CHAPTER-III

SOCIAL REALITY - NOVELS OF
KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly one of the earliest Indian-English writers of significance who emerged on literary scene after 1954. She presents the picture of India and its people struggling against odds and trying to rise above them. She, like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh, concentrates on contemporary Indian problems, the problems related to social, economic, political and cultural aspects. Speaking of the depiction of social life in India by Indian English writers, Prof. Iyengar writes: "Social life in a country of the size of India is so full of vagaries and varieties that the novelist with an observant eye and an understanding heart will find the material spread out before him to be liberally inexhaustible."¹

Concerned with contemporary Indian society, Kamala Markandaya involves herself with the changing ethos of post-independent India particularly of villages down south. Shiv K.Kumar gave her credit not for social realism but for sociological awareness. Mankandaya shows much concern for the miserable lot of the masses
and their ruthless exploitation in India in sharp contrast with the glitter and gloss, affluence and creature comfort of the west.

Kamala Markandaya deals with the problems of everyday life - the problems which a human being has to face in these days, problems that continue throughout his life. As an individual residing amidst other people is never lonely, her characters are never lonely, instead, they are the victims - victims of their helpless situation, hostile milieu or even social circumstances. Unlike Anita Desai’s limited range of characters and themes, Kamala Markandaya’s canvas is wider and she portrays the poverty-striken world of the dispossessed, of those struggling for independence, and those facing the conflict between traditionalism and modernism and the victims of east-west dichotomy. She also discusses the themes of uprootedness, racial tension and prejudice and conflict between faith and reason. The fiction of Kamala Markandaya is largely sociological in its focus and her characters struggle against the socio-economic problems. She is sensitive to human suffering emnating from poverty, superstition and an unequal social hierarchy. In her novels, the inner conflict - the conflict of mind is also delineated, though primarily the focus of her fiction remains on sociological concerns. The conflict prevailing in the Indian experience is realized through the common dilemmas of ordinary people torn between traditional values and those spawned by modernism, whose loved ones are destroyed by political violence, who have to make a choice between integrity and dubious prosperity, who in refusing to surrender their identity are destroyed by racialism. Markandaya also
focusses her attention on marital relationships - relationships that are influenced sometimes by financial matters and sometimes by changes in social environment, in a milieu of the Indian society undergoing a change, albeit reluctantly. Therefore such relationships are fraught with tensions and this is excellently portrayed in her novels. She is also aware of the misery created by the social domination of the Indians by the British, and therefore the theme of clash - the clash between cultures, between traditionalism and modernism, between belief and logic, between different value systems and between different races is depicted remarkably well in her fiction.

Kamala Markandaya is particularly sensitive to the clash of East and West and the tensions born of this clash. This may be because the writers who have been abroad, are in Meenakshi Mukherjee's words, "made aware of their Indianness as well as of the difference in the two systems of values: one rather acquired and the other inherited and taken for granted." Inter-racial and intercultural relationships highlight the gulf between India (as a representative of the East) and the West. This is one of the dominant themes in the fiction of Kamla Markandaya and Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out that:

In the complex fabric of contemporary Indian civilization, the two most easily discerned strands are the indigenous Indian traditions and the imported European conceptions. Almost every educated Indian today is the product of the conflicts and reconciliations of two cultures, although the consciousness of
this tension varies from individual to individual. What is generally true of the educated Indian is true of the Indian writer...\(^3\)

This topic has assumed greater significance after independence, since the Indo-British relations touched the lowest point during the national struggle for freedom and there is a growing awareness on the part of both the government and the people to instil a sense of mutual understanding and reliability. So, many Indian novelists in English took to this subject and exposed the superstitious belief and credulity of the one and vainglory and sense of superiority of the other. In the novels of Kamala Markandaya also, there is the theme of conflict between English and Indians, rooted in history, realised in political agitation and resulting in racial animosities and social disparities. Her novels deal with "different predicaments of identity... each ... effected by the East-West clash of codes that is a part of modern India."\(^4\)

Through the kaleidoscope of her art, the changing image of man and society is projected. She does not offer definite solutions to human problems. She holds the artistic mirror up to society from a realistic and moral point of view and permits the viewers to draw their own conclusions about the image. Writing about the cultural and social interaction of the East and West in the fiction of Kamla Markandaya, R.S. Singh observes that:

Her (Markandaya's) major theme has been the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the Western and the Oriental and the consequent actuation of the painful process of
modernization... But cultural pride and sharp political disagreements kept the twain apart. Besides political relationship, there was the difference of the two irreconcilables: idealism, mysticism and materialism.\(^5\)

Harish Raizada also makes a similar observation, commenting thus that:

> East-West confrontation as represented by India's contact with Britain figures prominently in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. She treats the tensions and points of contacts between people belonging to two races and two views of life from different points of view by bringing them together in different relationships and situations.\(^6\)

The theme of cultural clash pointed out by these scholars is quite natural in the novels of a writer who has been transplanted into a land other than her own and who, therefore, nostalgically recollects her childhood or adulthood associations with her own country. These associations have deep roots in an individual's psyche and can hardly ever be forgotten. Kamala Markandaya in handling the theme of East-West encounter, falls in the group of such talented women writers as Ruth Prawar Jhabvala and Santha Rama Rau. K.R.Chandrasekharan, a noted Indian scholar, has dwelt at length on the question of East-West encounter in the novels of Kamala Markandaya and interpreted her message in the following way: "The implied message in Kamala Markandaya's novels is that India should confidently pursue her own
path holding fast to her traditional values and using methods appropriate to her culture....”

The Indians and the English in the novels of Kamala Markandaya meet at two levels, social and political. At the social level, cultural differences arise and hence lasting relationships cannot be formed. At political level, the clash is constant and inevitable. As a result individual relationships suffer. At both the levels, the reason responsible for a breakdown of relationships is a basic lack of understanding. So, her protagonists cannot escape an over-powering sense of the unfortunate course of collision.

Another theme that occurs in the novels of Kamala Markandaya is - tradition vs. modernity. Quite a few Indian English novelists focus on an unavoidable conflict between tradition and modernity, but in Kamala Markandaya's novels this conflict assumes even greater proportions. This theme is often presented through the clash between faith and reason and between different values. The conflict between tradition and modernity affects the relationships in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Society is undergoing a change due to westernization and industrialization. As a result, some persons still hold their traditional values while some persons especially the younger generation has changed with the passage of time and changes in the social structure and adopted modern values. Industrialization attracts the young to the towns and cities and in Kamala Markandaya's novels, the background is usually rural and as the novel progresses this focus shifts from rural to the urban or it keeps shifting between the country-
side and the urban habitation. The younger generation wants to break away from the hold of traditional customs. They are more rational and practical, whereas, older generation is emotional and superstitious. So, the two generations are in the process of adjustment to a changing society.

In the novels of Kamala Markandaya, there is another theme which centres on "an individual's search for identity." Here, the protagonist is pitted against adverse social circumstances. He is at a loss to find out his own place and position in a society. There is a conflict in his mind, which stems from the contradictions between the different attitudes of the members of society towards an individual. He very often contemplates, who he is, what his role is in the society and in a desperate search for identity, the characters are caught in relationships fraught with tensions, which are excellently portrayed in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. The misery of the Indians, caused by the racial domination of the British too produces characters who are at a loss to identify themselves.

Another theme in the novels of Kamala Markandaya is social realism, which depicts poverty and hunger in society. This theme is usually portrayed in the rural background. If the background is not really rural, it is some backward area in the urban atmosphere. So, this theme may also be taken as the study of the life style of the people living in the rural areas. The study of the life style of peasants is also related to this because people in the rural background are usually associated with farming and they are the people who suffer. Though
they produce grains, they themselves still remain hungry. Sometimes, they have to leave their homes and villages in search of livelihood. Natural calamities play havoc with the lives of rural folk. So, man/nature struggle is also presented in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. The peasants are usually the victims of fate working malignantly in the guise of nature. Not only nature, sometimes the invasion of machines on the tranquility of the village too affects them. Inspite of all this, they are very much attached with their land. If they are cut off from their roots, they face total disintegration of their identity.

Another subject which Kamala Markandaya has focussed on in her novels is the theme of renunciation. Since the very inception of Indian-English writing, this subject has been the focus of attention of many writers. The place of renunciation in Indian life is quite significant. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

Renunciation has always been an Indian ideal of life... Like all ideals it is a distinctly difficult condition... In real life... But in literature, it is not impossible... Such a character will adhere to the ideals of non-attachment, conquest of the senses and selfless love towards all humanity.9

Prof. Iyengar too comments on the significant role played by sanyasis in Indian English fiction as: "It was mentioned earlier that, since Bankim's time, the sanyasi (in one or other guise) has often figured in Indian fiction."10 These sanyasis and rishis appear in different guises. Some sanyasis are true saints, the true friends of humanity and some
sanyasis are frauds and charlatans who try to deceive people for money and privileges. In one way or the other they have some impact on the people. They hold the souls of the public.

Another theme on which Kamala Markandaya focuses her attention is harmony - harmony in marital relations. These marital relationships are influenced - they either get strengthened or destroyed by society. Sometimes the happy marital relationships are marred by the changes in social environment. The relationships of not only Indian couples but also of Western couples are portrayed in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. These couples are caught in the web of such circumstances that they can neither break away nor carry on well with their existing life style and value system. There are many other reasons for the strained marital relationships like poverty or the difference in attitudes etc.

Kamala Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* delineates the theme of the rural folk being badly affected by the freakish behaviour of Nature and by the invasion of machines on the tranquillity of the village. According to Uma Prameswarn "*Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of a faceless peasant who stands silhouetted in the unending twilight of Indian agrarian bankruptcy...."11 The novel is a realistic chronicle of the sufferings of peasants. In the novel, Nathan's family is tortured by poverty, hunger, deprivation and starvation created not only by socio-economic factors but also by the vagaries of nature. Nathan is "a tenant farmer who was poor in everything but in love and care for... his wife."12 Nathan and Rukmani feed themselves and their children
somewhow with the little grains they grow. As nature does not favour the peasants and plays havoc with their lives, they have to face famine at one time and drought at another and they have no grains. They have to satisfy themselves with water only. Ira, Rukmani’s daughter, is forced into prostitution, as she is unable to see her baby brother Kuti starving. Shyamala Venkateswaran comments: "... poverty of the villagers, along with their ignorance of modern agricultural techniques, is stressed...."13

Nathan and Rukmani have to survive not only natural calamities, but also the juggernaut of progress - the tannery. The tannery has shattered the calm and tranquil rural life. It is swallowing up land month by month for new buildings. Nathan and his family are also evicted from the land they have cultivated for thirty years. Hunger becomes their permanent companion. Rukmani’s son Raja, driven by despair of hunger goes to steal from the tannery and gets killed by the watchmen. Nathan and Rukmani face a lot of hardship and when they are left with no land in the village, they leave for the city in the hope of meeting their son, who had left the village a long time ago to earn his livelihood in the city. They are innocent and helpless people who face the cruel, clever urban value system when their belongings are stolen and they are left with no money. They cannot even meet their son as he has left the city abandoning his family. They have to work in a quarry in order to earn their livelihood and save a little money to return to the village, but before they can return to the village Nathan dies of poverty and ill health. Rukmani stoically bears it. Tragedy bends...
her body not her spirit. It is because peasants leave everything in the hands of God and bear all sorrows and sufferings with a sense of fatalism that Rukmani does not see any use in fighting or protesting. She draws solace from the thought that she only lost the little she had, and thinks that want is her companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. She says: "... we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed." This passive acceptance is the result of economic insecurity and religious teaching. So, the heart that is tempted in the flames and faith of suffering and sacrifice will not easily accept defeat.

Kamala Markandaya, in the novel, "... takes us to the heart of a South Indian or Tamil Nad village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years..." Nature always victimises the peasant through floods, drought and the net result is famine, starvation and sometimes death. So, fear, hunger and despair are his constant companions - fear of the dark future, fear of the sharpness of hunger, fear of the blackness of death. A peasant has to work without any hope. There is no cure for the hopeless condition of the helpless. Their helplessness seems inevitable and it also seems that they are pitted against a force beyond their capacity to face. So, *Nectar in a Sieve* "... is a passionate cry of protest against social injustice, portrayal of patience in the face of suffering, of labour even when there is no hope." The novel delineates every possible problem that peasants can face. They have to face the cruelty caused by fate which
is inescapable, but it is disappointing, that they have to face the problems caused by an unjust social order which may be alleviated.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the theme of harmony in marital relations is depicted through the relations of Nathan and Rukmani. Socio-economic factors as well as cruel nature affect their relations. Rukmani is married at the age of twelve to Nathan. Since then, in spite of their poverty, they lead their lives satisfactorily. The problem arises only when they have to face famine at one time and drought at another and they have no grains. At first a half-empty cooking pot makes life miserable for them and later they are to satisfy themselves with water only. They are tortured by indigence, appetite, descent and malnutrition.

Murugan, the son of Nathan and Rukmani, too faces similar problems as his parents. He leaves his home and village and comes to city, in order to earn money and lead his life comfortably and he marries a girl there, but his lot does not change. He feels dissatisfied due to poverty and hunger. As a result, he abandons his wife and children and disappears. In both the cases economic factors are responsible for the cracks in husband-wife relationship, but in the case of Ira, daughter of Nathan and Rukmani, social conditions play a significant role. Ira’s marriage is also a broken marriage. Social evils caused by cruel customs come into being. As, Ira could not bear a child for sometime after marriage, her in-laws become dissatisfied and her husband rejects her and he remarries.
In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the theme of clash between traditional ideas and the forces of material progress is also depicted. The destructive force of progress, in the novel, is the tannery which stands for materialism and agro-industrialism, while the rural life stands for traditionalism and it is depicted by the protagonist Rukmani.

The tannery is owned by an Englishman. The busy industrialism spoils the peaceful countryside. In the name of progress the atmosphere of the village is completely violated.

The tannery that pollutes the vernal atmosphere of the village with its smells and clamour and corrodes the values of the people, is the main target of Rukmani's attack. She concedes that it brings in more money; but there are counter-balancing evils. Greater commercialization, an alien population, labour unrest and the death of a son, are some of its consequences.17

The tannery initially caused high market prices and later swallowed the rented land of the peasants from the zamindar and shattered the calm and tranquil rural life.

The tannery, on the one hand, symbolises the growth of materialism and on the other hand it keeps on usurping the land of peasants for new buildings. Nathan and Rukmani too lose their land which they have been farming for thirty years. Peasants till the rented land year after year in the hope of buying it one day but when they are left with no land they feel helpless and unsure of what to do. Rukmani
says that while there was land, there was hope, but there was nothing left of the sort.

The Indian peasant has to work without any hope. That is why Rukmani thinks that there is no use putting up resistance as the peasants have to leave everything in the hands of God and bear all the sorrows and sufferings, as Rukmani says, "We are in God's hands." The Westerner cannot stomach all this and reacts to the Indian peasants value system. An English doctor tells Rukmani: "Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die... Why do you not demand - cry out for help...." ...you must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life."

So, the traditional Indian attitude to suffering clashes with the modern ideas. This traditional resignation of people cannot be accepted by the modern man, whose philosophy is to fight the evil, whether the outcome is victory or defeat. So, the traditional apprehension of the universal, the eternal, is challenged by the modern obsession with the particular, the contemporary.

Not only the Westerners but the younger generation also show their distrust of traditional values. They protest against the passive attitudes of accepting their lot. Even one of the Rukmani's son cannot understand, why his father did not protest when he was evicted from the land he had been tilling for years. When Rukmani's sons can no more tolerate injustice and their parent's attitudes, they leave home in
the hope of improving their fortunes. So, generation gap too leads to the conflict between traditionalism and modernism.

*Some Inner Fury* focusses on Markandaya's major thematic concern of East-West encounter. It is a political novel transmitting "the high incandescence of national liberation struggle of the Indian people against the English colonizers." Here she presents the problem of the East and the West not only on the plane of interrelation of different civilizations, but also on the plane of corelation of the spiritual world of the man of the colonial East and the material world of the man of the colonial West. It shows how cultural differences effect individuals in their endeavour to communicate and establish meaningful relations. The novel probes the thinking attitude, mind set and value system of both the East and the West at the political as well as social level. The novel analyses the individual reaction to cultures dissimilar to his own and the sense of fear, distrust and alienation that he experiences in such a situation. Kamala Markandaya also probes how individuals and race relations get affected by cross cultural interaction where one culture keeps on influencing the other, sometimes positively but sometimes negatively.

The events, described in the novel are woven around the Quit India Movement of 1942. The theme of East-West conflict is dramatized in two ways: political agitation and cultural disparity. Kit, who returns from England after having his education at Oxford, marries Premala. Premala has been brought up in a family which believes in a blend of anglicization and Indianisation, but she has not been...
anglicized. So, in their marriage, Kit’s Western education and outlook make for cultural disparity, for Premala has traditional outlook. She is unable to accept his love, and finds it difficult to cope with her husband’s social obligations and English friends. Though she tries her best, she finds it disgusting to adjust to Kits westernized life-style. "... and though she tried desperately, she plainly found it difficult to adapt herself to him." Kit’s nature, likings are quite different from hers. He would propose Premala to play tennis

... and the two of them would drive off. At sundown they would return... Premala looking mortified, for she was no good at the game and heartily disliked playing. It would have been far better had she said so: but she did not - she persisted, perhaps having been warned that a woman must be companion as well as wife to her husband. On another occasion Kit says "only your sari does seem to get in the way... you ought to try wearing shorts..." She keeps on doing as she is told. She "made no complaint... she said she was happy to go. But... unskilled in the craft of concealment... She could bring out the words, but she could not control her voice the blood in her face, the look in her eyes, these were her betrayers..." She is so gentle and had tender and pleasing ways that even Govind, Kit’s adopted brother, suffers on her account and tells her, "It is not a vital matter... this of moving among the English." Her repeated failures and mistakes make her more nervous and inhibited and Kit, more bewildered and disappointed. Mira sorrows over the beautiful sister-in-law with "her
hurt lost face... which never lost its tenderness because she could
never learn to be tough, but which gave up, one by one, the lights and
colours of happiness."\textsuperscript{27}

Even in case of furnishing the house, Kit, with his
understanding and love of the West, furnishes his house completely in
English style. There is nothing Indian in it. The house-keeping is done
by English trained servants. Premala's Kashan rugs and Pahari
miniatures, which are purely Indian, are not to be seen anywhere in the
house. Kit has no liking for Indian music though he is proud of
Premala's skill in playing the \textit{veena}. In such circumstances Premala
tries to seek fulfilment in a village. There she helps an English
missionary Hickey, to run a new school for the village children, under a
village re-settlement scheme sponsored by the British. She turns
towards village atmosphere only for consolation. As she is accepted
there in her own right, it soon becomes her world, "for she could find
no place in the one her husband inhabited."\textsuperscript{28} So, incompatibility due
to cultural disparities, a common reason for tension in marriage is one
aspect of the theme of East-West conflict.

Political crisis in India in pre-independence days affects the
lives of the characters and young ones suffer the most. The
harmonious relations between the Britishers and the Indians are
obstructed by the national political crisis. Richard is an Englishman,
who comes with Kit, when he returns from England. He spends a few
weeks in the house of his friend, Kit and this offers ample scope to
juxtapose the East and the West: "Of course, of course," said my
father, "We shall be delighted... and somehow he managed to look as if he meant what he said. My mother... concerned with the problems of accommodating an Englishman... could not help showing something of her dismay; our relations were even more openly disconcerted."29

Here he meets Meera, the younger sister of Kit. They are irresistibly drawn to each other, but Richard goes away to join his duty, Mira too takes up a job and stays with Kit and Premala in the city. In the course of her work as a journalist she meets Richard again after a lapse of three years and they meet with greater love and understanding: "That’s why I’m early too", he said, and somehow when he said that there was suddenly "a new feeling between us, full of warmth and understanding."30 So, they fall in love with each other and experience the happiest moment of their lives. "He said... I’m so happy with you... I’ll come back, I’ll always come back to you."31

The two ardent lovers believe that they can never be separated from each other, but the inevitable is brought about by the surging tides of political turmoil and the two are torn apart. By and by, Mira too starts realizing the danger of loving an Englishman. Richard falls a prey to the political unrest in India and Mira is left alone to mourn the loss of her lover throughout her life. In the words of S.C.Harrex, the novel dramatizes the lives of young people "lost in the political confusion of the independence struggle."32

Richard and Mira are away from the town, when they return, the two find that the town is in the grip of a 'hartal' protesting against the presence of the English rulers and are bewildered by the eerie
silence. She reads one of the Quit India banners, and senses the creeping hostility around them. She tries to draw Richard away when a bottle of acid just misses him and she says in fear, "I clung to him. Tightly, hold fast, never let go. Let go and you will be swept away. You will go and he will be left, or he will be swept away and you will be lost." When Richard asks her if it is safer for him if they are together, she does not give a direct answer. So, their relationship suddenly changes, for she is an Indian, on the side of the nationalists, while he is of the ruling nation. "...I know now that the silence of these streets enfolded me too. I was a part of it, it no longer repudiated me, and from within its invisible envelop, do what I could, there was no easy reaching out to those who stood outside."34 Richard is outside.

Initially, they think that the national imbroglio will not jeopardize their love, but later on there is a feeling of doubt. Richard asks Mira "Has it infected you too - all this 'your people' and 'my people'?" Mira replies thus: "I thought, and I said No... I thought I spoke the truth. I thought there was no region of my mind I could not enter, if I tried. I did not know - I had yet to learn - that no man knows himself."35 So, she tries to tell Richard that the agitation is not against him, or balanced sensible people like him, but he tells her:

It is a terrible thing, to feel unwanted... Do you really think that people can be singled out... as an individual... No, of course not... You belong to one side, if you don't belong to the other... There is no in between... no middle standing. You
hadn’t a badge? - but it was there in your face, the colour of your skin, the accents of your speech, in the clothes on your back...36

Their position becomes insecure as the dragnet of politics spreads its snare and the situation goes out of control. Gopal and his men set fire to the school since it is a symbol of British rule. Premala is inside. She is found suffocated to death. Both, Kit and Govind, torn by grief, jealousy and anger accuse each other. In the dark night Kit is killed and no one knows the murderer. Gopal is implicated in the murder case on the false testimony of an English priest, but Mira is sure that he is not responsible. As a result, the patriotic Indian people adopt a tough attitude towards the British and the passion of hatred and jealousy runs high at the moment. The English believe Hickey, the Englishman, when he accuses Govind of murder and the Indians believe Mira who asserts Govind’s innocence. Mira asks Richard, "Do you believe it... this Englishman’s word against mine?" "I said it and it was as if I had inflicted some wound on myself. I stared at him frightened, I saw the blood slowly ebbing from his face..."37 In the trial that follows, Mira's firm belief in Govind’s innocence raises in her a surging hatred against the terrible power of the English. Though she cries that the feeling of hatred is not for Richard, but Richard feels that at a time like this no one can be singled out.

In the wake of the national awakening when the people’s fire and fury touch a new high, Mira has to make a choice whether to join the procession of nationalists or to stay back with her lover Richard.
After much thinking she realises and accepts that there can now be no happy outcome of their love. So, she decides:

Soon, I would go too. When the tail of that procession went through the door, I would join it, and Richard would stay behind. This was not a time for decision, for he knew he could not come with me, and I knew I could not stay: it was simply the time for parting. What had been given us had been gifted freely... it could never be taken from us... whatever happened the sweetness of that knowledge would always remain... Now it was time to set it down, and go.38

At this time, she sees the distinctions between the two races. "They were my people - those others were his."39 Eventually, they are separated. A.V.Krishna Rao is of the view that Mira joins the mob, forsaking her love for good, as "conflicting emotions rage in her heart"40 but once the decision is taken, it is irretraceable for her. No doubt, the decision is prompted by considerations of the national cause but there is a certain amount of instinctiveness about the decision. This instinctiveness is termed as "impulsiveness"41 by S. Krishna Sarma. Though all the 'your people' and 'my people' mean nothing to her, they cannot stay together. "... But ... I knew I would go, even as I knew Richard must stay. For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong."42 Richard gets killed in the melee of the processions and Mira is left ruminating. "...still my heart wept, tearless, desolate, silently to itself. But what matter to universe... if now and then a world is born or a star should die; or
what matter to the world, if here and there a man should fall, or a head or a heart should break."43 So, fate has destroyed her loved ones in the racial conflicts.

In this way, through Mira and her love for Richard the theme of East-West encounter is dramatized. Richard and Mira are finally forced to accept that the political situation of the time spells disaster for their love. Though this is not a historical novel, but against a historical background it shows the impersonal forces of national revolution destroying the private desire for happiness and this is a reality that can be found valid in any country, in any age.

In *A Silence of Desire*, the theme tradition vs. modernity occurs very prominently. The persons of the same generation hold different values. Kamala Markandaya talks of unexpressed desire that affect human relationships especially man-woman relationships. According to the writer, each individual is the product of a value system that over the period of time becomes an inseparable part of his being. This value system gives to an individual his outlook and approach to life, his desire for and reaction to the situations in life and a sense of morality and spirituality which he holds dear. When persons of dissimilar value system come together in a relationship, contradiction and clash is inevitable. Complications also occur in the protagonists inability to communicate their point of view and fear to the other which results in contradiction, conflict and unhappiness. Kamala Markandaya also probes in *Silence of Desire* the conflict between faith and reason, science and superstition. This theme has the
immediacy of the common contemporary problem that common man faces and the theme is manifest through the protagonist of the novel who represent the two aspects of life. Sarojini is traditional and superstitious while her husband, Dandekar, is modern and questioning. The protagonist of the novel, Dandekar, is a senior clerk in the office. He has to fight an abstract antagonist - the faith of his wife and the power of the *Swamy*. Just like traditional women Sarojini is perfectly dedicated to her husband and children:

She was a good Sarojini: good with children, an excellent cook, and 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.44

She is very calm and placid. They live happily without involving themselves in a deep, serious discussions.

The happiness of Dandekar and Sarojini fades away when Dandekar comes to know of Sarojini's visits to the *Swamy*. He even follows her one day to find nothing except that she along with some women is sitting near the *Swamy* and later the *Swamy* whispers something into her ear. As Dandekar does not believe in swamis, this is enough to provoke him and he accuses his wife of infidelity. Till now, Sarojini has not disclosed anything to her husband. Now, unable to tolerate the accusations, she discloses her problem: "I go to be healed. So do the others whom you saw. I have a growth in my womb."45 The *Swamy* functions as a social succor and security to the
sick, he "keeps going on faith and hope and other ingredients in dispute." But Dandekar does not believe all this or whatever Sarojini told him.

Changes in thinking are brought about by the changing ideology all over the world, particularly due to the developments in the technology of communication over the last century. Dandekar has some influence of the British systems of thought, may be because of his previous English boss and because of his belief in reason he takes Sarojini to the doctor for thorough medical check up and comes to know that hers is the case of "an innocent tumour, quite common in women." Sarojini does not want to get herself operated. She hopes to be cured with the help of the Swamy. Her faith is traditional and Indian. According to her, "...the West has withered this faith, blighting it with talk of ignorance and superstition."

Sarojini's faith in the Swamy remains firm and unshakeable though Dandekar is doubtful of even the Swamy's genuineness. Sarojini is correct when she tells Dandekar "... I do not expect you to understand - you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out." Dandekar wants to get rid off the Swamy. He pays him a visit, not because of any faith in him but to find out whether he is genuine or fake. He also requests the Swamy to leave his wife. He says, "She believes in you, she comes to you... you can stop her coming." At the same time he is doubtful of achieving this and finds himself helpless in being able to
wean away his credulous wife from her firmly grounded faith and it is quite difficult for him to accept.

Dandekar stands all for reality. When the Swamy asks Dadekar if his possessions matter a great deal to him, Dandekar does not conceal his feelings and plainly tells the Swamy "They don't matter at all now, when I am sitting here with you. But they will, later, and that later is reality to me, in which I must live... You see, we are not rich people, we cannot afford to give away so much."\textsuperscript{51} Later, after the departure of the Swamy, he demands all the valuables of his family which are now in custody of the dwarf. He says, "I wanted these 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, my self, my children and these are the other fragments, of which even you must be aware."\textsuperscript{52}

Kamala Markandaya writes with the conviction of one who knows intimately the conflict between faith and reason, perhaps based on a personal awareness of its relevance in India today. Faith-healing goes back to the earliest days of world history, and outside India also, has won the sanction of diverse creeds.\textsuperscript{53}

Dandekar, however, does not force his wife into having an operation, as he is not sure if it would cure her, but he is sure of one thing that faith-healing will never work. At last, he gets some peace of mind when the Swamy advises Sarojini to undergo an operation and assures her that it will be successful and leaves the town. So, at the advice of
the Swamy Sarojini undergoes an operation and gets her tumour removed and the happiness of Dandekar returns again to him - who has waged "a war against abstractions like the superstition of his wife and the immense spiritual power of the Swamy."\(^{54}\)

In this way, the clash between faith and reason in the novel is brought forward through Sarojini, the believer and Dandekar, the rationalist, who are united in an apparently harmonious marriage but each a product of two different evolutions of thought. "It seems, the two opposite approaches to life - Western pragmatism and Eastern faith - are beautifully represented in this novel by juxtaposing Dandekar and Sarojini on the one hand and the doctor and the Swamy on the other."\(^{55}\)

In *A Silence of Desire*, Kamala Markandaya questions one of the basic tenets of eastern philosophy - reununciation, through the character of the Swamy. In the eastern context the Swamy would ideally be totally unaffected by materialism and would have renounced the world. In reality, though Sarojini’s faith in the Swamy may be firm and unshakeable but public opinion is divided on the conduct of the Swamy. When Ghose, Dandekar’s immediate superior is given the duty to investigate thoroughly into the Swamy’s conduct and ways of living he finds fault with the Swamy whom he calls "a fraud, an imposter, a man who preys on the credulous, of whom there are many in the South."\(^{56}\) Dandekar himself is doubtful of the Swamy’s genuineness. He, himself, sets out to discover whether the Swamy is genuine or fake.
The Swamy emerges as a person who is not without any demands. He does not perform a selfless duty. Rather, he accepts gifts from his followers, unconcerned about their financial problems. Sarojini gives her precious ornaments and even her son’s gold chain to the Swamy, as her donation to him. Of course, the Swamy claims that he is not a swindler but that he uses the money obtained through donations for charitable purposes but the fact remains that the character of the Swamy and his motives do remain dubious in the novel, raising a doubt in the mind of the reader if this is how a Swamy, who should have renounced the world is supposed to behave.

In A Silence of Desire Kamala Markandaya once again explores another common contemporary theme - harmony in marital relations. In this novel, doubt is the main cause of difference between Dandekar and Sarojini who lead their lives peacefully with the problem starting only when Dandekar becomes doubtful of the fidelity of Sarojini. Sarojini’s devotion to familial ties, her love and concern for her husband come to naught with her becoming a disciple of the Swamy. Dandekar is doubtful of his wife’s frequent visits to the Swamy, chides Sarojini and this leads to acrimony and marital discord.

Though after knowing the truth that Sarojini visited the Swamy to seek cure for her ailment, Dandekar becomes more sympathetic and considerate towards Sarojini but the gulf caused by lack of trust remains and this leads to what Edwin Thumbo calls "disruption of routine - oversleeping, the consequent rush to work by bus."57 Gone is the happy and peaceful atmosphere of the home.
Dandekar becomes a sad introspective man, tortured by fear, worry and frustration. He starts neglecting his home and children and even visits prostitutes, resulting in further aggravating the husband-wife relationship.

In *Possession* also the clash of Eastern and Western values is quite conspicuous. H.M. Williams considers that "The novel is one of the most forceful artistic explorations of the distortion of India’s national character in the British embrace and of her consequent urge to be free." Meena Belliappa says: "In *Possession*, she (Kamala Markandaya) tries to concretise the invincibility of the spiritual power of the East confronted with the glamour of the materialistic society of the West."

*Possession* views Indo-British racial and cultural contacts from the cultural perspective, in contrast to *Some Inner Fury*, which has political overtones in dealing with the theme of East-West encounter. Western culture can influence an Indian mind only for some time but it cannot leave a lasting impression for a Britisher cannot possess the spirit of an Indian. Lady Caroline Bell, a prosperous English divorcee, a great lover and promoter of fine arts discovers Valmiki, the twentieth century shepherd boy. He used to draw on the rock walls of caves and is a poor peasant residing in one of the interior villages whom she immediately decides to take under her care and succeeds in transporting him to London. In London she provides him with opportunities for the pursuit of his art and tries to make something exotic of the East and she herself tailors her material to fit a Western
public. Consequently he wins world-wide fame within a few years. The popularity of Val amongst the Englishmen is actually inspired by their enthusiasm for all that is Indian: "Being Indian helped him generally and massively for India had come into fashion. Fashionable to know of India, fashionable to know Indians, fashionable to admire its art, fashionable to welcome its women and even, at a pinch, its men."\textsuperscript{60}

Lady Caroline Bell, who is a woman of insatiable possessive instincts has whisked away a humble peasant-boy Valmiki from his village and his rugged little family to London, taking him as a lover and boasting "I discovered him in a cave. Oh, yes, a real one. In India, Hideously bare and uncomfortable, except for those superb walls. And Val of course."\textsuperscript{61} She wants to be the discoverer of new talents and wants to show that she has picked up and polished the nugget of Valmiki lying in a crevice in the rocks. She desires to exhibit Val's paintings in France, America and London and also wishes to be his inspiration.

In a foreign atmosphere and among strangers Valmiki adjusts himself to an appreciable extent and becomes anglicized in his manner and tongue under the patronage of Lady Caroline. Her training makes him cultivated and refined on the one hand, and he loses some of his virtues on the other. His honesty goes and he forgets his own motherland, though temporarily.

His English was good, the accent cultivated - Caroline had clearly made him work at it. Most of the uncouthness was
gone and some of the honesty. Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished Western world, obviously yes. The East was too strident, too dissonant, too austere, too raw; it had to be muted, toned down, tarter up... its people taught to genuflect before understatement - before a measure of acceptance came. Undilute East had always been too much for West; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right.62

Caroline represents "the colonial and post colonial attitudes and outlook."63 She represents the British in almost all aspects of possessiveness. She feels that India needs England for an all round development and is so possessive in her attitude that when she sees Valmiki, she decides to whisk him away to Britain and wishes to establish her full and firm hold upon him. In addition, she is resolute, haughty, materialistic, self-centred. From the very beginning she treats him as an object of art to be collected and preserved in a museum. She considers him to be her possession. "Caroline thinks Valmiki belongs to her, and in a way one's right. She won't let go. People don't easily give up what they think are their possessions. The English never have."64 This strong sense of possessiveness in her is in keeping with the general British attitude towards India. On the contrary, the narrator notices a kind of detachment in Valmiki: "I was left with the feeling that he was not only ardent partaker but partly onlooker as well: that
there still remained, for good augury, vestiges of a cold and watchful inner eye, as disdainful of others as of himself. "65

Caroline fully interfere in the life of Valmiki. She adroitly eliminates other young women - Ellie and Annabel, who try to win Valmiki's love. Ellie is a Jewish war refugee and is engaged as a housekeeper by Caroline. She becomes Val's inspiration, but Caroline cannot tolerate this and she succeeds in separating them and later in the novel, Val leaves Caroline, as he realises that all she cares about is the attainment of her ends. He starts living with eighteen year old Annabel, but Caroline is so strong-willed that she will not surrender to defeat so easily and somehow, manages to inform Annabel that Ellie was once 'an obsession' of Val's and that she committed suicide. As a result, Annabel recoils and Val is overcome with remorse. After this, Caroline quickly exploits racial prejudice and tells Annabel that, Indians are "Emotional...Unstable. Foreigners are - Dear Annabel, you must realise, they are not like us, you would never be able to rely on one of them."66 The relationship of Valmiki and Caroline cannot be described as more than fleshdeep, as the inner urges and aspirations of Val remains untouched. He may not hate her, but he does not love her either. He is rather loved by Caroline, a lady having no conscience.

... it would have been difficult with majestic exception, to have found much love lurking in the old relationship. Perhaps, indeed, relationship was not the word to describe forcible possessing which had established nothing so clearly as that
there could be no reasonable relationship - merely a straddling of one stranger by another with little of it for either.\textsuperscript{67}

Though Caroline succeeds in making Val a well-known artist, in becoming his mistress, teaching him her materialstic values - inspite of his resistance, yet she fails in dominating him spiritually, because Val, in every crisis turns to his mentor the \textit{Swamy}. So, Lady Caroline comes into conflict with the Swamy, a wise and spiritual man who also stakes his claim to possess his spiritual discipline, Valmiki and Valmiki becomes, a mere puppet without the freedom to choose for himself. Moreover, the exoticism inherent in the story of an Indian goatherd who is a genius and a western Jezebel who discovers his talent and transplants him into another soil, comes in the way of any significant exploration of either East-West relations or the impact of an alien culture on the life of an individual.\textsuperscript{68}

Valmiki is so much under the influence of the \textit{Swamy} that when Caroline asks him to leave the village for London, he is not ready to move even a step forward without seeking the permission of the \textit{Swamy}. Similarly, he does not start to paint, inspite of Caroline's promptings. It seems that the alien surroundings have strangled his talent. Caroline shows him a letter, which she pretends is from the \textit{Swamy}, his friend and guide in India. This link with the past inspires him and he starts painting once more. Caroline, in no way, can become Valmiki's inspiration. She cannot attain the place in his life which the
Swamy has. When the Swamy visits London, Valmiki totally forgets about Caroline and starts spending most of his time with the ascetic. Caroline is not afraid of anyone in this world, but the Swamy. "... she was afraid of him, or if not of him of the power he still wielded over the clay she had moulded and caressed to an image she could love."69

Caroline is unable to understand the true spirit of Valmiki. Though she proudly claims of having profound influence on Val, his spirit remains in the forceful grip of the Swamy. His attachment to the Swamy remains intact.

Valmiki’s attachment to the Swamy seemed undiminished, if less emotional than when he had been a child. It was to some extent certainly reciprocated; and perhaps it was this human tie, tenuous though it was, that had led the Swamy to forsake his isolated life... In all the years of their separation he had never once communicated with Valmiki, nor had there been any indirect enquiry; and his visit to London, though distantly connected with Valmiki, was only a matter of a few brief weeks.70

Even the process of westernization slowly wears away, and love for the motherland and the Swamy gets stronger day by day in Valmiki. The glamour and the comforts of the West could not bind him for long. When Caroline reminds him of the awful 'wilderness' of India, his reply: "No crime... The wilderness is mine; it is no longer terrible as it used to be: it is nothing"71 shows his detachment with the West. So, the crippling Western impact does not last long upon Val.
Caroline utterly fails to comprehend the true powers of spirituality and asceticism. She keeps on believing that Valmiki will, one day, come back to her, when he returns to India. She believes that his stay in India is only temporary. She says,

Now is not for ever. He has tasted other satisfactions - satisfactions that I have given and which he knows I can give. One day he will crave them again and then - ... Valmiki is yours now, but he has been mine. One day he will want to be mine again. I shall take care to make him want me again: and on that day I shall come back to claim him.\textsuperscript{72}

The trip of Caroline to India, to bring back Val to England, proves to be a complete failure. He refuses to return with her for he does not want to be owned. She is surprised to discover that he is living in total peace and satisfaction and has returned to his caves and the Swamy and is painting again. She reminds him of his close association with western life and with herself but the Western impact has cracked up in the face of the Swamy’s spiritual aura. So, he adopts a negatively tough posture towards her and ultimately she has to return empty handed and disappointed, proving that the western culture may influence the eastern mind but cannot possess it.

In Possession the theme of search for identity is depicted through the character of Valmiki, an ambivalent expatriate who is shown shuttling across the continents in order to eke out an honourable place and living for himself. In Possession, Valmiki shuttles between the Swamy and Lady Caroline. He has no identity of his own.
He is quite influenced by the *Swamy* and does not move even a step without his permission. Lady Caroline, who has insatiable possessive instincts, wants to dominate him completely. So, "... Valmiki who forms the focal point of the conflict is a mere puppet without the freedom to choose for himself."  

Valmiki agrees to leave the village for London and then starts painting only after seeking permission of the *Swamy*. Caroline tries to change Valmiki according to her own liking, trying to refine him inspite of Valmiki’s resistance. When Valmiki comes closer to Elle and she becomes his inspiration, Caroline tries to and becomes successful in separating the two. She does not want to loose Valmiki. In case of Annabel also, Caroline very successfully creates a rift between Annabel and Valmiki. She treats him no better than her property and guards him "with zeal and efficiency as she might have a property - the necklace of diamonds round her throat..."  

She fails to understand the true spirit of Valmiki which is still in the forceful grip of the *Swamy*. This upsets and disillusions Valmiki who does not want to be owned, and who yearns to lead an independent life. That is why, when he returns to India, to the patronage of the *Swamy*, he is fully satisfied and peaceful and does not want to go back to London and lead the life of slavery. Valmiki is able to overcome the western impact with the help of the *Swamy*’s spiritual influence on him and he is able to experience emotional satiation when he returns to India, to the patronage of the *Swamy*. Valmiki’s deep attachment to the *Swamy* and his living with the *Swamy* in total peace and satisfaction is a matter of surprise for
Caroline. Thus, though initially Valmiki leads a suffocated life, where he has no identity and he is just a puppet in the hands of Caroline, but ultimately he reaches the place which he thinks fit for himself and attains peace of mind.

*A Handful of Rice* is primarily concerned with the problem of identity for a struggling youth in the form of dehumanized urban surroundings and people. It also depicts how need and starvation force one to think of adopting unfair means in order to earn money. Ravi, the protagonist of the novel, runs away from the countryside and its impoverished conditions to improve his lot in the city, but financial problems entrap him even in the city. He tries hard to overcome his adverse circumstances but he is crushed under the tyrannical wheels of destiny.

Ravi, the son of a poor peasant, leaves his village in disgust hoping to make a better living in Madras. In Madras he only becomes one of those who throng the city-streets for suitable jobs. But the city offers him nothing except unemployment, frustration and encounters with the police. At last, he realises that in order to earn his livelihood, he should rely more on his hands than the meagre education that he has got in his village and which has robbed him of any ability to work with his hands. Now, instead of expecting a white collared job, he makes friends with a blacksmith named Kannan. Before he starts work with him, he is introduced to the underworld and he becomes an active member of this world. He is exposed to all kinds of evil, like:
the insensitiveness of the affluent, their mania for conspicuous consumption, their hardness of heart; the exploitation of small fish by big, the worker by capitalist, the Apus of the world by the Big Shops in Mount Road; and the infernal success of the bootlegger, the black marketeer, the drug-pedlar at the cost of the poor, the down and out the desperate.75

This world, however, holds a bright future for Ravi. It is:

his passport to a world shot with glitter and excitement: a world that revived the incandescent glow the city had once kindled; and suddenly the terror and the loneliness were gone, lifted from the land whose other components were hunger, the lassitude of hunger... Of course much of this world, this dazzling world, lay in the future: but every kind of fear and privation became bearable in the light of its bright promise.76

He cannot continue this kind of life either. Attracted towards Nalini, he decides to leave this world, reform himself and lead a decent life henceforth:

For her, he resolved, everything would be different, he would be different. No act of his should sully the wholesome quality he discerned in her, a kind of vulnerable purity that he wanted to enclose and guard feeling himself cleansed and enriched by it.77

This decent life again leads him to poverty.

The hapless hopeless condition of Ravi is pictured in the novel. He has left his village in search of decent prosperous life and lost in
the labyrinthine of self-identity, the city does not offer him any attractive life. Ravi cannot join the underworld again because of his promise to Nalini and at the same time he finds himself unable to support the entire family by pursuing his father-in-law, Apu's, code of conduct. In the words of Margaret P. Joseph "It is not merely economic insecurity that is portrayed but the moral problems of conscience it arouses, and the apprehension that honesty and prosperity are not always synonymous." Ravi, once again, tries to seek help from Damodar and join the underworld but he is rejected for want of guts and courage and is advised to go back to his village, though this is no solution for a man who has to look after "three children and... mother-in-law... And another child on the way." Ravi feels sad and dejected. He cannot even afford a doctor for the treatment of his son, who ultimately dies of meningitis. Ravi tries every inch to improve his lot, but he meets success neither in the village, nor in the city, nor in the underworld.

In town the roof may not be thatched, but it still leaks since tiles are costly to replace. The half empty cooking-pot of the village provides only one good meal in town when the wage-earner is unemployed. The poor harvests of the village find their echo in the rice scarcity and the long queues for rice in the town. The disease that strikes the villager can sweep away a beloved son in the town as well, when one is too harassed by debts to call a doctor...
He contrasts the little he can offer his wife, with the luxury of the houses he visits in the course of his work. He feels dissatisfied at his failure to make both ends meet inspite of hard labour. He is cleft by tension between Damodar’s values and Nalini’s and is unable to find his own. He also attempts to create an honourable place for himself in society, but all in vain. He feels tortured to think “Who was he here? He did not know, he did not care, no one cared.”81 Ravi is terrified of losing his identity. He faces a moral dilemma as he realises the difference between the moral idea rooted in honesty and the moral fact that honesty can buy no rice and pay no bills. He finds it impossible to bridge the gap between desire and its fulfilment. He has to struggle against society and its values. He is at a loss to find out, who are the sinners "those who kept their standards and sacrificed their families, or those who went out to grab what they could.”82 Mrs. Margaret P. Joseph writes:

He is destroyed by a false society, represented by the "people" who think he has no feelings, who give him no privacy, who pin him down, actually and metaphorically, who give orders and who have money. His harsh treatment of Nalini, his incest with his mother-in-law, are indirect results of this frustrated rage against society.83

So, the novel highlights Ravi’s bid to know himself properly and his anguish when disowned by the village as well as the city.

Like Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice is also concerned with the theme of social realism. It depicts poverty and hunger in a
ruthless society. Kamala Markandaya, in this novel probes into the misery of human predicament. The hopeless condition of the young persons is remarkably pictured. Ravi is not satisfied with his hand to mouth living. He tries hard to better his lot, but in spite of hard work, he does not meet success. His efforts to get a handful of rice for the continuance of his life and maintenance of his family ends in fiasco. All domestic budgeting has proved a mockery in the face of the steadily rising prices.

Not only Ravi but several thousands face similar problems. This is clearly depicted when hungry, unruly mob loots rice and demands loudly: "Rice today, rice. Rice today, rice!" Thus, Ravi's yearning to overcome his existential problems comes to naught. He even tries to join Damodar, an active member of the criminal underworld, but he never musters courage to join him and finds no solution to provide, at least, the necessities to his family. So all his life has been a prolonged search for better existence though worthless.

In *A Handful of Rice* also, Kamala Markandaya explores the strained relations of husband and wife due to financial reasons and the difference of values. Ravi's relation with his wife Nalini, becomes strained on account of financial constrains. He comes to Madras in the hope of getting rid of his poverty but he finds it difficult to make both ends meet. Unable to provide the necessities to his family, Ravi feels gloomy and dejected and his nature becomes irritable and fretful. As a result, Nalini is neglected. He even treats her harshly. He cannot join Damodar because of Nalini's dislike for earning money through
dishonest means. In frustration he makes his own life hellish. He feels dissatisfied when he is not given any privacy. Though Nalini does not mind it, he feels the necessity of spending at least a few moments alone or with his wife. So due to difference of values and financial crisis, the relations of Ravi and Nalini become strained.

In Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* the clash of race and culture is depicted. "She sets the story in a remote village of South India in order to emphasize the confrontation between the Eastern traditional values and the Western scientific values."85 *The Coffer Dams* is an extension of Kamala Markandaya's fiction that deals with the themes of East-West encounter and in this novel microcosm symbolizes macrocosm. The remote little village becomes a mirror of an oppressive system that is materialistically progressive but spiritually dehumanising. Industrialization, advancement achieved at the cost of human dignity is repressive and regressive in nature. The eastern values which eulogize the human spirit may be more meaningful than western attitude and knowledge which may bring progress but corrodes the human heart. This theme is elaborated remarkably well through people who are not just individuals, but become symbols of the human situation and cultural attitudes.

Clinton, the head of a large British engineering firm, is quite harsh. He is conditioned by memories of the colonial past. He feels very much puzzled and irritated to see his young wife Helen's boundless curiosity about India and its people and her rapport with them. There are several incidents where the insensitivity of the whites...
Racial tension is born of the colonial past and exhibits itself in contemporary social relations. The tribals are persuaded to move in order to make room for the white men's quarters. The meaning of which is that during blasting the English will sit comfortably in their solidly built houses and the tribals will suffer in their flimsy huts, but Clinton is unconcerned about this. He thinks that the tribals would get used to it. For Helen, this is surprising to get used to suffering. So she tells Clinton "Can't you care? Don't human beings matter anything to you? Do they have to be a special kind of flesh before they do?"91

Clinton is so race conscious and considers the tribals so useless, dull that he avoids allowing them to handle expensive machines. When Smith, the English crane operator refuses to use the crane because of the uncertainty of its safety, at that time, Bashiam, the Indian, is given the job, without consideration for his safety in performing the job.

The two dominant races of the world - the English and the Indians - cannot have lasting relations. They cannot get over skin-deep prejudices and jealousies. Even the relation of Helen and Bashiam seems to operate on a physical level only. Helen is drawn towards Bashiam because of her unfulfilled desires which are ignored by her husband. Bashiam, while operating the defective crane, is seriously injured and permanently crippled. After his fatal injury, she withdraws herself from him for his disabled body no more attracts Helen.

In the East-West confrontation in the novel, Clinton stands for western neo-colonialism with its emphasis on material progress and
Krishnan stands for Eastern values of non-attachment to material progress and the brotherhood of man.

The novel *The Coffer Dams*, just like *A Silence of Desire*, highlights the unavoidable clash between tradition and modernity in a forceful manner. The novel explores the issues related to scientific attitudes and human values, a national approach to nature and an emotional response to its changing moods and freaks. The novel may also be said to expose the theme of industrialisation which is a gift of modernity. In the novel, a project - the construction of a dam - is executed. It will help in the progress of the country but the novel, taken as a whole, is "a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of the modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life." The construction work is carried on by a large British firm aided by Indian technicians and tribal labour. Clinton - the chief engineer, may be described as representing the moderns. He along with his team and fellow workers has to construct a dam to channelise the waters of a turbulent river in an unenlightened village. This will benefit and uplift the masses - the tribals, who may be said to represent the traditionalists.

Clinton has only one aim and that is to finish work in time. He does not take any precaution to avoid accidents and is concerned with the material progress only being quite indifferent towards the workers. Bashiam becomes permanently crippled only because he has to operate an ill-repaired crane which an Englishman has refused to operate. Even Helen is forced to think if work is more important than the men. She
accuses Clinton of being inhuman. Markendrick, another chief engineer, also thinks that "he (Clinton) seemed to miss out something on the human level."93

Clinton may be "responsive to nature, to the landscape, to the beauty of birds and animals, but he is apathetic towards his workers."94 He may be called a dehumanized person. He is quite indifferent towards the tribals. He is ignorant of their sufferings. For him, tribals are some stone age dwellers who are hustled into the twentieth century.

Rawlings too is an example of the double standards adopted by the oppressor who wishes to provide decent burial to his own people but questions the need for maintaining decency of the last rites for the tribals. At this, Krishnan, who is not concerned with the material progress and stands for the brotherhood of man answers him: "It is a simple matter of equality... the same done to us as to you. Whether in life or death."95

The novel very clearly depicts the effects of industrialization on the simple life of the villagers, as in Nectar in a Sieve. The dam, built for the benefit and uplift of the masses, encroaches slowly over the tradition bound village. The plans and charts of the British engineers and technocrats threaten nature - the jungle, the river - which is an integral part of the village life. The conflict between tradition and modernity is also symbolised by the death of the tribal chief at establishment of dam - a symbol of scientific and technological knowledge.
In *The Coffer Dams*, some insight into rural life and the life of labourers can be got. The book takes us to the jungle, as the story is set in a remote village of South India. The labour class includes the tribals and menial workers who are engaged in the work of dam construction. They are innocent, ignorant, tradition-bound and unenlightened people, living in the lap of nature and they are exploited very much. Not to talk of their comfort, no one cares for their safety even. Even in the case of the dead, the officials are unwilling to give them a decent burial. Thus, *The Coffer Dams* offers a full fledged view of the labour class - their exploitation, sufferings and their domination by the official world.

In *The Coffer Dams*, Clinton and Helen suffer strained relations and Kamala Markandaya probes the psyche of their relationship. Clinton, an engineer, pursues his work so much that he ignores his wife Helen who suffers because of his lack of interest in her. His insensitivity towards Helen creates a wide gap between the two and she is drawn to Bashiam - a tribal - due to Clinton’s inconsiderate behaviour. Clinton and Helen enjoy different temperaments. They behave differently towards the tribals. Helen, contrary to Clinton, shows deep sympathy for the tribals and the natives. She is humane and compassionate by nature. To her people are more important than abstractions. That’s why Bashiam is drawn towards her. He discovers an affirmity of soul with her. In the words of Uma Prameswaran: "They are twin souls, and this experience only brings about a mutual acknowledgement that their abstract relationship had come to a stage
which calls for physical consummation." This too widens the gap between Helen and Clinton. "Dabble in everything, get your hands muddied. Hands that belonged to him, whatsoever. So holding her down, physically, enjoying the leap and twist under him and thrusting deeper and coming to nothing, spirit gone and womb closed, only a proper thing in his arms." This is not a true, harmonious relationship between the two. Their relationship may be carnal or physical, but not spiritual at all. There is a vast spiritual chasm between them. So, the clash between husband and wife is due to the difference in their point of view about life.

In *The Nowhere Man* the theme of East-West encounter is all the more persistent and pervasive. In this novel, the condition of Indian immigrants in England before and after independence is illustrated. This book can be called a documentary on racial prejudice and its origin in colonialism. It shows in detail the misery generated by imperialism, the hatred of domination and the exploitation. *The Nowhere Man* discusses in detail the suffering and anguish caused to simple ordinary people by a system that is ambitious and insensitive. The novel focuses on how the human greed for power and wealth makes tyrants out of humans who begin to exploit those weaker than them. This basic lust for power motivates a political system to exploit nations and the people. At another level, the novel also talks of how the established systems do not accept any outsiders in their fold making a clear demarcation of the native and the non-native. Such demarcations lead to the

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subversion of human values and arouse fear, anguish and hatred in the minds of the exploited ones and uprooted ones.

Srinivas, the protagonist of the novel, is a victim of British cruelty and tyranny in India before his departure for England. Srinivas and his wife are forced to leave India because Britishers suspect him of carrying underground activities against them. So, to escape the cruelty and harassment of the British in India, they move to England and settle down there. Though the circumstances place them in 'an alien shore', they can never forsake their Indian way of life. Vasantha, the protagonist's wife sticks fast to the 'Indian way of life', to her sari, religion, rites and vegetarianism etc. unto her last. She holds a very pro-Indian stance in matters of religion, and looks down upon Christianity as a religion for ten years old. She is very practical. She forces her husband to buy a house of their own, though in a foreign land. On having bought the house, she says with pride: "At last we have achieved something. A place of our own, where we can live according to our lights although in alien surroundings: and our children after us, and after them theirs." Even Srinivas who acquires a little bit of bohemian habits of living, cannot change his basic habits and Gandhian outlook upon life. When Mrs. Fed Fletcher asks him if her son has brutally assaulted him Srinivas replies in the negative in the typical Indian 'forget and forgive attitude'. He finds it difficult to leave the customs observed in his own old country. That is why, when his wife dies he wishes to consign her ashes to an Indian river, instead of foreign waters. Srinivas experiences a terrible emotion when the
policeman reproves him for dumping 'rubbish' in the Thames and he could only answer "It was not rubbish... It was my wife." But his emotions, his sentiments are nothing for the British, only because he is coloured. The fact, that coloured people fought loyally for England, does not matter. They still remain unfit, unwanted and outsiders.

Though with great difficulty, Srinivas is ready to adjust himself to the new western situation, but England is not ready to accept him. The tragedy is this that despite his thirty years of stay in England he is considered an alien. His sons have fought for England and one has even died for the country and still he is treated as an outcast and is avoided and feared. He is a displaced person, who belongs neither to the place of his birth nor to England. He moves out of India under duress and tyranny but the English community does not accept him. Though he tries his best to adapt himself to the alien climate and manners and even claims that England is his country, but people grow totally inimical towards him. Srinivas believes in the decency of the English and thinks that they will allow him to call it his own country. He cannot accept that the old tolerance is disappearing very fast but, Abdul from Africa tells him: "First thing that goes wrong it will be their country and you go back, nigger, to yours, back where you came from." He further states that "Is there no such thing as history? Which tells how, when they were the top dogs, we were the pariah dogs... Took my land from right under my nose, took my old man first so he would not bleat, took my pride so I never walked with my head up, took my freedom finally." He gives many examples of
discrimination in restaurants, at the customs and of the jealousy of the whites, but Srinivas is not ready to agree and he believes in forgetting and forgiving policy.

Fred, the son of one of his neighbours, is of the view that all the immigrants who have blocked the job opportunities for the English youths, should leave England and go back to their homelands. Srinivas feels anguished at this, because he has started accepting England as his own country. England may not be the country of his birth but it is a country where he has spent a major part of his life and therefore the thought of leaving anguishes him. The natives are unable to understand such feelings as a result of which Srinivas is forced to face racial prejudice at its worst. He does not get along well with his neighbours, Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass, who do not like him and his comfortable establishment. For no fault of Srinivas, they are quite hostile towards him. Fred Fletcher spearheads the anti-colour agitation in the locality. He even makes an attempt to assault Srinivas. However, afterwards, his mother apologises saying "you've got as much right to live here as... he has!" Srinivas feels deeply disturbed and thinks if people need to re-assure when there was no danger, there must be something serious, wrong with the system, but still he denies any involvement of Fred in the incident when Fred's mother enquires about it. On the contrary, Fred is a hard-hearted guy and he repays Srinivas's goodness by burning his house. Fred thinks himself to be the saviour of his country and wants to do away with the immigrants. So, one night, he along with his companions enters the
basement of Srinivas's house. They fix the blasting machinery in the basement. As a result, the fuse starts burning and the fire spreads, devastating the whole of the big building. Srinivas is saved but he is in a state of deep shock and dies after some time. According to Margaret P. Joseph "... lack of love for one's fellowmen, lack of faith in the human brotherhood, is the core of the problem."\textsuperscript{103}

In the words of Niroj Banerji the "... depiction of East-West confrontation... (in) \textit{The Nowhere Man} is indisputably superb."\textsuperscript{104} Srinivas represents numberless Indians who live out of their country in a hapless, hopeless condition. Srinivas, throughout his life remains disconsolate and restless but non-violent. So, "The theme of \textit{The Nowhere Man} is the reaction of society in modern Britain to the inflow of coloured immigrants. It dramatises the attitudes of liberals... and of radicals... that began in the late fifties, and have hardened in recent years."\textsuperscript{105}

The \textit{Two Virgins} is a study of the theme of search for identity, though K.S. Ramamurti finds that "it has no well defined central theme..."\textsuperscript{106} It is a story of "...a girl who trades away her soul, lured by city splendours, and a girl who watches, learns her lesson and returns to the bosom of Mother Nature."\textsuperscript{107} The two virgins in the novel that is its two protagonists become symbols of the dual aspects of life - the natural and the cultivated. The novel talks of the corrosion of the human heart and the blemishing of the human soul by the lust for money, success, name and fame. Though there is nothing wrong in aspiring for these yet the tragedy occurs when the human beings cross
the limits of normal human aspirations and compromise with self integrity and soul for the fulfilment of these aspirations. According to the novelist, such compromises lead an individual to nowhere but pain, suffering and humiliation. On the other hand, once belief in acceptance of the traditional values may not bring success but it definitely brings dignity, peace of mind and a sense of harmony for the individual in his search for meaning in life.

Lalita does not like her village life and wants to find her future in the city. Miss Mendoza the teacher and Mr. Gupta, the film director take her away from her family and introduce her to the city, but in the city she loses her virginity and she returns to the village in a pregnant state. She is quite disspirited and disappointed and even tries to commit suicide but is saved and the baby is aborted. Inspite of all this she does not want to stay in the village, where, according to her, the life is dull and dreary. She feels that she belongs to the city, though she has become a victim of the corrupting influences of the city. That is why she disappears leaving a note that

...she couldn't face going back to the village: it stifled her, her talents, her ambition. She intended to stay in the city where she belonged. She could look after herself. They weren't to search for her, which in any case would be a waste of time because they would never find her.108

On the other hand, Saroja is a marked contrast to Lalitha. She has an unflinching faith in old-world values. She is very disciplined and practical and thus saves herself from being exploited and wrecked.
Unlike Lalitha, countryside fascinates her and finds that city makes one feel like an amoeba - "one in a hundred, in a thousand, you were no longer you..." She does not want to stay in the city. She wants to "go away and never come back." In the village she finds a sense of security - where "you always knew where you were, you knew who you were." She feels that life in the village is free from corruption and is always identifiable, though it is dull and eventless. So, she finds herself completely comfortable in the village. She is not altogether devoid of natural desires of passion, but because of her fear and distrust, she remains a virgin and saves herself. Both, Lalitha and Saroja, are in search of identity in totally different environments. The search for identity for Lalitha is quite painful and regrettable, but it is otherwise for Saroja whose roots are solidly implanted in the soil.

Two Virgins is also a description of village life. It is just a documentary about rural living. Mr Gupta, in the novel, actually makes a documentary film on village life. In the novel, the vicious results of Western influence are depicted. Miss Mendoza the teacher and Mr. Gupta the film director are the instruments of Western influence. Both of them have been trained abroad. Their life styles are not liked by the village folk. The alien fashions like high heeled shoes and cream silk suits rouse the villagers to vehement denunciation of such life styles. Amma and Aunt Alamelu do not like them. Amma condemns Mr. Gupta roundly. She calls him 'Western punk' and curses the day he and his ways crossed their threshold. Aunt Alamelu too comments:
Maypoles, she said ... is it a fitting pastime for our young Hindu maidens? And simpering with young men and flaunting themselves in films and such like, is there any propriety in it, no, it is shame-shame, totally contrary to the code of our Hindu decorum which has safeguarded the virtue of our youth for a thousand years.¹¹²

Miss Mendoza, who believes in modern methods of teaching and Mr. Gupta are responsible for taking Lalitha away from her family and showing her the glamour of the city. Lalitha pays heavily for this. She is totally exploited and wrecked. So, the innocence of the village is ruined in the city. The life of the people in a village is also made clear through the feelings of Saroja. She feels that the village always offers security and a sense of belongingness. One does not feel rudderless or anchorless. The life in the village may be monotonous and lacking in activity, but it is always identifiable and rooted. People have common beliefs and common traditions. The life in the village is free from corruption and chaos and is never cut off from the realities of human existence and that’s why Saroja feels deep attachment with the village. Thus, through Lalitha and Saroja the life style in the village and the effect of urban values on it is depicted.

The theme of East-West encounter is taken up by Kamala Markandaya in the *Pleasure City*. She discusses how relations become strained due to cultural disparity. The effect of progress on remote areas is also taken up in the novel. In the *Pleasure City*, the theme of the East-West encounter is treated through the relationship of Mr. Tully
and Rikki. The Tully-Rikki relationship, like the Helen-Bashiam one in *The Coffer Dams* finally wrecks on account of cultural diversity. Tully decides to renovate Avalon, a deserted castle, which was built by Mr. Tully's grandfather who was proconsul to the province during British rule in India. Rikki plays an important role in the renovation of Avalon and has become very friendly with Mr. Tully. They work together, go for picnicking and boating together. They are quite intimate with each other but it does not matter how intimate and full of boyish innocence their relationship may be because there are always distances which must separate the Englishman and the Indian.

There is a wide gulf of status between the two - Tully is a descendant of one of the consuls who once ruled India and comes to India as one of the directors of AIDCORP while Rikki is an orphaned fisherboy in the coastal village with little means to support himself. They are fond of each other and their relationship is one of cooperation and sincere friendship, without any taint of materialistic possessions. Their friendship keeps on growing and they even live together happily, respecting and acknowledging the barriers of race. In the end, the completion of projects and Tully's domestic and professional commitments draw him away from Rikki.

*Pleasure City* shows the impact of progress on the remote coastal regions of India, thus highlighting the theme tradition vs. modernity, just like *The Coffer Dams*. These remote areas are calm and quiet and have their own beauty. The Western science and technology encroaches their natural beauty. In this novel, the affected area is the
fishing village in the interior of South India. Here, the villager's life is quite calm, peaceful and eventless, but scientific advancement changes its very face completely. It happens only when the decision to build a holiday complex called 'Shalimar' is taken. The project is consigned to the Atlas International Development Corporation, which resembles the Clinton-Mackendrick Company in *The Coffer Dams* and it represents the modern, while the coastal fishing village is backward and traditional. It represents wretchedly unacceptable poverty and backwardness. This backwardness awaits a western touch for its complete transformation. Western touch, 'Shalimar', "represents progress and industrial and other development brought about by the scientific approach of engineers and technocrats who are the components of AIDCORP." It seems that in accepting the construction of the Pleasure City the imperialists have come back to India in another guise - "the same old imperialists at it again, only this time disguised as technocrats" but still, AIDCORP stands wholly for progress and modernity, for which the novelist rightly reports:

But whether by accident or design AIDCORP in due course included men who saw clearly where the future lay. It lay in fulfilling widespread and wistful longings for progress: (progress out of a wretchedly unacceptable poverty and backwardness) into something that decency could stomach. The prerequisite for it was believed to be, initially most ardently, (industrial and other development...).
This, in a way, "corresponds with A Silence of Desire and The Coffer Dams, and the three novels together constitute a solid group based on a clash of tradition and modernity."  

Kamala Markandaya, thus, focusses on different themes in her novels making the canvas of her fictional world vast and meaningful. In her novels, the prominent themes - East-West encounter, traditionalism vs. modernism, identity crisis, poverty and hunger (social realism), theme of familial/individual harmony and renunciation are portrayed in a very realistic manner. H.M. Williams compares her to Thomas Hardy. He writes, "... Kamala Markandaya will find herself somewhere alongside Thomas Hardy. They have much in common."  

Her characters are victims of inescapable doom and Kamala Markandaya's moral idealism controls and influences a largely realistic and often very cruel delineation of life. She claims to be on the side of human and life, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence. Kamala Markandaya projects the conservative traditional point of view asserting again and again the role of the established norms in human society while she allows a questioning of established traditions by her characters, she does not allow her characters to rebel against or break away from these norms. As a result, her protagonists seek meaning in life through the known and established while facing the changes of changing times. She stands for human dignity, valour and unending endeavour and sufferings as opposed to any progress which dehumanises people and corrodes human values.
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