Chapter-III

Social Perspectives of Indian Woman

*Nectar in a Sieve* is set in a village and examines the hard agricultural life of the Indian peasant; *Some Inner Fury*, which includes highly educated woman and her English lover who are torn apart by the Quit India campaign of the time, has to do with the quarrel between Western and Indian influences, as they are focused in a marriage; *A Silence of Desire* deals with the middle class, and *A Handful of Rice* with the city poor; *Possession* moves from the West End of London to a South Indian village, and is centred on the conflict of Eastern spirituality with Western materialism.

Markandaya has not the same intimacy and familiarity with all these areas of life, and she has indeed been criticized by Indian critics for a certain lack of inwardness with the life of the Indian poor. Her particular strength lies in the powerful social realism that she analyses through various interpersonal relationships of her characters. She has, too, the genuine novelist’s gift for fixing the individuality of the character within the given sociological milieu in a reasonably convincing social context. She has been most successful and at her best, in dealing with the problems of the educated middle class, and she has a gift in particular for delineating the self-imposed laceration of the dissatisfied, which is
partially the direct extension of the social realism and partially of their own mental complex.

Her works have received critical acclaim for their themes, and a rich social realism, and with each successive novel she seems to have achieved distinction as an important social realist and a visionary.

She stands tall among these novelists because of her portrayal of reality and her social vision in a natural way. Her novels depict a live picture of man’s sufferings and his behavior under different circumstances. Though Markandaya settled in England, her novels bear an indelible print of Indianness. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, writers who have been abroad are:

Made aware of their Indianness as well as of the difference in the two systems of values; one rather acquired the other inherited and taken for granted. (67)

She was keen to know more of rural India. She lived for sometime in a South Indian Village. This gave her first-hand knowledge of rural India-its poverty, its poor farmer’s dependence on rain, caste system, rural rituals, customs-all these facets of village life bear Markandaya’s stamp of realism and authenticity.

All of Markandaya’s novels reveal her deep preoccupation with the changing Indian social and political scene, her careful conscious craftsmanship and
her skillful use of the English Language for creative purpose. She excels in recording the inner workings of the minds of her characters, their personal perplexities and social confrontations. She has highlighted the suffering of ordinary Indians. In this connection S.K. Krishna Swamy observes:

   Her concerns being, predominantly socio-economic, her novels offer us a savage tale of brutality, ignorance, mental and physical bludgeoning that the ordinary Indian, man and woman is subjected to. (86)

   Her presentation is quite authentic because of her having a personal experience of both the cultures. She gradually advances the domain of her novels from the joys and sorrows of simple folks, always interpreting the clash in terms of emotional follies and foibles of individual characters. Such portrayal gave tone and direction to her mind by awakening her to the realities of society, particularly the plight of Indian Women. Writing about Markandaya, Stephen Ignatetus Hemeway remarks:

   Markandaya is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Anglian novelists and a superb representative of the growing number of Indian Women writing serious literature in English. (52)
Markandaya is gifted with artistic perfection and simple expression. The realistic approach to life is the hallmark of her social vision. She presents life as she sees it. She neither idealises it nor denounces it. She sees life with her own stark naked eyes and portrays it without any bias or colour. Infact, she never takes sides with any of her protagonists. Her portrayal of village life in transitional state is simply superb. She describes urban squalor with equal mastery: With her impeccable representational realism and innovative description of the Indian arcadia, Markandaya achieves a perfect poise between the rural reality and the disciplined urbanity of Art.(190)

Markandaya has deftly described all the social customs, traditions and conventions in rural areas of India. She has first-hand knowledge of South Indian villages, the real conditions of the villagers, their miseries, their sufferings and their real ways of life. She has depicted all the hardships faced by the poor peasants in her novels. Like Mulk Raj Anand, she wants to bring reforms in Indian society. Her fiction rooted in the Indian Soil and ethos, has a subtle social purpose. In a sense she fictionalizes the sociology of India. Her intention is to awaken the polite society to the real problem.

Markandaya started writing her novels at a time when India was in the vicious grip of many problems like racial differences, poverty, starvation emanating from natural calamities like famine and draught. Markandaya treats
fiction as a medium to teach humanity the real meaning of life. To her life is a mixture of happiness and sadness. Both these aspects of life have been realistically depicted by her. All racial conflicts, cultural differences, temperamental disparities and sexual perversions find true portrayal in her novels. She has drawn a realistic picture of rural India contrasted with the glamorous westernized world of England. Her stay in South villages before marriage and her settlement in England after marriage enabled her to draw a realistic picture of east and west.

Markandaya loves to portray man-woman relationship. Her characters are strong and daring. They are strong-willed and face all the odds of life with courage. Her protagonists are not idealists but are flawed with common weaknesses of mortals. They believe that despair, despondency, disappointment, conflict, frustration and struggle are the integral part of life.

Markandaya’s literary debut, *Nectar in a Sieve*, dramatizes the tragedy and trauma of a traditional Indian village and a peasant family whose livelihood depends on rain, rice and land. Rukmani and Nathan, who knit and knot the tapestry of the novel, have become the prey of the two evils—Zamindari system and capitalist economy. The novel portrays the narrator heroine Rukmani who earns the prominent position in the novel and she too embodies the central consciousness. On the thematic plane the novel becomes the sage of a peasant woman Rukmani, the soul of the story.
She won name and fame all over the world after the publication of her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. She is blessed with an extraordinary vision of life. As a novelist she has a practical feel of life in rural areas as well as in urban centres. Initially she lived in a south Indian village and closely observed the rustic life with a sense to get basic knowledge of village life in India. In her novels realistically depict the life of villages, cities, husband-wife relations, social conflicts and attraction for modernism. In her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* she attempts to portray the true vision of life through her protagonists.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a fictional epic on Indian life, revealing a rich gamut of human experience. This novel is a graphic portrayal of the peasants’ life, their toil, torture, anguish, suffering, and above all, their tragedy. It has been compared with Pearl S.Buck’s *The Good Earth* and with Bhabani Bhattacharya’s ‘So Many Hungers’; it may even be compared with Prem Chand’s *Godan* and *Rang Bhoomi*. The comparison is true in terms of hunger and human debasement. It is a realistic portrayal of the surroundings and sufferings of human life. It is an epic of the Indian life at the grass-roots, a full view of the village world where peasants grow and live, suffer and endure and emerge more dignified, more human in their elements with their tattered rags, their dying moans and their obstinate clinging to the soil like the stump withered all over but its roots delved in the earth, which make Markandaya a social visionary par excellence. Rukmani and Nathan are
individuals; they are also symbols of teeming millions, archetypal figures like Adam and Eve. Rukmani is the daughter of a village headsman whose power gradually dwindles and pales into insignificance and she is married to a tenant farmer: “Who was poor in everything but in love and care for me.” (NIS-49)

She is both sensible and sensitive. The mud hut, thatched, small, set near a paddy field which almost frightened her at the first look, gives her a sense of pride when she learns that it was Nathan who made every bit of it. She spends her days watching the seeds split, the shoots breaking through and the fruit ripening. And then things changed and the change came blasting its ways into their life in the form of tannery, the symbol of industrialization, in the form of flood and drought, Nature ‘red in tooth and claw.’ Hunger raises its head. Hunger appears like an Octopus in the story. It is the real evil, stronger than the original Satan that disturbed the bliss of Eden Garden. The eldest son Arjun joined the tannery against their wish, silencing them with the thunder of reality: “The important thing is to eat.” (NIS-185)

The picture is immaculately disturbing and ruthlessly realistic without any shallow idealization. Nathan and Rukmani are denied even the land they served, they leave for the city. They become stone-breakers in a quarry to earn money to return home, though they know that they have none in the village. They are children of the soil and naturally the longing for the land in their heart grows
intenser each day. Nathan dies under the strain and Rukmani returns with Puli, the leper she adopted as her son.

Awe, starvation and frustration are the characteristic feelings which dominate the villages. It is “fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger, fear of the blackness of death” (NIS-79). Rukmani says, ‘hope and fear’ are the twin faces in the villages that drag the people first in one direction and then in another: “Fear, constant companion of the peasant, hunger, ever at hand to joy his elbow should he relax. Despair, ready to engulf him should he falter.”(79). Rukmani and her family bear the physical and spiritual pangs of indigence and degradation poignantly and they move back and forth in life. Rukmani, who loses her husband at the end of the novel, contemplates that he will come back to her life again:

Sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning comes, the wavering grey turns to gold, there is a stirring within as the sleepers awake, and he softly departs. (NIS-7)
Rural India” lays stress on rural setting and its characters. Nageswara Rao rightly says:

The novel deals with the peasants, their activities, problems and anxieties, hopes and expectations, and joys and sorrows. It is therefore natural to find in it an emphasis on rural ethos and rural value system.(7)

Echoing similar views about Markandaya’s realistic portrayal of rural problems faced by Rukmani, R.K.Srivastava comments:

Nectar in a Sieve deals mainly with the tragic issue of life-hunger, pain and separation-the tone throughout the novel is reflective and philosophical as if Rukmani were indirectly accusing the heavenly powers on her Karma for ill-plight.(74)

Markandaya succeeds in presenting a woman’s self in unadventurous social milieu. The role of Rukmani as an unsplit self is not a gesture of civility extended to tradition by the novelist, but the reality made potential by the nature of the culture in which she lives. She presents the paradigm that while playing the conventional role of mother and wife she does not forget her other role as a human being. A profound self-knowledge can be attained not through separation and divided-self but through expansion and association.
Thus Markandaya uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. As a writer, she has clear perception of life in rural areas as well as in urban centres. She differs from other Indo-Anglian novelists in many ways. She focuses on the family structure to establish her themes in different novels. She is different from her contemporaries in that she vividly and with a rare understanding depicts the hard harsh realities of Indian life in all their horrifying and inhuman shapes and shades that makes Markandaya a social visionary.

The plight of the village becomes the pivotal because of the impact of the modern urban culture engineered by the British rule on the traditional Indian rural life and the value system. Being an old woman—a widow—Rukmani recapitulates her by gone days in a reminiscent mood. Actually, she hails from a family which has become poverty-stricken due to the wedding of three daughters. She has been offered to Nathan, a helpless and hapless tenant farmer lost in all walks of his life barring in his love for his wife. She recalls her early marital life with a tinge of nostalgia. They dwell in a mud-hut built by Nathan and life marches ahead smoothly so long as the fields are green and rains are regular.

Markandaya has been a real social realist in projecting across the following themes through her novels. These are Hunger and Degradation East-West-Encounter, Fatalism, Rootlessness, Politics and Human Relationship. She is different from these novelists in her own remarkable way of depiction of a large
variety of the novels. In her novels, she strives to present the changing colours of Indian environment significantly. Markandaya’s novels are first person narratives narrated by women protagonists, which clearly show that her women characters are more important than the men. A sensitive American educator Shashi Tharoor observes that:

Markandaya reminds us that not only are women important and enduring individuals but also that the plight of rural women in developing countries is one that is more often the norm than many of us either realize or appreciate. (56)

The portrayal of these novels makes a separate identity. In this connection K.N.Singh writes:

Every time the story begins when the narrator gets in the mood of recollection and ends when the experiences of a whole conscious life lead to a moment of decision to shake her ambivalent attitude. (84)

Like O-Lan of Pearl S.Buck’s The Good Earth Rukmani becomes the subject of tolerance. Even poverty and hunger coupled with misfortunes do not divert her piety. At first in her husband’s home she experiences poverty and starvation. She suffers for the sake of her family but she does not succumb. She
fights against the heaviest odds and never accepts defeat. She accepts all and everything. She herself utters:

It is true, one gets used to everything. I had got used to the noise and smell of the tannery; they no longer affected me. I had seen the slow, calm beauty of our village melt in the blast from the town, and I grieved no more, so now I accepted the future and Ira’s lot in it, and thrust it from me, only sometimes when I was weak, or myself rebellious, protesting, and rejecting and no longer calm. (NIS-62)

Markandaya narrates her story with clarity and brevity that relinquishes unnecessary digressions. Her longing in the sociological affairs of Indian life is keen and penetrating. Under this circumstance it is true that: “the subject of the novel is almost invariably the relation of the individual to society.” (NIS-31)

Markandaya is against the oppression and exploitation in any form-political, economic, cultural or racial. It is in fact, Rukmani’s strength, an all-out human effort that sustains the novel. Nathan advises Rukmani to bend like the grass so that she would not break. Rukmani helps Kunti to deliver her child fathered by Nathan. Ira conceives an illegitimate child who is previously abandoned by her husband because of her infertility. The most ironic situation is that Rukmani who despises Kunti for her immorality has to accept Ira’s prostitution and the
illegitimate son too. Other important aspect of Markandaya social vision is her portrayal of man-woman relationship. Her characters are strong and courageous. They are not idealists but they possess the general weakness of the mortals. They know how to bend like grass and how to face the reality of life. The novel portrays its positive woman characters as ideal sufferers and nurturers.

The cause of her suffering springs mainly from poverty and natural calamity. The women are from the rural sections of society. They are the daughters of the soil and have inherited age-old traditions which they do not question. Their courage lies in meek and at times cheerful way of facing poverty or calamity.(49)

Social relationships remain incomplete without understanding of Markandaya’s depiction of women characters in various shades. Markandaya has presented the life and travails of a peasant woman, Rukmani. She faces so many odds of life like famine, death, adultery and prostitution in the condition of bone chilling poverty and fights against them constantly. She has been able to win the sympathy of the readers by her astonishing will-power that endures a life without hope. Her plight resembles that of Nalini of A Handful of Rice . What we witness is the transformation of a carefree girl into an exploited and victimized woman trying to pull her family through the harsh and cruel life of a big city.
Rukmani and her daughter Ira display suffering throughout the novel. Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. She endures blow after blow from life: poverty, famine, and the divorce of her barren daughter, the death of her sons, her daughter’s prostitution, and finally her husband’s death.

Thus *Nectar in a Sieve* is lyrical and moving and can be read on a variety of levels. The most basic understanding makes the story of an arranged but loving marriage and rural peasant’s life. On another level, it is a tale of indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. Finally, it is a novel about the conflicts between a traditional-agricultural culture and a burgeoning industrial capitalistic society. The novel touches on several important social phenomena: the importance of traditional cultural practices, people’s reluctance to change, and the impact of economic change. An Indo-American writer, Indira Ganeshan has beautifully summed up the social realism of *Nectar in a Sieve*: There is so much packed into this little novel that if you blink you miss something. At its core is Rukmani, a peasant Indian girl who marries her husband at the age of twelve.

Indians have unshakable faith in religion and God, as people, particularly in villages, think that what is slotted cannot be blotted. One must accept what fate provides. So, passive acceptance forms the crux of rural Indians. This is touchingly described by Markandaya in the novel Nathan and Rukmani silently suffer what
life inflicts upon them. The ruin of crop, the death of their sons, their eviction from home and hearth, are the blows that come in quick succession.

Famine and the resulting degradation on one hand and the East-West Encounter on the other hand, are two recurring themes which have been realistically depicted and handled by Markandaya. These major themes are accompanied by certain other themes and ideas. For example East-West Encounter theme is studied as conflict between tradition and modernity, industry and agriculture, the rural and the urban, material and spiritual industrialization causes exodus from villages to cities which causes rootlessness.

Markandaya has got full command over the English language. Lucidity, clarity and fluidity mark her language. Her language is full of tilt, a richness of colour. Her language contains the purity of running water. She is in fact, a sociological novelist who portrays the Indian social life with remarkable vision. Markandaya is the greatest of the Indian women novelists writing in English. None can equal her in the realism and authenticity of her portrayal of Indian rural life; particularly its disintegration under the impact of industrialization.

Thus Markandaya’s most striking feature in her social realism is her realistic portrayal of women in relation to the historical, cultural, political and sociological environment of a changing India. *Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice, A Silence*
of Desire deal with real contemporary issues and preoccupations that make her a novelist of social realism. Therefore, after discussing her novels, one can confidently say that Markandaya has successfully presented almost all the important aspects of life. She has realistically brought out all the social and economic evils of post-independence India. She has faithfully reported the life as she saw it in that era of transition. She has thus given a true account of life with all its problems, joys and sorrows. Her novels stand for the welfare of humanity. That is why Markandaya calls her literature a ‘literature of concern’ which proves her a social realist and her novels powerful document of social realism beyond question.

Markandaya who has achieved a notable distinction writes with an intimate knowledge of English and Indian societies, acquired through years of living experience. Although she is not an aggressive feminist, she has shown an evident predilection for portraying female characters in her fiction. Her portrayal of Indian characters like Rukmani and Kunthi is exquisite and authentic but such Indian women characters are sadly missing from her later novels. In Nectar in a Sieve relationship between Rukmani and the Scottish doctor Kenny needs a detailed discussion in so far as it gives insight into the desire of every individual.

Rukmani’s relationship with Kenny is not viewed by her as part of “East-West relationship”, as has been suggested by H.S. Mahle (99-110). Actually she is not aware of it. She does not have the slightest realization that she is doing
something ‘new’. It is only that she does not wish to share this part of her relationship with anyone. It is true that she goes to Kenny for treatment of infertility and subsequently bears five sons to her husband Nathan. But her visits do not in any way weigh on her conscience. She does not consider them immoral by any standards, although in the context of her village background any other man, much less a foreigner, was against the accepted standards of normal conduct. The best part is that Rukmani does not experience an inner conflict even while she does not divulge the fact of her relationship with Kenny to her husband. When Kenny comes on a visit she introduces him to her husband Nathan in a casual way without any feeling of guilt,

“You have heard me tell of Kenny often enough. This is he, friend of my father’s house” (NIS-35).

Later also, when Kenny is on the verge of disclosing that Rukmani had been to him for treatment, the latter feels no sense of ‘betrayal’ on her part. Rukmani’s relationship with Kenny is based on friendship, intimacy and understanding. Rukmani, ever since her mother was treated by Dr. Kenny, had felt drawn towards him. He was the man in whom Rukmani’s mother had faith. He came to her father’s house often, sometimes even when he was not summoned. He told her no lies, and she trusted him. Since then, for sometimes there developed a relationship of faith and fear between Rukmani and Kenny. Soon the fear was dispelled.
Rukmani’s going to Kenny for treatment and begetting a child brought a complete transformation in her life. She started taking Kenny as her patron and benefactor. She bent down to his feet, stood as he was in leather shoes. When Kenny said that he was not her benefactor, nor a lord, she replied: “You are my benefactor. Have I not five sons to prove it” (NI S -34).

Rukmani stood under great obligation to Kenny. She was grateful to Kenny for bringing food and milk for her children and husband. Personally, Kenny had friendly feelings for Rukmani and her family. The two are friends, Rukmani holding him in respect. The entire domain of this relationship is beyond the moral and social code of the traditional woman. Her not sharing it with anyone might suggest that there is something in her mind, which she wants to keep as her own and only her own. Not sharing it with anyone else is only an urge to assert her individuality, as a person and as a woman. Hence, it is not concealment or keeping a secret. As observed by Goyal, “the encounter between them is not just a simple one of straight-forward, predetermined categories held in clear-cut opposition to one another, but there is a human bond that cuts across all the barriers of race and religion, of sex and skin, of nationality and culture” (108).

In Nectar in a Sieve, the presence of the West can be known from the character, Kenny. The presence of the West is prominent in Possession and Some Inner Fury and indirectly perceptible in A Silence of Desire. The Englishman is
portrayed in the novels in various roles. The least favorable image of the Englishman in India is that of the English ruler trying to lord over the people of this country. He lives ‘on the fat of the land’ without himself realizing it. Speaking of the connection between the rural and the ruled, Anasuya says:

“Perhaps, indeed, relationship was not the word to describe a forcible possessing which had established nothing so clearly as that there could be no reasonable relationship” (Possession-69-70).

Caroline, in a dialogue with Anasuya remarks that the classic ailment in Indo-British relations is that England and India never did understand one another. The same idea is expressed with greater force in Some Inner Fury where Mira speaking of her lover Richard, remarks:

“He came of a race which had acquired an empire, to which the people at home were largely indifferent, and of which the people on the spot were largely ignorant” (160).

Most of the English men who ran the administration of India was men who had forgotten the decencies of England amid the authoritarianism of empire. They deserve no credit for building bridges, roads and railways in India because it was sheer accident that they happened to be ruling India when these amenities were becoming widely available all over the world. The residential areas of these towns
they live are in sharp contrast with the other parts which are crowded and dirty. The artificial life lived by the Englishmen and the westernized Indians is vividly described in *Some Inner Fury*.

The presentation of the foreign missionary as revealed in *Nectar in a Sieve* is perfectly favorable. Kenny is a medical missionary who has left his family and his country and has settled down in India in order to relieve suffering. He is a healer, patiently listening to the tales of woe that the villagers tell him and doing all he can to alleviate their suffering. He is frank, sincere and genuinely interested in the people for whom he works. He is extremely reticent, never speaking about his family or his worries.

The building of the hospital is his life’s work and he accomplished it through untiring effort and with some assistance from Nathan’s son, Selvam. In the novel, he seems to play two roles. Primarily he is a good foreign missionary doing his best for a backward country without ostentation or vanity. He is also a neutral observer of life in India and provides the novelist with an opportunity to project an image of the country as seen by a sympathetic outsider. In *Some Inner Fury* we notice a marked change in the novelist’s attitude. Hickey is a good man and a useful missionary. He establishes an orphanage and school by his hard work and prayer. Markandaya admires his work and appreciates the fact that, in the midst of poverty and starvation and human beings for whom there was patently no provider,
his faith in providence remained unshaken. Two characters in the novel, Kit and Govind dislike the missionary for different reasons. Kit’s dislike was instinctive and somewhat superficial, but Govind’s was deeper and more dangerous. When we come to the end of the novel, we feel that the novelist’s attitude is more or less the same as Govind’s. It is true that when the school is burnt down by the terrorists and Premala was killed, Hickey reacts like a man of God, kneeling in earnest prayer in anguish of soul. But there is a conflict between the white man in him and the missionary. The white man asserts himself and Hickey bears false witness against Govind at the trial for murder asserting that he saw him throw the knife that killed Kit. The reader knows the truth that Govind could not have thrown the knife because at the time Mira was holding him firmly in her grasp.

Val is *Possession* is more than a match for Caroline. He does not permit Caroline to proceed to the cave before the Swamy indicates his approval. In spite of Caroline’s insistence that they should leave the village immediately, he obstinately refuses to budge until he has seen the Swamy and obtained his consent. Much later in London, he reveals his extreme sensitiveness and pride when Caroline insultingly mentions his he rescued him from a ‘crevice’ in his native land. He rushes out of the house like a madman, finds out from Anasuya the meaning of the word ‘crevice’ and in his anger he ravingly tells Anasuya:
“She not find me in crevice – she beg me. I come. She not like, I go back to Swamy. To Swamy, not hole in stone like belly – lizard. You go tell her that!” (Possession-54).

Val displays his oriental inability to conceal his feelings when his erstwhile mistress Annabel leaves him in anger. Possession also is a commentary on the phenomenon of India artificially becoming a fashion in England after her independence.

The novelist suggests that the interest in India is not genuine, but is a consequence of the turning of the great political wheel that had put India on the map and the emergence of a cult. Incidentally, while speaking of the film script on the life of the Rani of Jhansi which Anasuya was commissioned to write, Markandaya makes a comment on the nature of modern artistic taste which relishes a film only when ‘those box-office twins, love-interest and local colour’ are dragged in by the heels and ushered into full view.

Markandaya’s tragic vision dramatizes the common enough situation of an Indian in England falling in love with a ‘white’ girl and having to leave her. The author shows her sympathy and sentimentality over such instances, in Mira’s account of the photograph she finds among Kit’s things. He is withdrawn about this girl he used to know. After his marriage he leaves home with his new wife
and Mira finds in the confusion in his room, evidence of heavy smoking, and in the wastepaper basket, the photography of the girl with hair like silk.

Markandaya tempers her theme of personal, human relationships with a new mix of Indo-British relationship. The conflicting loyalties in *Some Inner Fury* are as neat as these: Mira falls in love with Richard Marlowe, an Englishman. Her brother Kitsamy upholds the authority of the British Raj while her foster – brother Govind attempts to overthrow British Raj through terrorist activities. This is the first novel by an Indian woman novelist on the theme of national struggle for independence and the havoc it causes in the private lives of individuals. Of all the private lives depicted in the novel, Mira and Richard’s is the most poignant one.

Many critics see the Mira – Richard relationship as an encounter between the East and the West and as an illustration of the irreconcilable gap between the two. But a closer glimpse into her emotional construct and intellectual background shows that Mira is the only person who lives at an experiential level and accepts life with all its pain. It is not just a passive acceptance of the cliché that “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet”(1). Racial differences never existed between Richard and Mira, and yet she decides to throw her lot with the natives. Obviously, under the impact of the Gandhian thought that pervaded the air during the 1940s, this painful decision of Mira is a big gesture of sacrifice. She sees that the mindless fury of the mobs could hurt even Richard and after being a
witness to the violence done to Kit who dies in her arms, she does not remain self-indulgent any more. It is obvious that by showing Mira as accepting her fate with equanimity, Markandaya wants to highlight a particular image of an Indian woman who opts for suffering and self-torture, instead of doggedly seeking her own happiness. Contrasted with Mira’s love at the individual level for the Englishman is the hatred of the Indians in general against the enormity of general hatred for the British.

For A.V.Krishna Rao, the title appears “Symbolically significant on two levels: first, the emotional inner fury of Mira is completely quenched when her love for Richard result in an ecstatic experience of the sweep and surge of love. Secondly, the wider inner fury of the nation at large is fully vented, culminating in the violent demonstration of national indignation at the alien rule, Govind being its focal figure” (6).

Premala tries her best, but finds it difficult to adjust to Kit’s westernized lifestyle. Her repeated failures and mistakes make her more nervous and inhibited and Kit more bewildered and disappointed. Premala turns to the village for consolation and since she is accepted there in her own right, it soon becomes her world. Kit’s parents had maintained two sets of rooms, one furnished for English and one for Indian guests. Like others of their class they served liquor and meat to the English, but kept to traditional fare and rituals themselves. Kit, however, with his
understanding and love of the West, furnishes his house completely in English style. The house-keeping is done by English-trained servants. Premala’s Kashan rugs and Pahari miniatures are not to be seen and though Kit is proud of her skill in playing the Veena, he has no liking for Indian music.

In *A Silence of Desire* there are no English characters involved in the action, but the author cannot escape them. There are references to Dandekar’s previous English boss, Wilson and frequent mention of the influence of British rule. Thus, we are told that belief in reason as the guide of one’s actions is a result of British systems of thought. By implied contrast, Sarojini’s faith is traditional and Indian changes in thinking are brought about by the changing climate of ideology all over the world, particularly due to the developments in the technology of communication over the last century, and though they have been encouraged by political domination of one country over another, they are not dependent on it.

Britain is not without its own believers in faith – healing, just as India has long had its own systems of medical treatment. One wonders if the British had not ruled India, whether all Indians would have depended on faith-healing rather than hospitals!

The pull between East and West, not in politics but this time, in schools of thoughts is thus dramatized. The traditional Indian attitude to illness and its cure,
whether through faith or treatment is put in perspective when she says that in this
country “the body had long taken second place”, due to harshness of circumstance,
climate and religion. It is interesting to see how Markandaya observes India
through Western eyes so as to gain perspective. To the upper middle-class English
as represented by Caroline, India is merely a ‘wilderness’. Kenny in *Nectar in a
Sieve* finds it impossible to understand the Indian’s passive suffering. On a later
occasion, when Rukmani speaks to him about the Indian teaching that one should
bear one’s sorrows patiently so that the soul may be saved, he exclaims with
disgust.

Perhaps one thing for which Kenny admires the Indian character is the
strong sense of duty which binds wife to husband and children to parents. After
referring to his own domestic unhappiness, namely his wife leaving him and
teaching his children to forget him, he speaks appreciatively of the fidelity of the
Indian wife. Rukmani notices that for the first time there is a spark of admiration
in his eyes. To the Westerner who desires to win over and to ‘possess’ India, the
real adversary is that spiritual tradition of the land which is powerful enough to
resist and defeat any attack against it. Thus, Caroline finds her adversary in the
Swamy. Her instincts correctly tell her that as long as the Swamy is there, she
cannot retain Valmiki with her. In the novels *Some Inner Fury* and *Possession*
Markandaya moved away from the pastoral to the portrayal of women in an
urbanized setting. Mirabai and Anasuya are women who have broken the chains of traditional taboos. As writers, with a voice of their own, they represent the emancipated Indian women. Mirabai, an affluent middle class Indian girl, finds her voice and her work in the nation’s struggle for freedom. Women ranged themselves beside the men to overthrow the foreign yoke. Sarojini Naidu, VijayalakshmiPandit and others became the symbols of a new concept of Indian womanhood. A moral and social responsibility makes her forsake her love for Richard. Young and sophisticated, she is accustomed to the dual life-style, the two worlds of upper class Indian women in British India and adjusts easily to either English or Indian ways. Her character has little to do with her personal tragedy. She and Richard are victims of circumstances and despite her protests and questions; she can do little to fight it. Mira’s pain and bewilderment are but a reflection of countless other nameless victims of terrorism or war.

A calamity which they have done nothing to bring about destroys them. In Mira, Markandaya’s tragic sense seems to brood over such questions as determining of character, the inescapability of destiny and the insignificance of man. Unlike Roshan, she is not drawn into the freedom movement, nor does she let the political situation in the country affect her in the larger context. She relates to it in so far as it touches the life of the people whom she loves and cares. But her sister-in-law Premala is an image of the Indian wife bound by the chains of a
loveless arranged marriage. She cannot break free from the social conventions that press upon her. Like Rukmani, she is pathetic rather than tragic. She is a contrast to Mira on the one hand and to Roshan on the other. Roshan is sturdily defiant of tradition whereas Premala cannot break away from it. Roshan is incurably optimistic, everlastingly resourceful, at ease with the Eastern as well as the Western world and a symbol of modern India, as Premala is a symbol of the ancient. Both try to serve their country, Premala quietly, Roshan flamboyantly. But Roshan, even in jail, is not a pathetic figure.

Economic independence which liberates an Indian woman is very clearly portrayed in the character of Anasuya. As a creative writer who has travelled extensively, Anasuya yet retains her culture represented by Valmiki and the Swamy. Caroline’s materialistic view of life blinds her to an appreciation of the Indian way of life. Anasuya, however, realizes that Valmiki can find his true art only in the hidden caves, as an offering to the divine.

In Anasuya’s account of the story, the characters that seem to reflect tragic tension are not Caroline, who is evil, nor Annabel, who is superficially drawn, but Valmiki, Ellie and Anasuya herself. Anasuya feels the pull of both England and India when she is away from either. Her commuting between continents provides her with opportunities for comparison and contrast, but is rooted in restlessness, an inability to settle down, the outcome of a strong western orientation. Anasuya
writes; she travels, she understands both East and West. However, this very objectivity breeds its own antibody, for it prevents her from full identification with the main characters. She belongs to Caroline’s class, but to Val’s and Swami’s country. She is the link connecting all three. The author seems to portray herself in Anasuya. Like her she is fully aware of the chasm that separates the continents and like Valmiki she is “between two worlds”. Anasuya may be unconsciously a reflection of her “cultural schizophrenia”, but Valmiki and Ellie are conscious manifestations of the tragic vision. They carry the seeds of tragedy within them.

Told from the point of view of an Indian lady, Anasuya, the story concerns Lady Caroline, a rich aristocratic woman who goes to India. She discovers a very gifted village boy, decides to take full possession of him, takes him to England, disregards his spiritual adviser but is finally defeated in her purpose. Of all the Western woman characters portrayed by Markandaya, Lady Caroline is the worst. The narrator comments on Caroline’s zestful search for filthy Indian liquor. This sultry woman seeks and has, sexual relations with a boy, younger than herself and her voluptuousness is boundless. The narrator suspects an unholy relationship between the boy and the woman. Her suspicions about their relationship are soon confirmed.

There is an abundance of vivid description of sex acts, nude paintings and others all related to Western woman, especially Caroline in the story. These
descriptions constitute a strong stricture on the Western woman of the story. But the western woman cannot retain for long her possession, for Valmiki turns away from her, East’s spiritual power finally asserting itself over West’s possessive pursuit. Clearly, then, this most enviable portrayal of Caroline is meant to underscore West’s greedy possessive nature, its unbridled pursuit of sexual passion and the ultimate triumph of East’s spiritual legacy. Caroline has genuine respect for Val’s Art. Her desire is to wear him as a necklace of diamonds round her neck for show.

At the cocktail party given in London by Caroline to introduce Val to artists, Val appears splendidly dressed in dazzling white, leading by a chain ‘a tiny monkey’ wearing a scarlet hip-jacket and a gilt leather collar. What the monkey is to Val, Val is to Caroline a possession dressed up for show. If India is no longer a glittering diamond on the British crown, at least Indian art is sought to be made an exotic possession to be displayed. Annabel, Caroline’s cousin, understands the latter’s motive in having brought Val with her to London.

Of all the characters in the book, Jumbo and Mrs. Peabody are perhaps the least cardboard-like and the most satisfying. Jumbo with his snobbish complaints about the clubs, the riff-raff foreigners who do not conform to his British-Oriented dress, regulations, the endless sybaritic round, the private bar he carries in his pocket to combat the aridity of prohibition, is a comic portrait of a deposed prince
existing very comfortably on a much slimmer purse than he used to have. He is like a prince who will hob-nob with Valmiki in London, but find him an embarrassment in India. There are three other Western women, all minor characters in the novel. Ellie is a German girl who had been in a concentration camp and is now a servant at Lady Caroline’s house. Her character is twisted by the malicious results of possessiveness. Ellie cannot imagine a world where the crippled and sick are accepted. Hence she tries to hide her disability. She is the symbol of all the Jews, and in the larger context of innocent suffering humanity under the heel of the possessor.

Annabel the other westerner in the novel Possession, is a girl of eighteen, who is drawn into sexual passion with the painter’s Valmiki. This relationship does not find fruition in marriage. In addition to Annabel, there is another Italian girl by name Ellie who is also inclined towards Valmiki. Valmiki blames her for their passionate affair. By day he sleeps with Annabel and by night with Caroline, but there is no comment on his conduct. The implication being that he, a young man is drawn into a vortex of sex acts with Western woman while in the West. There is just one other character mentioned in the story, Emilia the Italian landlady of Valmiki.

The next novel, A Handful of Rice gives a brief glimpse of Western women as seen by a poor man of India. Ravi, a poor tailor, has an unflattering opinion of
Western women. The European’s sartorial tastes baffle him and their physical display of their bodies turns him off. To him they are alien. The European women had always been a breed apart, living in another world. The white woman goes into tantrums and is even ready to beat the poor tailor. The narrator says:

“The memsahib was angry. She shouted at him over her daughter’s head tweaking at the blouse where it did not fit” (AHR -181).

The novel shows that most westerners have little knowledge of Indians and less interest in their lives even when they live in that country and the European woman in the story is no exception.

Natural to the writer of post-1947 India, Markandaya’s novels focus on the changing socio-economic scene. Nostalgically, she takes stock of the changing situation in the villages that stand on the periphery. The village India that was stirred into a new life under Gandhi’s constructive origramme, still remains for Markandaya even in the fifties the subject matter of her novels. Her preoccupation with the theme of hunger in Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice is influenced by her Gandhian concern for the poor and lowly. Her picture of the uprootedness of Indian villagers on accounted of the menacing growth of industrial civilization derives its vigour from Gandhi’s pleading for village economy. Markandaya
pauses to have a look back at the nature of the freedom movement in her *Some Inner Fury*.

Markandaya reveals her ardent nationalism and her complete identification with and approval of the ‘Quit India’ Movement. *Some Inner Fury* is politically a war cry against Britain. The stirring events connected with the struggle for independence, particularly the anger and hatred felt by an oppressed people for the oppressor, are portrayed in it. The people, yearning for freedom, take part in the Swadeshi movement and the boycott of foreign goods.

Civil Disobedience takes various forms like the ticketless travel done by Roshan in the novel. The British government is stung to resentment and tries intimidatory steps such as sending agitators to jail and suppression of newspapers. The novelist makes Mira remark that only who belonged to the generation that was involved could understand the deep joy and satisfaction of the men and women who cheerfully sought imprisonment for the ultimate attainment of freedom.

The unnatural and savage hatred for the British rulers felt by most people in India during the days of the struggle is graphically depicted in *Some Inner Fury*. Govind incites his followers to violence, makes them set fire to the newspaper office where he himself worked for twenty years and is disappointed to hear that the Englishman who had been his boss has escaped with his life. The hatred of
Indians against the British is displayed in the form of filthy abuse and slogans asking them to quit India. Markandaya depicts how when freedom is suppressed, resentment spreads with lightning speed among the people and resistance gets organized. The volcanic “Inner Fury” of the nation erupts, destroying the illusion of harmony, with wider connotations of relationships between races and nations. When a country is engaged in a painful struggle for liberation, it is quite natural that a conflict of loyalties is experienced either by some individuals within themselves or by individuals and groups with one another.

Markandaya shows the conflict as creating divisions in one and the same family that of Kit. Kit is a genuine admirer of the British and a loyal pillar of the alien government. His cousin Govind develops into a fiery revolutionary, burning with hatred for the white man. Mira is in love with an Englishman and has experienced complete union with him, but also is against the British as masters. When they come to the parting of the ways, Richard automatically joins the group of Englishmen, and Mira with the same spontaneity joins her countrymen. The final parting between Mira and Richard is clearly symbolic of the parting between India and Britain. Mira says: “For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong” (*SIF*-158).

The important message proclaimed by the novel, *Some Inner Fury* is that one race cannot forever rule over another. On the personal plane there may be and
should be understanding and love between the people of one country and those of another. But any domination is bound to be resented and destroyed in due course. *Possession* is built on a different theme that of attempted cultural domination and condescending patronage of India by Britain, but this novel has strong political overtones. Markandaya certainly considers the long subjection of India to British rule as an unmixed evil. At all levels except the personal, she thinks that the gulf between the two countries is unbridgeable.

In *Possession*, the emphasis is on cultural domination, but the political theme is partly present. There is no wrong in finding political significance in the words of Val addressed to Caroline who had tried to ‘Possess’ him wholly. Caroline asks him whether he wishes to accuse her of greed, meanness, avarice or cruelty, and replies: “None of those things. Only one, that you wanted to own me, and it is not an uncommon iniquity” (*Possession*-232).

These words have significance at different levels the personal, the artistic or cultural and the political. Hindu women are paradoxically seen as too worldly and engrossed in the activities of the material realm to aspire to the religious and secular practice of Sannyasa or renunciation from the attachments of the worldly sphere. It is easy to understand the obstacles in the path of the married Hindu woman’s desire for renunciation. The term ‘Sanyasa’ in Brahminical usage means “discarding or abandonment” a connotation that seems antithetical to the very
conception of Hindu womanhood. Within Hindu society, women’s highest virtue lies in their invincible attachment and service to the family and in their moral obligation to fulfill the demands of the marital bond. Marriage itself remains the predominant goal for most young women in Hindu culture. There are even specially sanctioned rituals through which maidens can hope to gain a husband and by extension, a respected and accepted place in society.

Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* traces the struggle of an aspiring female renouncer who finds her real cure in silencing all desire for material attachments, including even the husband and the family. In her search for salvation, Sarojini is shown to reject the institutionalized aspect of Hinduism. Instead, through the Swami’s healing presence, she experiences a non-ritualized communion of the spirit that leads her to peace and eases her bodily pain. Markandaya skillfully underlines the hereditary nature of female oppression in Hindu culture by making both Sarojini’s refusal to undergo a surgical operation and her insistence on seeking a cure through the agency of the Swamy, a Hindu ascetic, implies her refusal to be treated as an object, a body without a spirit. She determines to get cured in her own way through a faith that will not lessen her bodily suffering but also lead her, through the mode of detachment, to a more rewarding release from the material world itself. The novel thus focuses on the interplay and conflict between two individuals of opposing orientations. Dandekar is clearly committed
to the material realm as befits his stage of life, while Sarojini is steadily gaining
detachment from the business of day-to-day living preparing herself for spiritual
liberation. Premala in *Some Inner Fury* is the typical Hindu woman who believes
in abiding by one’s Dharma as the way to salvation and happiness. She confirms
closely to the mythical ideal of suffering: Indian womanhood leads the way for the
salvation of the Indian male.

The word *Possession* has yet another meaning: the ancient idea of an evil
spirit inhabiting the body of a person who is therefore called ‘Possessed’. Caroline
possesses Val, and she is evil. Just as the spirit is said to impel the body, it inhabits
to behave in demonic fashion. Caroline through Val ruins Ellie and brings
unhappiness to him and Annabel. If Caroline is evil and the Swamy is good, they
could be taken to represent Evil and Good. Val, the village idiot, sophisticatedly
turned and then contemplative, is a man in his journey from innocence to
knowledge of good and evil, and the choice of good.

No one who has read *Possession* and *A Silence of Desire*, can be in least
doubt regarding Markandaya’s faith in India’s genuine holy men. The Swamy in
either of these novels has pivotal importance in the plot and embodies the best in
the tradition of sainthood. The Swamy in *Possession* is the first person to
recognize the artistic genius of Val and to destiny of the shepherd boy from the
beginning. He does not say anything spectacular, but inspires the same devotion
and loyalty in Val, the cripple, the fashionable ladies who assemble at the hotel to meet him and the sophisticated devotees who invite him to London. When Val asks for permission to go to England with Caroline, he gives it without hesitation because he wants Val to learn by experience. He is however, quite certain that Val will finally return to him and that it will be a real home-coming.

After he is comfortably established in London, Val finds that he cannot do any painting because the fountain of inspiration has dried up within him. It is only when Caroline produces the forged letters supposed to have been written by the Swamy he recovers from his lethargy and gets re-started as an artist. Disillusionment and disappointment at last drive Val back to India and the arms of the Swamy who has been waiting for his return in confident expectation. The Swamy in A Silence of Desire again occupies the most important place in the novel. He accepts presents from his devotees and spends everything he gets feeding the poor. He represents all the virtues of Indian sainthood, living a simple, austere life and silently ministering to the hungry and sick. Crowds gather round him and although he hardly speaks, he radiates peace and joy. He receives gifts from whosoever gives, and feeds the destitute people who depend entirely upon him. Dandekar’s distrust of him and antagonism to him are the results of his loss of faith owing to the influence of the West.
Markandaya’s Indian characters are steeped in religious belief and superstitions. They seem to be an integrated lot who possess a systematic set of ethical and social belief which are accepted norms of traditions and customs of Indian culture. No doubt they belong to various religious groups but most of them specifically represent the social group they belong to. They are distinctive and possess basic Indian cultural traits which are common to them. Yet they can be distinguished by their speech and language habits, dress patterns, occupations and religions practices and beliefs.

In fact the Indian scenario is superbly painted in such a way that we get glimpses of the rich diversity that is prevalent among the ethnic groups that exist not only in big Indian cities but also in the rural areas. The characters in the novels of Markandaya do display common Indian characteristics and represent a complex of emotional feelings and attitudes towards mysteries and complexities of life. They have common attitudes, superstitions, beliefs and symbols that govern their social relations and which are sacred and morally imperative to them. They are all very religious. Almost all of them believe in supernatural forces, are superstitious and conduct various forms of rites, prayers, singing of hymns, kirtans, performing yajnas, sacrifices, etc., to propitiate the Gods and attain salvation. Burning of camphor, worship of the tulasi plant, the holy cow and the Sun-God are common everyday practices arising out of the religions belief that the Gods must be
propitiated. In *A Silence of Desire*, Rajam assures Dandekar: “Be sure I shall burn camphor in your name every day until the evil is lifted from you” (*ASD*-189).

Rajan at the lowest level believes in the Swami because, she says he has cured of her pain. Her faith has more of narrow superstition in it. Sarojini is however, truly religious, believing in the efficacy of prayer and well drilled in the tenets of her religion. Rites and rituals and offerings are made during the harvest season for a bumper and good agricultural crop.

“We took our seed to our Goddess and placed it at her feet to receive her blessing, and then we bore it away and made our sowing” (*NIS*-81).

Nathan celebrates the birth of Ira’s child with the customary ceremony on the tenth day. “Giving of alms and sharing of Prasad’ is considered to be a means of gaining merit in heaven. Such offerings made to Gods and Goddesses are rooted in the belief that they would please the Gods and wishes would be fulfilled. During celebration of marriages and other auspicious occasions, the decoration of homes courtyards, the colour of dress, etc., play a significant role. Amongst the Indians it is commonly believed that ‘drawing of colam’ and rangoli designs on the floor, ‘tying the garland of mango leaves across the doorway’ are symbols of happiness and good fortune.
Red and green coloured garments are generally worn to indicate the mood of gaiety. She paints the rites and ceremonies of Indian weddings in almost all her novels. The bride is found draped in red sari; red and green bangles and eyes being darkened with ‘Kohal’. She is also laden with ornaments. As opposed to these colours, ‘white’, ‘black’ and ‘grey’ are used during inauspicious occasions and are indicative of sadness, mourning and evil. On auspicious occasions, it is believed that special food should be served along with sweet items. Even the poorest of the poor bring out their entire store of “Rice and dhal and ghee, jars of oil, betel leaf, areca nuts, chewing tobacco and copra” *(NIS- 39)*.

But windows are not permitted to eat such food or dress in this manner. Such a special diet and control of food habits was generally self-imposed under the belief that less heat would be generated in the system of the windows and starving the body would subdue their sexual hunger.

Another strong inclination is found amongst Indians—the strong desire for the birth of a son in the family because it is believed that the son can perpetuate the family name and is permitted to light the funeral pyre. Couples who parented a son are assured of attaining ‘moksha’. Therefore, the birth of a male child in Indian families has always been looked upon with happiness. The birth of girls is not considered a matter of happiness as they are considered as belonging to their husband’s families. Besides, their marriages entailed the giving away of a vast
dowry. Women with large dowries are always welcomed. Kit in Some Inner Fury accepts Premala for her dowry. In Nectar in a Sieve, Rukmani’s three elder sisters had taken all the dowry her parents could afford, leaving practically nothing for her. Consequently, her hope of having a grand wedding is shaken.

Most of the high-caste Indians have certain class and caste prejudices and believe in untouchability. They don’t like themselves or even their possessions being touched by aliens and lower classes. There are many beliefs and superstitions linked together in Markandaya’s novels which contribute to emphasizing the Indianness in them. It would not be out of place to conclude by listing even the significance of the ‘cries of animals’ such as ‘bats squeaking all night’ a sign off ill omen and ‘howling of dogs at night’ indicating the presence of death in the vicinity. Markandaya in all her novels tries to demolish such superstitions and beliefs in favour of truth by always adding a comment or commentary on reasonable and rational thinking immediately after highlighting such superstitions and beliefs. This she does in the hope of making her readers conscious of the various types of communities that are present in India and showing how superstitions and beliefs govern their social relationship with each other and foreigners.
It is these common superstitions and beliefs which have their roots in religion, that help Markandaya to firmly and clearly bring out the Indianness of her Indian characters and paint the colorful Indian background of her novels.

The traditions and values of India and the West show fundamental differences and in a way, Kipling’s prophecy that ‘never the twain shall meet’ seems to be true. Politically it was inevitable that India and Britain should part company. In the course of the conflict between the two it was natural that there should be some bitterness and damage, but as Mira remarks is Some Inner Fury it is not a great matter that “a man should fall, or a head or a heart should break” (SIF- 223).

The implied message in 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. It is true that while the novelist recognizes the evils and deficiencies in Indian life and society and warns her countrymen against slavish imitations of the west, she does not offer any ready-made solutions to the many problems facing the country. Her emphatic teaching is that India should preserve her soul and carve out her own destiny. In religion she should be proud of her great legacy and her constant aim should be the attainment of the purity, equipoise and altruism represented by the Swamy of Possession or A Silence of Desire.
When the menace of poverty strikes Indian pastoral life and brings, despair, despondency, disappointment, conflict, only women rise to the occasion and tackle them confidently. They may be in pitiable plight but they do not give up their struggle. The novels *A Handful of Rice* and *Nectar in a Sieve* depict the struggle of women. Kamala Markandaya’s writings also illustrate how women fall victims to Indian Zamindari system. Besides, temperamental, disparities and sexual perversions against women also find expression in her writings.