Chapter-V

Summation

Women, or a section of women, started participating in social responsibility. As early as 1903 the women’s social and political union had been founded to obtain for women what was vaguely termed equality, the symbol of which was the parliamentary vote. Such a development was logical enough in view of women’s advance in the social, and more particularly, the economic sphere.

One of the most persuasive ideologies of the age rested on the assumption that the ideal womanly virtues are sacrifice, self-effacement, moral-purity, service and these virtues were best expressed in the vocations of wife and mother. The relegation of women to what, though spiritually elevated, was in reality a narrowed and restricted function, had its source in a masculine self preserving strategy disguised as a doctrine of adulation.

In such a male dominated society a well-bred young woman seeks equilibrium based on social and economic security, fulfillment of her duties as mother and companion, and if lucky, get a tender and respectful relationship with her husband, reducing her sense of sub-ordination and dependence. But true, equal and reciprocal love is rare.
It is the middle class who establishes the correct behavior based on virtue and respect, with marriage is the most respected institution and state for the individual, for man he had someone to take care of him and it guaranteed the descent, for woman, she got her ideal state, that of looking after and to serve to her husband and her children. Once they are born. By giving birth to the child, a woman has got immense happiness through her motherhood. Women were not allowed to show signs of greater intelligence than her husband’s in public. But women were educated for playing this role, they wanted this function. The price and aim of all women are motherhood.

Feminism is one of the most serious, which arouse out of male-chauvinism. Because of this, legally, women had no rights: she was seen as unable, dependent of a male figure.

In Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), though Rukmani’s life is disrupted by calamities like drought, famine, floods and death, she finds it difficult, if not agonizing, to accept the change wrought by the tannery: “The change that now came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our village” (*NIS* - 25). As pointed out by Faulkner, “Rukmani refuses to be overwhelmed by the night mare of existence as though Cauterized out of the old and tragic flank of the world”(265). The Parallelism marking the characteristic effect of the drought and the tannery on man, which the novelist ‘exploits’ does not show any signs of
analogic entrapment. They generate an environment in which Rukmani’s capacity for incarnating the necessary energies and other resources is put to test.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is replete with the tragedy arising from situation. Rukmani can hardly be called tragic. She is innocent and she has no personal hand in any of the misfortunes which befell her and her family. The fate bludgeones her but not her own mistakes. She does not contribute to the moulding of events but on the other hand the events mould her. She has the stoic endurance of the peasant. In this first novel, the author is feeling her way to the fuller realization of the tragic in contemporary society. This is seen in the succeeding books. As her technique develops and her vision matures, it gradually finds its enunciation in major characters.

*A Handful of Rice* penetrates beneath the veneer of social respectability to examine the lives of the victims of an unfair social system – a sphere in which Mulk Raj Anand achieved a niche. Just as industrialization assumes the form of looming threat in Anand (*Coolie, 1936* and *Untouchable, 1935*), social and economic facts threaten Ravi also. While Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve (1954)* is a puppet in the hands of Fate, Ravi is portrayed as facing a moral choice.

In the universe of discourse that Markandaya presents, there is no total divorce from society. The individual has to find freedom within the fold of society
- the freedom to grow within the sphere of basic human relationships and moral codes.

The author weaves the details of sights and sounds of sex into the texture of the story in order to portray an authentic picture of a family of poor people, whose lack of material things in life and whose pent-up feelings seem to find a security of another kind. However it must be remarked that the morality of man in this male-dominated world is never questioned, though he is not without a sense of shame or remorse for his libidinous beyond the sanction of marriage. The woman submits herself to the pleasures of man, Willy nilly, and hopes to remain unexposed.

In her novel Markandaya is at work with the essential stuff and substance of fiction, avoiding the didacticism she sees as the mark of a “poor novelist,” while successfully using imagery which is “intrinsic to literature” and illustrating ways in which images are “regulators of our conduct toward each other” and ways in which they “Shape the patterns of behavior.”

It is Nalini who holds the key to Ravi’s happiness.“What a girl,” he thought.“Take a girl like that and half a man’s trouble would be over” (25). A mere glimpse of her is enough to “make a man’s day…” (24). The symbol of sari when associated to Nalini becomes quite powerful. She is very charming. She stands for family. The two women, Jayamma and Nalini symbolize society and
family as well as the old and new generations. Associating Jayamma with society, Ravi finds her harsh and callous whereas Nalini who keeps his conscience alive. Meena Shirwadkar voices the same idea when she says that Ravi moves about in the world “where all unhealthy elements dwell… when he is a vagabond but leaves it when he marries Nalini whom he loves” (138).

Exposed to the Western concept of the liberated, independent individual, the woman in India too is on her journey of transformation from the timid, dependent and dumb person to a self-respecting, self-confident individual. She wants to bestir herself to shake off the sloth of centuries, which thwarts her personality. In this quest she wants to enjoy economic freedom, which is very necessary to her independence. Undoubtedly, the Indian writer’s sense of identity involves questions of artistic integrity, particularly with respect to how the writer deals with such problems as use of language and consciousness of audience. This may be further complicated by the author’s own temperamental or experiential identification with western culture, or his sense of alienation from it.

In the novels of Markandaya women play a significant and complex role. They have more depth, more richness than the men folk. However, retiring and apparently submissive their public image might have been, they have always been the heart of the family life, responsible in their roles as wife, mother, daughter-in-law and finally mother-in-law for the solidarity of the family and the continuation
of its values. What is astonishing is the woman’s power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love and her tenderness. Her problems, her family, her thoughts and hopes are very much like ours. It is the measure of Markandaya’s success that she has given her novel this touch of universality. Markandaya has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction, from peasant to princess. Many complex and realistic women characters have been created by many other forerunners of the doomed female of modern India. They are portrayed in a unique manner, neither merely imitative, nor exotic not mystic.

The woman fights alone, silent, protracted battle for her right to love and happiness. However, she retires voluntarily, in the nick of time, because of her innate sense of dignity. There is a shift in authorial sensibility towards woman in the fiction of Markandaya. The ideal man -woman relationship as the dominant male and submissive female union. Has been imprinted so deep into the Indian psyche that questioning of the concept comes as a fresh breath of air. The woman marches off towards a future, however hazardous, with a quiet confidence, determined to provide a better future for herself.

The novel in the western world focuses on the woman’s ability to choose, while here the literary world pushes the women from one set of no choices to another, from father to husband to son in fixed cycles of their lives. The discussion
about her selfhood or personality simply does not arise. But in actually literary practice, numerous characters are found to adhere to classic prototypes. The women have been described as the embodiment of purity and spiritual power and respected as godly beings on the one hand and on the other, viewed as being essentially weak creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their lord and master.

The marriage of the woman is to family, to the community and not to the individual. Once married, she has to forget all personal ambitions. Once in the family, all her needs and necessities are to be fulfilled in the family. She is made to cut off from the social life to be confined to the home, the temple and company of women relatives. It is interesting to note that Markandaya in *Possession* has portrayed the character of Lady Caroline Bell diametrically opposed to the women in some of her other novels. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the protagonist Rukmani has so much of proverbial humility, monumental patience and an untiring devotion to her husband that his illicit relationship with another woman, the vagaries of weather, the onslaught of the tannery and even the deaths of her sons fail to evoke an angry remark, let alone a protest, from her. She remains a perfect specimen of an Indian wife conceived and idealized by the patriarchal society and its authors. Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* is also so submissive that she puts up with the mercurial whims, impractical dreams and occasional outbursts of Ravi’s anger, though her mother
Jayamma is somewhat dominant over her ‘mouse-like’ husband. Lady Caroline Bell in *Possession* seems to belong to an altogether different category created possibly out of Markandaya’s opposition to patriarchal traditions as also of her intention of giving an allegorical garb to be a political theme of the British domination in India.

The analysis of her key novels undoubtedly establishes Markandaya’s forte in achieving a special insight into the female psyche. Her characters range widely from the illiterate poor peasant women to be educated, westernized city women as also the British women in India.

Markandaya sees to believe in social purpose of the novel. Though her commitment is not overt like that of Anand, her fiction, rooted in the Indian soil and ethos, has a subtle social purpose. In a sense she fictionalizes the sociology of India. She places the plight of the polite urban society so as show that rural India, inspite of the national freedom, despairs and languishes. Her intention is ‘to awaken the polite society to the real problems’. It is this purposive direction of a creative sensibility that endows her novels with a certain representative character that marks them out as a significant entity in the Indo-Anglian fiction. Markandaya executes her themes skillfully and has a commendable technique. Her method of story-telling is straight forward, and she does not allow her plot to be bogged down with numerous tangled threads. Usually her story is complete in itself and her plot
moves ahead step by step. Her art of characterization does not permit too many characters in a novel; it is often stringent and fastidious. Her narrative power rises to the occasion and effectively meets the exigencies of plot and story.

In spite of sustained efforts by writers like Markandaya to project the injustice meted out to women, continue to struggle and suffer. Hence, constant efforts are needed to protect women and elevate them to the level of men in terms of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Markandaya is well-known, for she uses fiction as a medium for communicating her vision of life, and particularly her social vision. In her novels she has depicted racial-conflicts, temperamental disparities, cultural divergences and sexual perversion as factors working in the form of barriers of communication. Her novels are an experimental journey undertaken in search of a visionary’s solution to suggest a way out of the dilemma. The picture of rural India juxtaposed with the glamorous Westernized Life of England has found a prominent place in her novels. She values Indian traditions and culture more than those of the West. Besides, she has highlighted the sufferings of ordinary Indians in a realistic and matter-of-the-fact-way. In her novels, Markandaya does not stick to a particular theme. She ceaselessly tries to present the changing colours of Indian environment vividly so as to make her social realism a multi-faceted and variegated spectrum of human life.
If *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts rural poverty, the urban poverty and squalor are described in *A Handful of Rice*. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragic story dealing with the themes of suffering, starvation and death but it ends on a positive note. Rukmani returns home after her wanderings during which she loses her husband Nathen.

In short, it can be said that the social realism of *Nectar in a Sieve* introduces Western students to life in rural India and the changes that took place during the country’s British colonization. Although easy to read, the novel is lyrical and moving and can be read on a variety of levels. On the most basic level, it is the story of an arranged but loving marriage and rural peasant life. On another level; it is a tale of indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. The social realism of the novel touches on several important social phenomena: the importance of traditional cultural practices, people’s reluctance to change. *Nectar in a Sieve* focuses effectively on the social problems like poverty, beggary, lack of family planning, crime, unemployment, prostitution, the Zamindari system, industrialization, demoralization, caste and class conflict, superstitions, dowry system, low status of woman and evil of the marriage system.

The social realism in *A Silence of Desire* explores the theme of the clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason, represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple in the novel. The entire plot is geared up around Dandekar who wages a war against the superstition of his wife
and the immense spiritual power of the Swami. Dandekar finds her firmly grounded faith. There is a lot of concentration on the tense domestic life of Sarojini and Dandekar. Another point of focus is the dubious nature and character of the Swamy. Markandaya skillfully spins her crisis and tension round the eternal topic of Jealousy and blind religious faith. She has given a realistic portrayal of the domestic bliss of Dandekar’s family, happy in their mutual confidence. Such harmony in lower middle class life exists even today.

As a social realist, Markandaya in *A Handful of Rice* is primarily concerned with the problem of identity for a struggling youth in the midst of dehumanized urban surroundings and people. The hapless and hopeless condition of the ‘angry young man’ of this era is authentically and beautifully pictured in this novel. The theme of social injustice has been handled deftly. Markandaya’s close acquaintance with Indian Life suitably matches with her authentic understanding of the western life. Most of her novels explore a social vision that is based on the fundamental difference and clash between Eastern and Western ways of life. In her novels, Markandaya has depicted racial conflicts, cultural differences and temperamental disparities. She drawn a realistic picture of rural India in sharp contrast with the glamorous Westernised World of England. Her stay in South Indian Villages before marriage and her post marriage settlement in England enabled her to draw a realistic picture of East and West. Being a social visionary,
Markandaya values Indian culture and tradition more than that of the West. Starvation has been described vividly and truly in Nectar in a Sieve. Markandaya has given a real and vivid account of the degradation and immorality of a frustrated young man Ravi who represents all young angry and unemployed youth. Equally real and natural is the description of the husband-wife relationship in A Silence of Desire. In fact, Markandaya has successfully presented almost all the important aspects of life. She has truly painted a large variety of theme laced with social values and problems through equally live and powerful vision of life.

Markandaya, in spite of social evils which are present in the world, expresses a powerful social realism. Rukmani believe that there is an affirmation of life in the midst of colossal human suffering. The characters of Markandaya exhibit great strength of heart and soul even in moments of crisis and calamities. Her novels do not end in a note of despair and gloom; rather there is a silver lining through human sufferings as the negative aspects of life terminate into a positive vision. All the characters in the novel experience troubles and turmoil but they rise above their desperation triumphantly of their aspiration.

Thus Markandaya embodies in her a multi-faceted genius a fine-story teller, a fine craftsman, champion of the novel of concern but above all-she is a social realist and remains unmatched and unchallenged in this domain. Her books have been legitimately acclaimed as artistic achievements in the field of realistic
documentation and as aesthetic excellence in the domain of a powerful social realism of life, which make Markandaya a social realist par excellence.

It creates situation for woman to be dependent rather than a self-determining individual and imposes rigid standards of morality upon her. The society expects women to maintain chastity before marriage, fidelity to husband after marriage and self-control after losing husband. It means that women are only a symbol of sex, not an intellectual or society-motivated human being like men. It is clear that the society wants the women to play a subordinate role in every field of life, both inside and outside home. The male-dominated society expects the young women to do menial, charitable work always grooming themselves to be marketable brides. When they get married, they should submit to their husband, procreate and serve the family like self-sacrificing angles in the houses.

In the traditional Indian society, as woman is considered to be an embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge, she should be virtuous, chaste, submissive, homely, graceful and devoted to her husband and his family. She has to find pleasure within these relationships and she should not even imagine doing anything against the will of her husband. These attitudes of the society show the inferior status of women.
The social changes in the wake of independence have brought about the emergence of the equitation role of the sexes. It makes women psychologically and economically independent. As a result, their views on marriage and family relations are changed.

The young women of the modern society are becoming aware of the biased attitude of the society. They have started raising questions about their individual freedom and they want to maintain their individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms.

Markandaya feels that marital harmony is possible in society when women are accepted and treated as equal partners in human relationships. The emancipation of women will be practically possible if the society accepts the theory that a woman’s body is after all her own and she has her own thinking on issues related to her. Markandaya is very clear in her conviction that individual freedom and self-respect are the crucial factors for the healthy growth of modern society.

She advocates for freedom and self-identity for women. She is aware of the exploitations and victimization of women. At the same time she smells the fact that modern Indian women are mentally strong and self-respecting. She is very much
sure that unless women are liberated from the social taboos, the country cannot be considered as an independent country.

Markandaya suggests that the boys and girls should be educated together in order to accustom them early to each other’s influences and women should be given equal opportunities in all social and cultural activities. Markandaya feels that women are not taken into confidence by their men in India. Men take decision first and then force the women to accept it without giving them any option. This dominating behavior of men damages the concept of women as human beings with minds and bodies of their own. Markandaya’s women are thinking women, striving for individual, independent personality. Markandaya brings out the helplessness of women and indifference of society to their plight in marriage. The society conditions young girls to accept that their duty in life is to get married, deliver children, promote husband’s career and serve the entire family.

Markandaya strongly believes that in a truly liberated society, social inequality and sex-difference must be abolished. Women are also individuals and they should be given equal status in all matters concerning them. The participation of women in national, social and familial life has to be on the ground of their own individuality and not as labeled possession. Women are not rivals to men but they wish to relate themselves to men around them and would like to be treated as equals.
The fictional world of Markandaya provides lot of avenues to carry out further studies on emancipation of women with reference to their educational qualification, family background, experience in life, involvement in home-making, interest in cultural values and participation in social welfare activities.

She highlights their subordinate status and the following humiliation in a male-dominated society. They are aware of the great social discrimination and prejudice towards them, and strive against the repressive and unequal nature of the social conventions and regulations that restrict their ability ad survival.

Markandaya’s works have drawn great serious awareness and honour for her sensitive and realistic symbolization of the women. Markandaya remarkably represented the subordinate position of women by providing us an insight into their married lives. Markandaya keeps her narratives female-centered and gives an ultimate discernment into the soul of the women who feel suppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. She furnishes new principles for a better man-woman relationship, thereby deepening the scope of women’s survival. Her protagonists move out of their confused selves to contend their peculiarity as human beings, after having submissively played out their socially prescribed positions. She mostly projects the familial structure to give full assertion to her uniqueness.
Among major Indian novelists, Markandaya has generally a feminist framework and this depicts the difficulties of women. All her women characters habitually experience a comparable disaster. She is neither a feminist nor an anti-feminist but her sole aim is to expose the state of women. The author’s women characters are usually young but old enough for their knowledge in the modern world. They are exposed to some type of calamity in life. Majority of them have standardized the moves of the twentieth century consumer society and survived in the society. Indian writers express what goes on in the brain of a woman. She informs how women struggle in the narrow crevices of individuality. She is a writer committed to the society in which she exists.

Markandaya comprehends the real character of women. The aim of feminist movements is confined to knowledge and to the development of the position of women. She can be called a humanist. She analyses her growing relationship with human problems. There are many ideas and facts something from which she cannot be obviously detached. The author’s women characters make resolutions, discharge, deeds, willing to face the repercussions whatever they may be. The writer’s protagonists discover the truth that survival is difficult owing to the fact that there are conflicting pressures, frightening the survival of woman so far as she is ready to strive to sustain not by a flight from sordid reality but by a brave conflict of it. She unvaryingly emerges as a ‘new woman’ willing to face the
charges of life. It presents her uniqueness and she redeems her lost soul. Sympathy starts to is associated in various escapes and changes. And she is not caught in the traps of those men. Instead she became a writer.

Markandaya’s heroines attain knowledge. Markandaya in Indian Literature presents terrifying depictions of women who have been distressed by men throughout the history in the world. Instead of sticking out a stereotype image of woman as ordinary housewife and mother roles, there is the depiction of woman as a hopeful, talented, brave and self-determinative woman. In fact, one has to transform our feeling with the transforming times. Many women suffer from mental hunger like a empty stomach is paining and distressing due to the oppression by the males.

The problem of women has to be resolved by offering them varied positive opportunities in life. Social restrictions push back the girls in the gender specific positions of doing house-hold work, for example looking after the siblings and being treated as inferior to boys. A common contemporary issue facing every country is about the status of woman. In Western or Indian literary tradition, the women are seen as initiating themselves into the search for their individuality. This immense statement considered in the historical perspective exhibits that woman’s positions and rights were within the patriarchal set-up.
Woman is thus the direct product of the male-generated and dominated social values and has remained so, for centuries. She is moulded and re-oriented by men and for the men. Woman is just identified as meek, weak and submissive creatures. The new women is not conscious of her subjugated position still is also in search of her real roots-the real image. A traditional women furthermore was self-effacing, kind, supportive, dutiful, unseeking and innocent. And men have been profitable in exercising this feeble and innocent creature. She was so recognized as that she not at all had a wish or desires of her own, but she is expected to show her concern always with the wish and desires of others. True women are the torch bearers, but they are still grouping in the dark, fighting odds, and trying to swim against the tide. Despite all the hurdles, the women marching towards their destinations. Increasing awareness of their oppressed situation has given rise to the women’s conflict against male dominance. The woman’s feelings, attitudes and economic freedom were limited by the religions and moral constrains.

The traditional woman was hence the product of man’s desires. It is from this sort of suffering that the new woman is frustrating to set herself free. Increasing consciousness of their suppressed situation has given rise to the woman’s endeavours against male-dominance, against the restrictions passed by the renowned men. The social problem may not be rectified; going to the root of the illness is a step with regards to preventing the disorder. The same is a
condition with the solution of women’s difficulties, but has not yet been able to seek results to all of them. The women today is also aware in fighting with herself to get rid of the elements of submissiveness and subordinations ingrained in her since centuries.

It is a challenging task, no doubt, but challenges must be accepted with full strength and strong wish to judge practical resolutions. There is the need to develop a positive attitude among people towards woman. There ought to be cooperation and help among the family, community and society. So the people must join hands and offer a bright future to the woman. Woman is busy reshaping herself in a more humanistic mould, focusing thereby the necessity for a thorough re-examination in the extent of wedding and male-female relationship, for a healthier knowledge and sharing of mutual love and respect. Woman has recognized that her chief role is not simply to please and carry out orders of man but also to lead a life of dignity and equality.

The suffering of the heroines depicted in the novels is the sufferings of the entire women in the world, but these suppressions can be overcome by the women. Women should be courageous to face the problems. The women Mira in some inner Fury spite of their plight make an effort to face their life boldly, but undergo a lot of plight and predicaments before establishing their self. In conclusion it can be stated that Markandaya in her novels not only focuses the problems of women
in a male-dominated society but also offers solutions to them so that they emerge triumphant asserting their self.

They want an identity outside the boundary of homes. They feel they are equal to men. They want their existence to be felt and recognized by all. They are far from the conservative stronghold of Indian society. They have their own social circle; they care little for what their hostile critics say. They believe that sky is the limit for their progress. These are the new modern women, a very striking group that is emerging stealthily in Indian aristocratic society and which Markandaya presents in her novels with enthusiasm and creative energy.

Indian women over the centuries have been portrayed as picture of pain, hardship and struggle. They have always been shown as dependent. They are without identity, dignity or individuality. Gradually with the advent of education from the west, the Indian society got a chance to see the advancement reached by the west and its liberal attitude toward women. Education opened the eyes of the simple urban and rustic Indian women. Women started coming out to experience the outside world. This was not an easy task; a lot of hurdles and hardships had to be faced by them as they ventured to create some space for themselves in fiercely male-dominated Indian society.
Some women did succeed while number of them failed. Women belonging to the middle class and the higher middle class were fortunate in this regard. They got a chance to explore a new world through educational enlightenment. It is they who started a new revolution for women’s emancipation. A number of women writers came up with remarkable works advocating women’s issues and looking at the world from a women’s perspective. Shobha De, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya and others expressed their views on the issues of women. Markandaya who joined this bridge in the late nineties somehow managed to stand distinctly from all other novelists of India. Her writings are marked by unreserved straightforward portrayals of a particular class of women who are filthy, powerful and reckless. She successfully discovers this new of women who have started flourishing among the rich and mighty social strata.

The modern women aspire for everything that gives them extreme power and equal footing with their male counterparts. They are ready to make every compromise as long as they can get to their desired goals. These women are all out to complete and excel in almost every field which previously man’s territory.

All the women characters in Markandaya’s novels are drawn after the lifestyle of independent, upper class women. They have left their traditional image far behind. A new set of moral values has been formed by these women. Markandaya
gives a vivid description of these women and their inner world. However reckless this world of women may appear to be, there is a clear message that new woman is a strong individual who is out to create a new identity for herself in the society. Her promiscuous sexual behavior may bring her the bad name of being a woman of loose morals. But going by the fact that her male counterparts are indulging in the same, it will be wrong to call them characterless. Whatever they do is a reaction to their immediate surroundings. It is in fact the modern system of education which awakes them to claim equal rights with man.

Markandaya’s novels are popular in the middle class as this class is eager to know the life style of upper class women. Whether the novels make a positive or negative impact on the reader doesn’t count so much. What matters is that they are widely read for all kinds of new experiences, aesthetic sense and morality; which are given an altogether new definition. There is a Scope for further research. A line of investigation can be extended to make a comparative study of Kamala Markandaya with her Western counterparts.

Thus, Markandaya’s novels call for a redefining of the traditional set of moral values in the light of actions of the fast growing breed of new ultra-modern group of ambitious women.