonists are presented in the characters of Ghose and Chari.

But perhaps the most vivid character depicted with the least number of strokes is that of the boy-pimp whose spirit is aged with the tainting of the sinful profession forced on him. His remarks and gestures are full of realism that whips our conscience and complacency. The two whores also provide pictures of harsh reality painted with swift strokes of black and white. The doctor is a prototype of the overworked, impatient medical practitioner, weary in spirit and body with the lot of suffering around her. The dwarf's character seems too theatrical to be impressive enough.
Markandeya's strong belief in 'Destiny' colours her philosophy of life. Sandekar and Sarojini are destined to suffer because suffering purifies the spirit. This suffering has to be borne alone for each individual has a different destiny waiting for him (P.125). Everyone of us has individual and collective values as Chari thinks : "It's curious how people will hoist some tattered standard of their own and keep it flying through thick and thin, when the rest of the flags have long been lowered" (P.159). Values have to be shifted and selected because some values disappear as their basis is devoid of truth. Sandekar's values undergo a change for better, but it can only happen at the right and predestined moment. Sandekar comes to realise: "that serenity was not at his command and never had been. It was his now because he believed he could see light edging up his horizon: prolong the night and the frenzy would start". (P.151)

Sandekar suffers because primarily he can not visualise the whole truth with clarity. His values are partial truth or truth covered by shadows of falsehood. Hence his clash with reality shatters his misconception. It also enables him to reach the total truth and reject the artificial values. Sandekar tells the dwarf:

"I wanted those things and I fought for them because they
meant a great deal to me, that is a fragment of the truth. But I fought also for other things - my wife, myself, my children and these are the other fragments, of which even you must be aware" (P.159).

Humour is presented with picquante words joined together for effect: "Can't have sensuality and punctuality, you know. That's life for you - the detectable and the detestable indissolubly linked together" (P.115). Or in the delightfully metaphorical description of Hajam, "Here was a sunny disposition, tiring only those who liked a little shade with their sun" (P.12). Even the name of Canekear's easy chair: 'The fornicator' is ironical in relation to his character.

With Possession Durkenaya returns to her favourite theme; the encounter between the English and the Indian. An English woman, Lady Caroline Bell desires to possess and show off Valmiki, a rural Indian painter as her unique discovery. The title marks the basic quality of the theme, in the manner of Jane Austen. Since Caroline Bell treats Valmiki like one of her numerous possessions, their relationship is highly unsatisfactory as is pointed out by Barney:

"The presentation of this theme is complex because the possession is literal and symbolic at the same time; for while the substance of the novel's action is taking over of Valmiki by an English
woman, Lady Caroline Bell, Kamala Markandaya interprets this as symbolic of the historic relations between Britain and India. Just as independence was essential to a national Indian identity, so at the end of the novel Valmiki's moral and artistic salvation is dependent on a severance of relations with Caroline Bell and a return to India.

In Possession, also a first person narrative novel, the narrator is Anasuya who meets Caroline at Jumbo's party. Caroline Bell discovers Valmiki as a boy in the village and is impressed by his artistic potentialities. She buys him from his parents for five thousand rupees and takes him to Daras to escape the formal schooling which the English law demands, she exiles herself to Switzerland and returns to England with Valmiki when he is sixteen with his name shortened to 'Val' to give an English flavour. She changes her residence and works hard to provide him a background, tolerating and sacrificing much. She wants Val to be discovered as her protege.

Young Val comes into contact with Lillie, the Jewish refugee girl and falls in love with her. Caroline's possessive attitude can bear to have no obstruction in her path and ruthlessly she sets out to make Lillie miserable and desperate so that the pregnant girl commits suicide. Later on, when Val is involved with Annabel, Caroline
eliminates her from Val's life by presenting the facts about Ellie's suicide in a twisted way. With his guilty feelings taking hold of his soul, Val can no more be enticed by material comforts and leaves England to come back to the little village, where the Swami, his eastern mentor resides. With Anasuya's help, Caroline invades this sanctuary but fails to induce Valmiki to return back. She returns with a promise that she will come again till she succeeds in her mission.

Lady Caroline Bell represents the British 'a breed that never accepts defeat' and who has 'inherited the formidable skill of divide and rule'. Her ruthless actions and ambition to be successful in possessing Valmiki body and soul, speaks of the fierce individualism in the western attitude. It is a forcible possessing representing the dominion of British Imperialism over India.

The Swami represents the eastern mystic values of 'non-attachment' and the triumph of the spirit over the body. He understands the anguish of Val's soul and shelters him from the possessive outside world till Val comes back to sanity and peace.

Anasuya and Valmiki represent the urban and rural Indians; the former a prototype of the class of educated
Indians in close contact, with the English and the letter of the illiterate, fearful villagers who consider the fair-skinned foreigners as the 'Avatars' of God. While Sonya has a grudging admiration for Caroline, Val regards her as a magician with wonderful influence at first and later on he flees from the evil charm of the same woman because he is powerless to face her. Thus the love-hate relationship between the British and the Indians is clearly indicated through Caroline Bell's words: "... we go out of our way to meet, and we squabble every time we do... It's a sort of love-hate relationship; don't you think? Like the kind Britain and India used to have?"

Possession is a novel of characters than of an interesting plot, even though it differs from the themes generally handled by the novelist. Each of the characters, Caroline, Valmiki and the many search for their identities and pass through a number of crisis to reach their goals. Anjouya acts more as a commentator than an actor, but she also has to reshape her values in the course of her character-development.

Caroline is easily the most dominating character. She is an autocrat and ruthlessly ambitious, and is determined to get what she wants. Affluent and unscrupulous, she sets about
getting possession of Val and moulds him into a man, an artist and a lover after the image she has in her mind, and in the process ruins him, exploiting him or independence and spiritual strength though in her opinion he gains more than he loses. That she is supercilious towards all non-British, specially towards Indians is amply illustrated by the method she has used to buy Val from his parents. She is supremely selfish and diabolically clever, in engineering the suicide of Allie and separation of Annabel. She represents the elite of the British society with its clever talk, sensuous living, material comforts and career opportunities. She faces crisis when Val returns to his village and becomes Valmiki in the real sense refusing to return to the material world of Caroline.

Valmiki is a village boy who causes himself by painting and is considered to be a good for nothing in his South-Indian village. But he is talented and is fortunate enough to engage the interest of Caroline Bell, who is determined to make an artist of him. He is flattered no doubt, but at the same time, his inner self recognises that his value of a human being is somehow diminished when his parents sell him for five thousand rupees to a foreigner. With the typical docility of his race he subjugates himself to Caroline's dictation to achieve name, fame and comforts.
His spiritual crisis comes with the awakening of love and desire for Allie. The metamorphosis of Caroline rudely shakes him back to the cruel realities. His relations with the three women, Allie, Annabel and Caroline, bring him to the brink of desperation. To overcome this existential predicament, he has no other alternative but to leave this artificial world of glitter and facade and begin afresh in the Swamy's sanctuary.

Valmiki is a strange combination of materialism and spiritualism, symbolizing the two facets of the West and the East. He suffers endlessly on account of his guilt feelings, but still cannot face his problem with courage. He has a cold and watchful inner eye, as disdainful of others as of himself (p.157), but is unable to criticize Caroline or to disown her influence. Cut off from his moorings he floats, flounders and then saves his values by striking out for his native shores. Valmiki is like the average Indian who lets his life be dictated by parents, friends, wife and children and lastly the guru. He must have a mentor, Caroline is one and the Swamy is the other.

The Swamy is a victim to attachment in relation to Valmiki. Like the other mystic figures in the novels of Markandaya, the Swamy also possesses a tall, spare frame and a calm manner of speaking. He says he realized after meeting
Caroline that there were lessons that he had yet to learn from the world and therefore he returns to the world. 
"What else should I be doing among you ladies here but sitting at your feet learning my lesson" (P.35). In Anasuya, the novelist comes closer to her own self. Suya is a moderate who admires the good qualities of both the cultures and dislikes characteristic faults. Her love for British is based on understanding and deep feelings. She admires Caroline for her courage and determination and wishes that Valmiki should be able to acquire these qualities. She is an equal to Caroline and dislikes her arrogance expressing it in bars of sarcasm and resentment. She is equally impatient with the anglicized slaves like Jumbo, whose British friends gave him this name "not because of his size, but because it was the custom for people of his class to be given nicknames... so that Bingos, Bapos, Binkies and boys should be abounded in the luminous upper strata of erstwhile British India" (P.3).

A Handful of Rice brings back the novelist to sociological problems faced by the lower-middle class people, bordering on the poverty line. The symbolic title is related to the goal of thousands of semi-educated and illiterate young men, who have left their villages in search of food and shelter. Navi, the son of a peasant passes through many heart rending experiences to get a handful of rice to satisfy
the fire burning in his belly.

In this novel the novelist is the omniscient narrator, the canvas covering the city and the village. Markandeya picks up several problems, unemployment in the cities, exodus from the villages due to drought and famine, the lure of the underworld, the corruption in high places, the stifling atmosphere and living conditions of the poor, the class consciousness between the English and the Indian and the rich Indian and the poverty-stricken ones, the exploitation of the downtrodden by the capitalists, the overpopulation problem (without being tackled) growing into a demon and the superstition and blind faith keeping the masses bound to illiteracy, meaningless customs and caste differences. The plot is a well-planned and better executed one, more in the lines of *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Hari, the hero leaves his village with others like him and comes to the city in search of a job. Bitter experience teaches him that a semi-educated young man with no background and money has no prospects. Though Damodar, he is introduced to the underworld and to the source of easy but dangerous income. By sheer chance he comes across Apu the tailor, and falls in love with Malini, his daughter. A turning point comes and Hari sincerely tries to change his way of life after marrying Malini. Misfortune after misfortune crowns
his life, till at last, hopeless and angry, he loses himself again to the drag from where he had tried to come up.

It is a tragic story with black thunderclouds hovering overhead while Navi vainly hopes for the silver lining. It is a social chronicle of the present age: "In this jungle one had to fight, fiercely with whatever weapons one had, or go under." It is also an eye opener to the fundamental problems that the poor have been suffering from time immemorial. It is an ugly, disturbing and conscience-raising document because it is based on stark, unrelieved realism.

The existential predicament faced by Navi in the loss of his identity in this jungle, is presented on sociological background. The family-roots in the village having been forgotten and cut off by his own hands, Navi desperately wanted to have a sound base in the city. But he is considered to be a vagabond even after his marriage because "he suffered from having no roots here, no family to give him a background..." (p.73).

The inner feeling of inferiority always prompts him to prove his worth in the eyes of the world around him. He is hopelessly ill-equipped for such a venture and thus gradually bitterness reinstates itself where optimism has once reigned. He wants to be a 'decent' man, with a
'decent' family and 'decent' job through honest means, which is next to impossible (p.66). Nalini, who changes his life for better, has no doubt about the basic points of goodness in his nature: "So long as he had the money, he had never grudged her or the child a treat, or treated himself as some men do, totally forgetting his family." (p.136).

Unable to carry the load alone by himself, he expected Nalini to share his indignation, but she is fearful of the change coming over him. Naju's death, makes the breach deeper, wider and in the nights _savi_ walked the city alone, feeling a strange, harsh freedom in the anonymity into which he was once again swallowed (p.206).

_Ravi_ falls into the deepest degradation of animal passions of wife-beating and incest with his mother-in-law, that removes his basic decency forever. His business ruined beyond repair, he joins 'the band of people throwing pebbles in the gutter,' symbolically back to square one. But there is a difference, a vital difference that gnaws his bones and turns him into an eunuch regarding his mental conditions so that he loses even the energy to revolt: "The strength that had inflamed him, the strength of a suppressed, laminated anger ebbed as quickly as it had risen. His hand dropped." (p.237). He has been overrun, defeated and trampled over, and has accepted it as his destiny, like
countless others before him.

Apu and Malini, are both bewildered by the change coming over the characters and situations around them. Apu is shocked and drained of his will to survive when he finds that it is not the vagabond Navi who has stolen his life's savings but Puttanna, the son of a shopowner whose heredity is always above suspicion. Malini wishes "If only it was like it used to be. In the beginning we were happy then... just to hold it once, only for a little while, just to feel what it was like..." (P.224)

Jayamma's dilemma is psychological rather than sociological married to a middle aged man without any comfortable source of income, she manages to hide her mental and physical dissatisfaction under a thin veneer of adjustment. They come out in spouts and in depraved fashions sometimes when she has beaten Navi, experiencing distinctly voluptuous sexual pleasure, or when she has wished that it is herself, not Malini who has been thrashed by Navi. Her abnormal infatuation for money, which was the only hold Apu had over her, is another outlet for her mental turmoil. The members of her family rise or drop in her esteem according to the money they dole out to her and she cannot forgive Puttanna and Thangam even though she understands their hopeless
through the agonised pleasure of fire-walking, Jayamma wants to experience the passion - fury that is denied to her through circumstances. The symbolic burden of old and disabled Apu, drags back her steps but cannot save her even if she wills strongly. It is Navi who comes to her aid and it is Navi again who drags her down on a headlong fall into the dark caverns of incestuous pleasure. The awesome position that Jayamma occupies in Navi's house as his mother-in-law is wiped away with one unforgettable stroke and she becomes nothing better than a concubine, middle-aged and ugly, who is sure to blackmail Navi one day to oust Nalini permanently from her home. She is not afraid of the changed relations but she is afraid of the scandal and thus continues to live and behave in a normal fashion.

Putanna, Varna, Kumaran and Tanoor have their peculiar existential predicaments to face. Harsh realities of life turn Putanna into a thief and he becomes one of those fathers, who "want to put my hands round their necks and squeeze until I know I'll never again have to think about feeding them..."(P.126). Varna and Kumaran, the homosexuals, live in their private hell: "Varna, unconscious of being watched, was gazing at the child with a chill, naked,
Kumaran was called a boy "because subconsciously they felt he was inferior... a tart and reluctant charity over the years had induced him to do as much as, and then a little more than he could" (P.131). "Navoor, the man who introduces Navi to the underworld, has apparently all that money could buy, but when Navi taunts him, Navoor tells him:

"But I know what a city's like. It drags the bloody entrails out of you before you do but I have done it" (P.214).

Bitterly he curses his parents for leaving him on the garbage heap.

The Indian English encounter and the class-consciousness between the rich and the poor form an important part of the social background in the novel. The English woman wonders if "these people, who appears when summoned by her servants and disappears when she is done with them she has no idea where; has any existence in between or were they merely cardboard figures... faceless and aliens than her own country-men thousands of miles away..." (P.100).

The Indian mesasahib, an imitation show-piece, full of vanity and superciliousness, is more despicable than her European counterpart. Both are as conscious of their
superiority over the nameless, faceless, poverty ridden Indian mass at their back and call. It is the Indian business people who buy the jackets from You at Rs.eighty for a dozen and sell them for Rs.125 a piece. It is the Indian grain-merchant who hoards the rice while the hungry people die for a handful of rice.

Nerkandaya does not hesitate to depict ugly realities of Indian life in their stark naked form. The village, a long cherished ideal of simplicity, friendliness and a wealth of virtue, is exposed brutally to show the viciousness and rot lurking inside it. Navi remembers his village where sex is the commonest and most observed recreation, where men get drunk while their women suffer labour pains, where women die howling like animals without even first-aid and nobody thinks twice about it, where poverty and illiteracy are rampant.

On the other hand in the jungle of the city the beasts of prey and their victims always play a game of hide and seek. The honest and respectable are forced to die in poverty, unburned and forgotten quickly. It is money that gives glitter and power to life and to survive in the city, one must beg, borrow or steal it. It is the same with the 'threadbare' students whose patience snags, making them screaming agitators, or with middle aged men...
with families to support throwing pebbles in the gutter, suddenly turning into a ferocious mob frenziedly shouting "Rice today, rice" (P.233).

Regionalism is evident in the description of food and drinks which are typically South-Indian.

The marriage ceremony is traditionally South-Indian, the ritual of the fire walking belongs mainly to South India; Malini playing with her son's tassel as the midwife had shown her to give him early and strong virility and an easy manhood (P.155), and the little girls wearing silver public shields girdling their loins (P.210) are customs observed in traditional South-Indian families. The climate is always the typical summer and rainy seasons of the southern part of India, very rarely a stark winter-climate or snows are mentioned except in some inner fury and The Nowhere man.

Her next novel, The Coffer Loga has its setting in the small industrial town on a hill side in South-India. The title is the name of the project undertaken by the British builder Clinton to harness the turbulent river that coursed through the highlands and valleys of South India. It is the story of industrialization slowly destroying nature and the tribes and the East West encounter at personal and social levels.
The socio-cultural conflict is evident from the very beginning when the tribals are evicted to make way for the settlement colonies, Indian barracks and English quarters.

While MacKenrick considers with sympathy 'the pulsing jealousy and pride... the pride of an ancient civilization limping behind in the modern race, called backward everywhere except to its face' (P. 12), Krishnan broods over 'The Western techniques of seduction, persuasion and coercion. It was the new guiding trinity, as pietà, gunboats and the way of Christ had been old' (P. 51).

But it is not only an encounter between the European culture and the oriental one. There is a substantial if subtle difference between the western educated Indians and the self-taught or completely illiterate tribals who are called jungle-wallah by their own countrymen, as well as by the English people. The antagonism between these three kinds of people comes out in putting labels like Bengali babus on all the Indian engineers by smallings or calling Cũshian a 'civilised' jungle wallah.

The personal yardstick to measure this antagonism is more vicious and prejudiced than the collective one. While the European waver, between 'keeping themselves to themselves, to the extremity of 'Never Trust the Blacks' (PP. 36-37),
the Indians like Ropal Rao feel supremely uncomfortable and unwanted (P.66), and the headman of the tribals condemns the builders for leaving them "In a peace full of moaning and pining for trash" (P.73). While Clinton is contemptuous of the people "who worshipped birds and beasts and probably snakes" (P.76) Kirshanan remarks with equal contempt about Rawlin's insistence on a Christian burial: "in the end what he really cared about, was that he should be right and I should be wrong" (P.116). This culture conflict proves disastrous to each one of them, demanding a heavy price, perhaps the heaviest from the three central characters: Clinton, Bashiam and Helen. The East-West encounter can only be resolved through good will, compromise and understanding. Helen and Mackendrick realise this and their personal equations with the Indians have no racial barrier. Helen crosses the racial line easily, learning their language and lore and finding love and fulfilment she lacked so.

Symbolically, this encounter is also presented through the confrontation between the echanical and the mystical. The Indians know that the Indian river has a character of its own but the Western engineers consider it only in terms of its strata, flow and course. They collect a hundred years old data on it and construct a dam based on their
projections which is completely destroyed by the torrential rains. The sophisticated machinery grounds to a halt and Mackenrick borrows the knowledge about the rains and the river from the headman. Technology may build things, but it lacks the wisdom to preserve them.

Clinton, Helen and Bashias: the three corners of the triangle move through heartrending experiences in quest of their identities. All three of them live by principles and realize that "there are some things which one has to do" (P.234). The gradual breaking up of the marriage between Clinton and Helen has its source in these principles that guide their values: Clinton refusing to recognize the demands of a soulless relationship, Helen repulsing the hypocritical bondage that obstructed her in joining Bashias. But perhaps Bashias's predicament is far greater than either Clinton's or Helen's. An outcast from his own tribal home, Bashias is rootless and without an identity even in his own village. Through pain, rejection and bewilderment, Bashias at last realizes, 'I must do it, since they are my people whom I can not shed although I have tried' (P.182). He also owes a different kind of debt to Clinton and there is no other way to freedom (P.183), but to offer himself for the final sacrifice. It is Clinton who sums up this dilemma of existence accurately: ।
"One builds a ship, a bridge, a can, what it is build of is plain to see. Iron, steel, glass, concrete would one not say? But not at all. It is built of oneself, one's blood, brain, nerve, guts, spleen and marrow. And spirit. Whatever goes into us, goes into it. The making of two... is not dissimilar". (P.101).

The novelist is not partisan to any particular ethical system. Her characters learn the lesson through bitter experience that no culture is perfect and the basic principles are always sincerity, integrity and compassion.

The nowhere man is the story of Srinivas, whose rootlessness in an alien country leaves him 'nowhere', an alien in a foreign land and a foreigner in his native country.

A South Indian Brahmin, Srinivas is settled in England for the last fifty years with his wife Vasantha and two sons. With typical Indian habits, they form a micro-India around themselves in an alien land. The sudden deaths of his younger son Sheelu and Vasantha, turns him into a hermit. Loneliness envelops him... for the first time and he considers going back to India to start a new life. But the West redoubles its attractions even though he experiences the 'unwanted feelings'. He turns to Mrs. Pickering (a
middle ages divorcee and house-guest for twenty years) for comfort and peace and enjoys once again the beauty of English rivers, winter mornings and even celebrates Christmas, an alien festival.

The violent hatred in feelings of racism which flooded England in the sixties, makes this peace a short lived one. The leprosy of Srinivas makes him the first target of this hostility, and he realizes it too late:

"It was my mistake to imagine that I am in England. The people will not allow it, except physically... I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in England." [10]

Fred Fletcher, a neighbour, who plays the main role in this hate campaign against Srinivas, torments him in many ways and at last burns him alive in his house. Srinivas's son Laxman however, is determined to belong to the country in which he is born, lives and labours. Thus, to him is handed down the legacy of the rootlessness of the 'Nowhere man, looking for a nowhere city' [p.174].

The Nowhere man is almost a reversal of some inner fury with harsher realities depicted by the novelist. The culture-conflict is expressed through ugly incidents of race war perpetrated by the skin-hearts like Fred and his countrymen.
As in some inner fury, the violence looms in the forefront to kill, disfigure and drive away the British from India, so also, the 'blacks' are subjected to the fanaticism of 'England for the English' and are made either to leave the country or die violent deaths.

An author narrated novel, *The Nowhere Man* brings this conflict out in the personal level of the characters. Srinivas, smarting under the indignities heaped upon the Indians by the British imperialists, leaves India and paradoxically chooses England as his adopted country for the British sense of justice, fair play and tolerance. He is comfortable in a manner, possessing perfect British manners, imitating the British way of thinking and generally enjoying the material goods they offer to make life easier. He even lives down the shock of Laxman's marrying a British girl Pat and his severence of relations from the family. His younger son Shekhoo joins the royal Air force and Srinivas is quite proud of it.

But this is a veneer only for he still cannot eat eggs and meat and prefers gulab jamuns to cakes. The name of his house is changed to 'Chandraprasad' to give an idea of Indianisation in an alien land. Warring Laxman, the three of them, Srinivas, Vasantha and Shekhoo remain bound by the chain of Eastern culture even though a gallant attempt at
compromise is put forward by Srinivas.

It is the non-acceptance and violent rejection by the English that destroys this fragile attempt at compromise. Sheela's instinctive repulsion in the bombing operations that resulted in killing thousands of innocent people, forced him to take premature retirement from active service. The Eastern culture of non-violence rose over the sense of justified price in fighting a national war. Vasanth, uncompromising and ascetic, is fortunate to die before the racial war starts. Laxman, the pucca Britisher realizes in his heart the futility of an East-West connection when he is involved in a quarrel over the eviction of a tenant in 'Chandraprasad'. But it is Srinivas who comes out barefoot and dhoti clad in open revolt against the Western values, even though he has been at peace with himself in his adopted land.

On the British side there are the neighbours who wish that the Indians should express their emotions within the four walls and closed doors. Mrs. Wills believes that the ashes of Vasantha's dead body kept in the basement and Srinivas must be performing some unholy rites, when actually he is burning the dead rat. Fred Fletcher's Cronies declare the motto of 'Hang the Blacks' and spread lies about Srinivas, and last but not the least Fred Fletcher
himself torments Srinivas in various ways—placing excreta
and a dead mouse on the doorstep, abusing and slandering
him, slugging him and finally burning him alive in his home.

Like The Coffer Dome where the reconciliation between
the east and the west comes through Helen and Bashian, in
this novel the compromise and cooperative attitude is
advocated through the relationship of Srinivas and
Mrs. Pickering. Both of them face the same existential
predicament of living a loveless and lonely life, and by
mutual agreement, their relationship gains growth and stability.
Both shock the neighbours and Laxman by their action, but to
them the skin colour is not at all important, it is the call
of the heart that they respect.

There are other characters like Dr. Had Cliffe,
constable Kent and the constable at the Thames, who
propagate diametrically opposite values to those of Fred
Fletcher and the other hooligans.

These people believe in no barriers of colour, language
or nationality and consider all as human beings. Thus it
is not impossible that the East should meet the West on equal
grounds if saner elements take the initiative and mob frenzy
is restrained.

The moral message is clear in this novel. Always an
advocate of non-violence, Markandaya believes that violence kills the innocent and hatred destroys the hated as well as the hated. Fred Florchar does not escape from his deterrent punishment even as he kills his helpless victim. As Srinivas lies dead on the street, the curiosity of the onlookers is transformed into guilt and embarrassment.

TWO VIRGINS has not claimed for itself the same interest and admiration as the other novels of Markandaya have done. There are various reasons for it: the plot is paper thin and not suitable for a full-length novel. In fact TWO VIRGINS is grossly at fault for 'padding' or repetition of unnecessary sequences. Secondly, the characterization of the two sisters, to some extent, is a glorified version of the two sisters Kamalai and Laxmi in A SILENCE OF DESIRE with a good bit of Irwoody's character from Deekter in a sieve blended in. Thus one may say, that, instead of breaking a completely new ground, Markandaya has taken bits and pieces from her old novels and tried to sew them together to give a concrete form.

Recently, another criticism has been aimed at this book which of course is subject to a debate. A charge of pronography has resulted in dropping the book from the syllabi of the university of Tamil Nadu. The legislature debated the point and decided to overlook it in the greater
benefit of all concerned.

Lalitha and Seroja are the two central characters in *Two Virgins*. Lalitha is tempted by the lure of the city and is dazzled by its glamour. Like Faustus, she is ready to pay the supreme price and enjoy life as best as she can. Her promiscuous nature entices her to taste new delights in physical relation with obvious results. After she is seduced and has an abortion, she decides that her life belongs to the glitter and glamour of the city.

Seroja, the other virgin is an intelligent witness to all Lalitha's escapades. By nature she is cautious and avoids the quicksand of adolescent mistakes. She passes through experiences, exhilarating and disgusting but never lets herself be a victim of the circumstances as Lalitha has done. She learns her lessons and leaves the city life to go back to her natural surroundings.

The encounter is between the artificial and corrupt glamour of the city life and the realistic and healing powers of nature and the village. This theme has been presented in *Saptarini* with instant success because there is death and high emotion in Rukmani's tragic exile from her village. But Lalitha and Seroja's token regard for village life does not encourage the same tragic
intensity when they are lured away by the city life. The elaborate descriptions of the adolescence and maturation of Lalitha and Saroja does not make a good plot line:

'What Two Virgins says about adolescence and maturation in 250 pages is said still more effectively as incidents in earlier novels - Dancekar's daughter crouching in a corner at her senses (A Silence of Desire) - Iris cold-bloodedly trading her body for food (Nectar in a Sieve). Vasantha's mind growing into womanhood when the British inspector of Police twitches her skirt over head with his cane (The Nowhere Man).'

Markandaya deals with a limited number of characters and does away with the formality of names of persons of places: Appa and Amma are enough as proper nouns, and the village is nameless. The authorial commentary is not used in this novel and therefore, it presents an objective picture of life. Flashbacks and thought-sequences are used much more to chain the events in the narration.

The Golden Honeycomb (1977) is a remarkable piece of historical fiction. Set in the pre-independence days it is the story of the conflict between rulers of the Devapur State and the foreign Government that rules over India. A.N. Advai rightly remarks:
"This historical novel, precisely speaking follows a certain chronology in recording the dates and years of these events, and reflects the spirit of the age faithfully. Before the story proper begins, we encounter a prologue and at the close we read an epilogue, a note and acknowledgements. All these appendages should not be construed as mere accessories, but as important organs in the body of the text intended to reveal the purpose of the work and the author's choice of a particular time, the tense drama enacted on the national stage and its eventual outcome in the form of independence. The explanation to avoid certain probable confusions and the sources of the novelist's material.

The novel describes the Debapur estate whose ruler Bawajiraj-I is deposed for his seditious activities.

The resident Sir Arthur Copuland and the Dewan put on the throne an eighteen year old youngman of Kshatriya caste as the ruler - Bawajiraj - II. Unfortunately he dies in a hunting accident and his young son, ascends the throne as Bawajiraj-III. He marries princess Shanta Devi and has four daughters. He is not satisfied and is drawn more towards his mistress beautiful Mohini, who gives him a son Rabindranath.

Bawajiraj-III has received European education through English tutors, public schools and colleges and feels and acts like a 'brown Englishman' alienating his own people.
Rabi's education on the other hand, is supervised by his mother and grandmother and he inherits Indian traditions and culture.

After the grand Durbar the maharajah and his family go to Bombay to take delivery of three cars. Bombay is trouble-torn with labour riots and Rabi joins a group of striking labourers and in the process, is hurt seriously. He is nursed back to health by a millworker named Jaya who initiates him into his first sexual experience with a woman.

Meanwhile the clamour for independence grows stronger and in Devapur also, the common people are in no mood to co-operate with the foreign rulers who levy heavy, new taxes on them. Rabi along with Usha, the youngest daughter of the Bawan, fights for the masses. At last they emerge triumphant with the declaration of independence in 1947.

This novel also puts forward the favourite themes of Darkandaya in its plot. The theme of poverty and hunger, the theme of struggle for independence, the theme of conflict between traditionalism and modernism and the theme of the East-West encounter. The author has used a new technique in the thematic presentation. She alternates long and short scenes with the cinematic effect. It is a combination of forceful narration and occasional description.
But perhaps her strongest point in this novel is again her characterization. The three rulers of Devapur Estate are painted vividly in strong colours and the author exposes their vagaries, whims and personal defects mercilessly. Devajiraj-II and Havi are the central characters of this novel. They personify the two aspects, the loyalty to the Britishraj and the penchant for freedom. But though they stand at the opposite extremes politically, the deep love that exists between them, finds them in an unbreakable bond.

Havi is a fascinating and powerful character, who has an assertive and aggressive nature. Even though born in the world of luxury and Europeanism, he definitely turns back to Indian culture and later identifies himself with the luckless labourers and common people of the Devapur Estate. Catholic minded and fearless, he leads his people to independence through grim struggle and trials.

A serious and committed novelist, Markandaya never propagates. She considers her novels part of what she calls "the literature of concern" or "socio-literature": "The literature of concern has a part to play, therefore and will be more effective than other media such as television. For news is often forgotten or people develop a kind of defence mechanism that shuts off unpleasant truth. Socio-literature
prevents this for it tells you what it is like to be there and feel it happening to you*. Markandaya definitely offers positive messages through her novels.

A votary of non-violence, moderation, compromise, cooperation and peace, Markandaya's message comes out clear and bright. There is always one mystic character or a religious figure to bring this message to the notice of other characters. But compromise does not mean subjugation of real values to the baser one, as she has shown when Revi rejects Damodar's offer in *A handful of rice*. A rotten civilization needs a clean revolution to give it a fresh lease of life even if sacrifices are needed on the way.

Rootlessness is the canker that maligns human beings at the very core. One must have faith in the pulsation of life and values of heart for faith is the greatest sustaining power that enables mankind to brave all existential challenges.

Markandaya's plots on the whole are well-constructed and convincingly executed. Uma Parameshwaran remarks in this relation:

"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.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Dr. M. Presau, Markandaya's novels have "circular plots".\textsuperscript{16} The beginnings and the endings are closely connected creating a structural circle in the plot-lines. Her stories are nearly always inconclusive as real life is. There is neither poetic justice nor the ringing of the merry wedding bells for the happy couple because Markandaya's vision of life is complete and realistic. K.S. Narayana too has aptly described Markandaya's novels as:

"The stories do not end in the spirit of 'And they lived happily ever after'. It is as though they suggest the seeming endlessness of life cycle".\textsuperscript{17}

Markandaya's prose style exhibits a superb command over the English language. Her style, characterized by chastity and lucidity, economy and preciseness, crispness and raciness, has an inimitable quality. She reveals the eighteenth century English literature's penchant for 'what oft was thought but never so well expressed', in her careful choice of right words in the right places. She never translates her thoughts into language: nor does she attempt "to adopt the 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." For instance, her description of Helen in The Coffin Lane as she lies torn and covered with the ejaculation of her drunken husband after he rapes her and the fierce hatred that burns her body and soul as she touches herself again and again, leaves one shaken with the dread for the unknown calamities of life itself. In describing spiritual attachment as between Hukmani and Kenny in Nectar in a Sieve or between Sarojini and the Swami in a Silence of Desire, the same pen turns delicate and noble to elevate the human mind towards sublimity.

Markandaya has avoided presenting direct dialogues between Indian characters to tackle the problem of dialect realism. This of course marked a certain amount of critical response.

"Kamala Markandaya solves the problem of dialect realism by practically doing away with straight dialogues between Indians. There are very few dialogues between her Indian characters and here she uses some rather standard Indianisms—rather needlessly—such as the omission of articles and the transformation of a statement into a question by adding a question mark (the voice would be suitably inflected) at the end..."
Her prose style has undergone a change in *Two Virgins*. She has experimented with journalistic style, using the indirect form of narration in this novel, like the repeated use of the word 'said'.

All in all, Kanaka Markandaya's novels present an enjoyable experience for her readers. As A. V. Krishna Rao sums up so beautifully and clearly:

"In her novels, Markandaya not only displays a flair for virtuosity which orders and patterns her feelings and ideas resulting in a truly enjoyable work of art but also projects the image of national consciousness on many levels of aesthetic awareness."20
REFERENCES


4. Uma Parameshwara, P. 106.


12. Uma Parameshwara, P. 121.


15. Uma Parameshwara, P. 91.


18. Uma Parameshwaram, P. 54.

19. Uma Parameshwaram, P. 120.